

Primary Sources Packet: Survival

Document One

Eugene Nielsen, "A Survivor of the Palawan Massacre," 2003 (excerpt)
American Experience, PBS

"Utah native Eugene Nielsen, private first class in the 59th Coast Artillery, was one of the few who escaped. Filipino guerrillas transported the survivors to the island of Morotai, where Nielsen described his experience to an Army intelligence officer. "...They were bayoneting guys down low and making them suffer. They shot or stabbed twelve Americans and then dug a shallow grave in the sand and threw them in. Some of these men were still groaning while they were covered with sand. Then the Japs started to cover the grave with rubbish from the pile where I was hiding. They scraped some of the coconut husks off, and found me lying there. Then they uncovered me from the shoulders on down. They thought I was dead, and seemed to think I had been buried by my friends. I lay there for about fifteen minutes while they stood around talking Japanese. It was getting to be late in the afternoon. One of the guys hollered it was time to eat dinner, and every one of the Japs there went off somewhere to eat. I got up and ran down along the beach and hid in a little pocket of coral reef there."

[...]

"I left that area and started down the beach. About fifty yards ahead I ran into more Japanese. Suddenly I realized I was surrounded. They were up above me and also coming in from both sides. I was trapped. So I jumped in the sea. I swam underwater as far as I could. When I came up there were twenty Japanese firing at me, both from the cliff and from the beach. Shots were hitting all around me. One shot hit me in the armpit and grazed my ribs. Another hit me in the left thigh, then another one hit me right along the right side of my head, grazing my temple. I think it knocked me out temporarily. For a short period I was numb in the water; and I nearly drowned. Then I found a large coconut husk, bobbing around in the bay and I used it to shield my head as I swam."

[...]

"I swam most of the night. I couldn't see the other side of the bay but I knew it was about five miles. About halfway out I ran into a strong current. It seemed like I was there for a couple hours making no headway. Finally I reached the opposite shore and crawled on my hands and knees up on the rocks. I was in a mangrove swamp. I was too weak to stand up. It was about 4 A.M. I'd been swimming for nearly nine hours."

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Document Two

"On the Homefront: Oral and Charles Cheney," 2003 (excerpt)
American Experience, PBS

Western Union Telegram

WASHINGTON DC 502PM JAN 2 1943

MRS ETTA CHENEY

BOX 205 BERNALILLO NMEX.

YOUR SON CORPORAL CHARLES E CHENEY COAST ARTILLERY CORPS REPORTED A PRISONER OF WAR OF THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT IN THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS PERIOD LETTER FOLLOWS.

ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
350PM

Form Letter

War Department

The Adjutant General's Office

Washington

In reply refer to: AG 201 Cheney, Charles E. (12-30-42) PC-G 365076-1

January 5, 1943

Mrs. Etta Cheney

Box 205,

Bernalillo, New Mexico.

Dear Mrs. Cheney:

Report has been received that your son, Corporal Charles E. Cheney, 38,012,383, Coast Artillery Corps, is now a prisoner of war of the Japanese Government in the Philippine Islands. This will confirm my telegram of January 2, 1943.

The Provost Marshal General, Prisoner of War Information Bureau, Washington, D.C., will furnish you the address to which mail may be sent. Any future correspondence in connection with his status as a prisoner of war should be addressed to that office.

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Very truly yours,

J.A. ULIO
Major General,
The Adjutant General

1 Inclosure
Memorandum re financial benefits

Imperial Japanese Army Post Card

[undated]

From: Charles E. Cheney

Nationality: American

Rank: Cpl.

Camp: Phil. Military Prison Camp #2

To: Mr. C. D. Cheney

Bernalillo, New Mexico, U.S.A.

[stamped: U.S. Censorship, Examined by 217]

[fill-in-the-blanks card; Charles' typed comments are in bold.]

1. I am interned at: **Phil. Military Prison Camp #2**
2. My health is: **excellent**; good; fair; poor.
3. I am -- uninjured; sick in hospital; under treatment; **not under treatment.**
4. I am -- improving; not improving; better; **well.**
5. Please see that: **Your letter is sent to this address**
6. (Re: Family): **Take care of everyone**
7. Please give my best regards to: **All my friends.**

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Civilian Message Form

AMERICAN RED CROSS

Washington, D.C.

International Red Cross Committee

Geneva, Switzerland

[undated]

Sender:

Etta Cheney

Box 205, Bernalillo, N.Mex. U.S.A.

Relationship to person sought: Mother

Message (News of personal or family character; not more than 25 words):

Dear Charles;

It is a great pleasure to write this to you as we feel when you get it all will be well and we will soon be together again.

We are still on the farm and are well. Grandpa and Grandma and Uncle Edds folks are well. Vivian weites often she is in Tex. We still don't know anything about Oral but still have hopes he will be home sometime. Marvin is still farming and talking Ark. Uncle Edwards were well the last we heard from them.

Grandpa is having his 79 birthday tomorrow he can still pick them up and put them down asspry as ever.

Pop has learned to eat with his new teeth good now.

We all send Love and also a host of your friends sends Love.

Addressee:

Corp. Charles E. Cheney

Philippine Military Prison Camp no.2

P.I.

Identifying Data:

Birthplace and date of birth: Dawson, N.M., Aug. 13 1918

Citizen of: U.S.A.

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Document Three

William E. Dyess, "The Dyess Story: The Eye-Witness Account of the Death March from Bataan and the Narrative of Experiences in Japanese Prison Camps and of Eventual Escape" (excerpt) 1944

"Our talk and thoughts were almost continually of food; food we had enjoyed in the past; food we craved now and food we intended to enjoy upon our release. At first I wanted steaks; big Hereford steaks from Shackleford County, Texas. Then my fancy turned to eggs - I wanted them fried and by the platter. I dreamed of them. Sometimes it seemed I was wallowing in gargantuan plates of eggs, smashing the yellows and absorbing them through my pores.

"But there were plenty of things to occupy our minds...our hopes really soared when we heard a report the steamer Blackhawk was lying in Manila Bay being painted white to effect the transfer. A day or two later a Filipino smuggled in a package of cigarettes which contained a note: 'Be brave! You will soon be free.' Although I didn't allow myself to believe it, I stopped throwing cold water on our hopes."

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Document Four

Roy Jolma, "POW 972," 1995 (excerpt)

Veterans History Project, Library of Congress

"The Japanese allowed us to bring a few instruments into camp, a trumpet, a sax, and piano and a guitar, so once a month we'd have entertainment. Gradually, professional musicians emerged from among us and more instruments were "procured." The Cabanatuan Dance Band was formed, then the Art Players Lousy developed. Soon, planned programs were permitted every Friday and Saturday night. They boosted our morale, provided some smiles and even some laughs, and brought back a lot of memories of home."