

200
December 28, 1981

MINDANAO

One of 83, About 4:30 P.M. on the afternoon of September 7, 1944, a prison ship loaded with 750 Japanese Prisoners of War was sunk by an American submarine.

This Is My Story

Even after the evacuation of Davao, however, there were still some 750 prisoners left at Iasang, on the island of Mindanao. These men had been transferred there on 2 March 1944, to work as laborers on a work detail at a Japanese air strip. The prisoners in this detail, among whom there were many American officers, suffered untold hardships. They were cruelly beaten by their captors, forced to work unreasonably long hours at the most gruelling kinds of labor, and were given only limited food rations. They were given no protection against the bombs dropped on the air strip by American planes.

In late August or early September 1944 these 750 prisoners were loaded aboard an Japanese freighter, crowded into 2 holds, and shipped north. Several different times the ship was bombed by American planes, and on 7 September it was struck by torpedoes fired by American ships.

Prisoners who jumped from the ship into the water were machine-gunned by the Japanese as they struggled in the water. Others were beaten into unconsciousness by their guards and thrown into the sea to drown.

Only 87 of the original 750 who had gone aboard the ship managed to escape with their lives, and eventually reached the Philippine archipelago. There they established contact with Filipino guerillas, who helped them reach the American forces, to whom they told their story.

Just before the attack I heard an awful commotion on deck. The Japs uncovered the hatch and started shooting and dropping hand grenades down in the hold then everything went black. When I was unconscious I heard a voice tell me three times to grab the rope.

When I came to I saw this rope hanging down from the hatch. I had to swim over dead bodies to get the rope.

I climbed on to the deck and started to jump in the water when I heard cries for help. I went back to the hatch and pulled five or six men out and told them to head for shore. I started to jump again and I heard another voice cry for help. I went back to the hatch and I saw this head, he didn't have enough strength to pull himself out, so I pulled him out and told him to head for shore. I looked down in the hatch to see if anyone else was alive, no one was.

All the time this was going on the Japs were shooting at us from the rear of the ship. I don't know how they missed us, but I'm glad they did. They didn't want anyone to escape.

I jumped into the water and swam about 2 miles to shore. I was so weak when I arrived I couldn't get up. I laid on the sand for awhile to get my strength back. I started to get up when I noticed the sand was red with blood. At the time I thought I was dying, but it was only small fragment wounds.

The Japs were still firing at me as I ran into the jungle, they didn't want me to escape. I made contact with the Filipino guerillas and they helped me reach the American forces. We were taken to their headquarters and our wounds were treated and we were given food, the first good food in over two years.

The last man I rescued is still living today. His name is, Cletes Overton 2800 Dalewood Little Rock, AR 72207. This happened 37 years ago. I had forgotten all about the incident until Mr. Overton, told the story at our 1981 convention at Fontana Dan in North Carolina. He is the

only man that I know that is still living that I rescued. That was a happy reunion.

Joseph H. Jones

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I certify that the above statements are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

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