

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Joseph Emile Dupont, Jr.

COLLECTION: 4700.1409

IDENTIFICATION: Louisiana native, served in World War II with the U.S. Marine Corps, was a prisoner of the Japanese in the Philippines.

INTERVIEWER: Jennifer Abraham

SERIES: Military

INTERVIEW DATES: Session I - February 14, 2001; Session II - April 26, 2001; Session III - May 11, 2001; Session IV - June 19, 2001; Session V - September 5, 2001; Session VI - January 29, 2002.

FOCUS DATES: Sessions I -V: 1940-1945 Session VI: 1920s-1940s

ABSTRACT:

Session I

Tape 2037, Side A

Dupont born February 2, 1922, in Plaquemine, Louisiana; family background; transferred from Catholic to public school to participate in athletics; involvement with football, track, and boxing; graduated in 1940, during the Great Depression; jobs were scarce; father worked in distribution for Texaco; inspired to join Marine Corps after seeing movie starring Dick Powell; meeting an army convoy en route to Fort Polk; went to Marine recruitment office in New Orleans; despite worries about flat feet and being too short, accepted into Marine Corps; had to board train bound for San Diego that night; boot camp drilling and discipline; methods of firing rifle; test on marksmanship; rifle training; graduation from boot camp; everybody friendly with drill instructors after graduation; boarded USS *Chaumont*, bound for Asia; stop en route in Vallejo, California; getting drunk on Cuba Libres during liberty in Vallejo; departing California; description of ship; arrival in Hawaii, locals diving for coins; great adventure for boy who had never been out of Louisiana; touring Hawaii while on liberty; disastrous attempt at surfing; stop in Guam; typhoon hit ship off of Midway Island; another marine's close encounter with a shark near Midway; stop in dirty and unappealing Manila; explanation of China Marines; thrill of arriving in Chinwangtao and seeing Great Wall of China; excitement of seeing Chinese junks on Whangpoo River; overwhelmed by fact of being in China; description of marine housing in old Chinese mansion in Shanghai.

Tape 2037, Side B

Troops stationed at International Settlement in Shanghai; guarding International Settlement; Sikh policemen in International Settlement; fifteen minute full pack march every Monday; description of a typical day; practicing maneuvers; weekly dress parade; practicing maneuver to destroy

machine gun nest; rules for liberty; terrorists bombed banks and pawnshops on holidays; movie theaters in wartime Shanghai; White Russians in Shanghai; White Russian bar girls; Marine Corps club on Bubbling Well Road; sports teams and boxing; getting around Shanghai by rickshaw; "club books" that worked like credit cards at Marine Corps club; exchange rate made soldiers very rich; buying gifts and tailor-made suits; had a room boy who cleaned and did laundry; communication with home; sinking of *USS Panay*; Standard Oil refinery in Japanese-held area contracted with marines for guard duty; marines protecting American business interests in China; American military evacuated from China on President Liners a week before Pearl Harbor attack; troops given twenty-four hours to evacuate; emotional departure from Shanghai, Chinese people crying because abandoned by soldiers; surfaced Japanese subs following them as they set sail from Shanghai; arrival in Olongapo, Philippines; explanation of floating dry dock; explanation of bivouac; discrepancy about Pearl Harbor date because of crossing International Dateline; Dupont was in hospital during Pearl Harbor attack because he broke his leg playing football; transferred to bigger hospital in Cavite Navy Yard outside Manila; Japanese bombing of Manila on December 9, 1941; evacuation of hospital; Dupont blames General MacArthur for the whole Philippine Air Force being wiped out by the Japanese; description of anti-aircraft guns; release from hospital.

Session II

Tape 2038, Side A

Introduction; getting ride with Colonel Clements from hospital to Subic Bay Naval Base to rejoin his regiment; plan to evacuate and destroy naval base when Japanese were coming; Japanese bombing attack on Christmas Eve; visceral experience of bombing brought mortality into focus for the first time; the galley was hit, ruining Christmas dinner; assigned guard duty atop water tower; decision came to evacuate and blow up base on Christmas Day; Dupont's battalion intelligence section was in last truck out before demolition; stopping at bombed out cabaret to help themselves to a Christmas drink and sing Christmas carols with piano; set up camp at Mariveles, at the tip of the Bataan Peninsula; Fourth Marine Regiment put under control of US Army, headed by General MacArthur, sent to Corregidor; geographic and historic description of Corregidor; Japanese attack on Corregidor, December 19, 1941; description of Malinta Tunnel; description of his pillbox within Battery Morrison; duties were to man telescope and report doings in North Channel; defense duties of other soldiers; waiting and watching; description of recurring bomb attacks; vacuum created by bombing and effects on body; became accustomed to bombing; assigned to Battery Hannah on South China Sea, a three-gun battery manned by Filipinos; unbelievable noise of test firing at batteries; bombing raids on new post, which was more exposed than pillbox had been; description of watching incoming bombs; leaflets dropped on Bataan; holding positions through February and March, waiting for help; General MacArthur and his family left for Australia; Japanese warships formed blockade; soldiers' low opinion of MacArthur; soldiers from sunken navy ships given to marines; battle of Pucot Hill; Philippine Scouts dynamiting Japanese soldiers hidden in caves.

Tape 2038, Side B

Hardships of Bataan combat: minimal food rations, malaria, World War One weaponry; on April 9, 1942, Japanese broke through American and Filipino lines in Bataan; rumor that Japanese had killed everybody in the hospitals; many soldiers escaped to Corregidor, put in with marines;

using scope to track further movements on Bataan; explanation of azimuth reading; watching for artillery flashes; Corregidor under siege for twenty-one days; Corregidor and Midway last American outposts in Pacific; knowing that no help would come; couldn't kill army mules, because they were government property, so put mules in line of bombs so they could eat them; description of marine D rations; meals and cooking while under siege; heaviest shelling came on May 2, 1942; description of 240 millimeter shells; shells hitting from three directions; statistics of bombs and shelling on May 2, 1942; Soochow, First Battalion's pet dog on Corregidor; on May 5, anticipating invasion; barbed wire strung in water where they expected the Japanese to land on the beach; horn that announced invasion; Americans turned on huge floodlight, shot as many Japanese as possible before light was shot out; propellers of Japanese ships tangled in barbed wire; Japanese soldiers jumped into water, cut by barbed wire; looked like invasion would fail; second group of Japanese got carried away by tide, managed to land on south side of island and sneak across; Japanese closing in on tunnels, which contained headquarters and many wounded soldiers; surrendered in order to stop a massacre; ceasefire not respected by all Japanese soldiers; ordered to destroy his weapons; surrendered at noon; Japanese took rings and everything; ten or eleven thousand soldiers crammed into 92nd garage area; devastated by having to surrender; in China, Japanese always executed POWs; Japanese considered it dishonorable to surrender; shame of "losing face" in Japanese culture; fear of eventual execution; sent on work details to clean up island and recover food; after three days at 92nd garage, forced to walk through battlefield filled with dead Americans; work detail recovering drowned Japanese soldiers from bay; before invasion, secret submarine mission to bring better fuses for anti-aircraft guns; submarine left with nurses, key personnel, and the Philippine mint's gold; President Roosevelt wanted to get into war to end Great Depression; trouble getting war funds approved by Congress; MacArthur did not want them to surrender; belief that soldiers on Corregidor were purposely sacrificed to show the world that Americans would fight to the death; blames MacArthur for loss; paralyzed by lack of air power; MacArthur disapproved of Wainwright surrendering, but never set foot on Bataan during fighting; soldiers that hid in the tunnels lacked suntans; Dupont shows Abraham pictures of Puerto Princesa on small island of Palawan; shows pictures of aftermath of massacre.

Session III

Tape 2039, Side A

Introduction to the session's topics; clarifies rate of shelling on Corregidor, correcting mistake he made in previous session; approximately ten thousand Filipino and American prisoners of war herded to 92nd Garage; excruciating three days without water; when Japanese installed one spigot, POWs stood in line three hours to fill canteen; POWs formed groups of four, staked out territory together; POWs got food if assigned to work detail; shared food with comrades in group of four; disease spread due to very poor latrine conditions; after eleven days, POWs marched to Bilibid Prison in Manila; shipped in metal boxcars a hundred miles north to Cabanatuan; description of rustic barracks in which they were housed; diet of potato soup and rice; allowed to bathe in stream once a week; torture and execution of three POWs who were caught after escaping; Japanese ordered POWs into ten-man shooting squads - if any one escaped, the other nine would be executed; story of ten-man squad in Mindanao who all escaped together; diseases in camp; volunteered for unknown work detail to get out of camp; put on ship with a Japanese

commander who encouraged POWs to sing American songs for him; work detail delivered supplies to lone Japanese stationed on leper island of Culion; detail sent to Palawan to build airfield in the middle of a jungle using only wheelbarrows, shovels, picks and axes; description of removing trees using winches and army trucks; Japanese dynamited huge mahogany trees; trees full of snakes, parrots and monkeys; housed in an old constabulary building with a castle-like entrance; slept on floor; clothing disintegrated, Japanese issued no new clothes but G strings; POW bitten by scorpion; food at Palawan; lining up to be counted; paying homage to emperor; description of daily routine; dismantling a building that stood on the airfield; incident where a POW caught a cobra and used it to scare a guard; nicknames for guards; playing a spelling game at night with other POWs.

Tape 2039, Side B

Description of spelling game; names his best friends in the POW camp; decrease in food rations; big trouble if POWs caught eating tropical fruit because Japanese wanted to keep them weak and tractable; POWs' arms broken in beatings by Japanese; description of wet beriberi and dry beriberi; Dupont began to lose his vision from beriberi; Japanese wouldn't accept vision loss as a reason to be transferred back to Manila, so Dupont faked malaria; sent to Bilibid prison hospital in Manila; put on special diet with milk and eggs, felt strength returning; worked as "dog robber" in hospital, someone who was paid to do little things for American officers there; bought nutritious peanuts with his earnings; worked in small library; used Filipino dish called *lugao* to bind pages into books; pretending to need *lugao* for the library, but ate it; worked as dog robber for three corpsmen who shared food with him; faith that Americans would come to rescue POWs; ambulatory patients forced to leave Bilibid after Dupont had been there a year; back to hard work on farm; losing his strength again; on September 22, 1944, an airplane came and made bombing raid on Japanese; POWs didn't recognize the new US Navy insignia on plane; Leyte invasion; running into friend from Plaquemine who worked in the galley; friend brought him bag of canned foods; Gunner Ferrell, a Marine he knew from Shanghai, got him kitchen job; able bodied people sent to Japan, only amputees and visually impaired like Dupont left behind; Americans advancing; then everybody was told they would be evacuated to Japan; trucked to Manila; imprisoned in Fort McKinley, outside of Manila; ate dog that was electrified by security fence; transferred to Bilibid Prison, waiting for transport to Japan; sinking of *Oryoku Maru*; terrible food shortage reduced men to animal level; Japanese entertaining themselves by letting POWs fight over their food garbage; Thirty-Seventh tank division had landed; Americans didn't know there were still POWs in Manila; Japanese released POWs and left; civilians taken hostage; Americans soldiers stumble upon the POWs in Bilibid; food, cigarettes, nurses; leaving prison while Japanese were shelling; POWs taken to Luzon; ate so much they got sick; found out that orders had been issued to execute POWs in Bilibid, but not transmitted.

Session IV

Tape 2040, Side A

Introduction; February 3, 1945, tanks came through Manila and destroyed the Japanese communication center in the Philippines; Americans thought all the healthy POWs had been relocated to Japan; Sixth Army Rangers entered Cabanatuan to free the infirm and insane POWs housed there; strategy Rangers used; POWs didn't realize the Rangers were saving them, thought

the Japanese were going to execute them; transported the non-ambulatory in caribou carts; then Rangers headed to Santo Tomas University to free civilians. Santo Tomas is five blocks from Bilibid prison, where Dupont and other POWs were; hostage trade between Rangers and Japanese; Japanese released POWs morning of February 4, 1945; orders for execution of POWs were in the communication center that was blown up on February third; reflection on why they were released; after liberation, stayed in shoe factory with civilians; later learned that there was an ammunition dump beside Bilibid prison that the American soldiers were afraid would ignite and kill POWs; after two days at shoe factory, lines had moved and it was safe to return to Bilibid prison; transferred to rest camp at Lingayen Gulf and spent a week eating until they were sick; ice was such a shock to his system it numbed his mouth and throat for a whole day; correspondence from mother while a POW; debriefing by officers to learn about injustices perpetrated on Americans by Americans; story of an American doctor who traded medicines with Japanese to get more food for himself; POWs who were favored by Japanese; sent note to mother saying he was free, she was afraid it was a cruel prank; sent to rest area in New Guinea: "They didn't want us to get back home too fast, because we were scrawny and awful looking"; first night of liberation, stayed up all night asking liberators questions about the war; POWs' unflagging belief that Americans would win war; wanting to catch up on popular culture; issued new clothes; army and navy men separated; after two months of physical and social rehabilitation, sent back to San Francisco in April, 1945; checked out at receiving hospital in San Francisco; had liberty, went out every night, it was all new; first meal of freedom was a dozen fried oysters and a chocolate malt; got free call home; mother didn't recognize Dupont's voice, as he'd traded Southern drawl for military language; sent by train to New Orleans; family met him in hospital there; had to be treated for parasites before release; band playing for him as he got off train for his homecoming; description of people liberated at the same time, both POWs and civilians; explanation of fixed ammunition; friend Cody Miller who lost hearing from accident with explosives; Miller worked hard to become proficient at lip reading while in POW camp; they remained friends after liberation; Miller could read lips in both English and French; lip reading came in handy in loud bars; friend Herman Carpenter from POW camp who later ran chicken farm in Mississippi; troubles getting Soochow the dog to the US; Soochow landed in San Diego, was mascot there; Soochow lived five more years, is buried in San Diego; hell ships.

Tape 2040, Side B

Attacks on ships in 1942-1943; Japanese ships carrying POWs sunk by American submarines; torpedoing of *Arisan Maru*; torpedoing of *Oryoku Maru*; casualties on *Brazil Maru* and *Enuri Maru*; air raid shelters at Palawan; Japanese massacre of POWs in Palawan tunnels; how Glen McDole, Rufus Smith and Roy Henderson survived Palawan massacre; men who fought back; men who escaped jumped into bay, Japanese shot them when they came up for breath; Japanese acts of barbarism: hunting people down, slowly burning alive; only three of eleven Palawan massacre survivors still living; now Japanese deny Palawan massacre; fifteen *Oryoku Maru* survivors who Japanese beheaded and buried in mass grave; punishments for Japanese war crimes; MacArthur's amnesty deal for Japanese guards at Palawan massacre; current attempts to get reparations from Japanese; motivation for Palawan massacre; many men he knew were killed at Palawan; what families of the victims were told; lost his mess kit, used a spittoon instead; mail system used for POW camp; Japanese mail censors; attempts to write coded messages in letters; friend who embellished his life story; rehab at Philadelphia Naval Hospital.

Session V

Tape 2041, Side A

Today is his anniversary, married September 5, 1946; Japanese soldiers insulting prisoners of war; POWs had to bow to Japanese guards; Dupont's vision problem meant he got in trouble for not seeing the guards, thus failing to bow; explains fixed ammunition; POWs cleaned up ammunition dumps to reclaim usable brass; accident that left his friend Cody Miller deaf; Miller taught himself to read lips while in prison camp; Miller had problems with guards who didn't realize he was deaf and thought he was defying them; had to tell Miller if you were speaking French or English; showing off his lip reading skills in public; Miller's troubled career history after military; Miller and many other ex-POWs died of alcoholism; doctors at rehab hospital in Philadelphia didn't believe Miller could read lips that well, thought he was faking deafness for psychological reasons; when they realized their mistake, wanted to train Miller to teach deaf kids, but he refused; Dupont was on blind bowling team in Philadelphia; rowing, competing in a regatta; describes rowing techniques; won regatta by half a length; Dupont was dating a woman who worked at rehab hospital; friendship with Carpenter over the years; Carpenter also had vision problems due to beriberi; Dupont's wife Angie had baby while Dupont was attending LSU; difficulties in school due to vision problem and baby crying during study time; dropped out of LSU; Angie encouraged him in new job with Department of Veterans Affairs in East Baton Rouge Parish; process of getting job: tests and interviews; because of his vision problems, Angie worked as his unpaid secretary until she got pregnant again; someone gave him a magnifying glass, which helped; transferred to LSU office; transferred to his hometown of Plaquemine; job duties; retired in 1980; Vietnam veterans were different, more demanding; coincided with Governor Edwin Edwards campaign to downsize state government, offering 10% bonus for retirees; volunteer activities since retirement; Angela's job duties as corpsman at rehab hospital; activities in ward for blind; Dupont wasn't supposed to help people with other handicaps on the ward, as they were supposed to be learning self sufficiency.

Tape 2041, Side B

Depressing visit to New York broom factory that employed blind workers; Angela's navy career; Angela returned to New Orleans after she was discharged, got job in publishing; got engaged, then married suddenly at her home in Maryland before school started; journey back to New Orleans; recollections of V-J Day; hearing news of Japanese surrender while on Canal Street in New Orleans; didn't understand what the atomic bomb was; on trip home, they knew they were safe once their transport ship passed beneath Golden Gate Bridge; such a hurry to get off the ship and touch American ground that the ship listed; taken to hastily constructed naval hospital in San Francisco; first telephone to his mother after getting back to US; Cody Miller's emotional reunion with his mother while their train was stopped in El Paso; reunion with Dupont's family in New Orleans; seeing specialist eye doctor in New Orleans; big greeting at Plaquemine train station with lots of people and high school band; catching up with friends; location of home at that time; death of mother in 2000; location of houses he lived in; Dupont's education at LSU; given oral exams because of his vision; subjects studied; favorite subject was history; description of LSU in late 1940s; names of children; views on Japan today; opinion of reparations: "All I want is an apology"; exceptions to cruelty of Japanese guards.

Session VI

Tape 2042, Side A

Memories of grandparents; naming of his mother; earliest memory was of a light bulb; memories of first home; stubbed toe hazards of early sidewalks; little brother won beautiful baby contest at state fair; baby brother died of locked bowels; mostly raised by maternal grandmother; birth of two younger sisters; description of grandmother's house; grandmother's servants; house moved due to flooding; homes built on pillars; playing behind the levee; garbage disposal system; skinny dipping in river; borrowing fishermen's boats without permission; harvesting dump for bottles to clean and sell; begging parents to leave private school so he could participate in athletics at public school; names of childhood friends; dangerous swim across the river at age sixteen; river shrimping before chemical plants contaminated water; African American men caught shrimp and sold it from baskets early in the morning; description of river shrimp; grandmother's cooking; description of skiffs; catfish; memories of flood of 1927; National Guard patrolling so people downriver wouldn't blow up levee; reinforcing levees with boards and sandbags; locks on river couldn't operate due to high water; looking at pictures of Hymelia and Torres Crevasses; more 1912 flood photographs; more description of levee reinforcement; alligators getting into locks; boys who caught alligator with a grappling hook; Dupont let local museum copy his photos for display;

Tape 2042, Side B

Details of his grandfather's medical practice; family meals; grandfather's house calls; grandmother's gluttony; competition between grandmother and aunt to grow better flower garden; worked on high school crew doing demolition; ceremonial sword discovered in demolished building; Dupont bought sword for forty cents; grandmother's activities: church, needlework, baking; suppers Grandma made; Dupont's chores were chopping kindling and building fires; serving as altar boy; favorite school subjects were history and science; Dupont's family stayed financially comfortable through the Depression; classmates reduced to eating cocoa and sugar sandwiches; seeing cowboy pictures on Saturdays at downtown movie theater; childhood wardrobe: dress clothes, school clothes, play clothes; grandmother feeding hobos during the Depression; accepting racial divide during childhood; girls learned to drive cars first, would take boys for rides; teenage experiences with girls; girl who taught him ballroom dancing; Dupont was "C" student, but good at athletics; no local jobs after high school graduation in 1940; signing up for the Marines; immediately sent on train to San Diego; slept through his family coming to send him off at depot, didn't see them again for almost six years; being sent to China was a coveted position; local poorhouse; family's views on Huey Long; connection between Dupont family and Huey Long; grandfather's education; grandfather's family bought Nottoway Plantation for social advancement; lost Nottoway due to financial troubles; subsequent owners of Nottoway.

TAPES: 6 (T2037, T2038, T2039, T2040, T2041, T2042)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 9 hours

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OTHER MATERIALS:

- Correspondence
- Photographs of Palawan plaque at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery (2)
- Article on massacre at Palawan from *Yank –The Army Weekly* April 20, 1945 (1 pg)
- Statement of Douglas Bogue and Glen McDole on their experience as POWs (4 pgs)
- Statement of Douglas Bogue on Palawan massacre (2 pgs)
- Statement of Glen McDole on Palawan massacre (1 pg)
- Information on “Hell Ships” (2 pgs)
- *Oryoku Maru* “Hell Ship” account (4 pgs)
- October ship “Hell Ship” account (3 pgs)
- Drawings of layout of POW camps, from <http://home.comcast.net/~rgrokkett/POW/> (2 pgs)
- Copy of American Ex-Prisoners of War, Inc. member identification card belonging to Russell A. Grokett, from <http://home.comcast.net/~rgrokkett/POW/> (1 pg)
- Photo and poem on Death March from <http://home.pacbell.net/fbaldie/> (1 pg)
- “Bataan, Corregidor, and the Death March: In Retrospect” printed from <http://home.pacbell.net/fbaldie/> (5 pgs)
- “Outline of Events” on Bataan, printed from <http://home.pacbell.net/fbaldie/> (includes interviewer’s notes) (4 pgs)
- “Chapter 13: The Rescue of Bilibid Prison” printed from www.frankel-y.com/ (6 pgs)
- List of interview questions with interviewer’s notes (1 pg)
- Background information prepared by interviewer (4 pgs)

RESTRICTIONS: None