

Interview with William Ingram

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Interviewer: Mark R. DePue

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DePue: Today is Monday, June 30, 2014, the last day of the month. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I've got a telephonic interview, and I'm thrilled to have it with William Ingram. You go by Bill, don't you?

Ingram: Bill. Yes, sir.

DePue: I'm thrilled to have you here, Bill. I've talked to quite a few prisoners of war, several from the Second World War, but nobody ever from the perspective of being held by the Japanese, so this is going to be quite different for me. Of course, you had quite a life before you were captured, and we wanted to start with that. So how about telling me when and where you were born?

Ingram: I was born in 1924, South Grand Avenue in Springfield, Illinois, in 1924.

DePue: Did you grow up in Springfield?

Ingram: Yes, sir. I stayed there until I was seventeen.

DePue: Tell me about your parents.

Ingram: Who?

DePue: Your father and your mother.

Ingram: Oh. My dad, when I was a young lad, a little kid, he worked in the coal mines for a while. We lived out on South Grand Avenue then. He'd come home, and all you'd see is his eyes and his mouth. (laughs) The rest of him was all covered over with the coal dust. There was five of us in my family; Dad called us the hungry five. He wasn't missing it very long, very far. He worked that coal mine. They finally closed most all the coal mines down. They're all down underneath Springfield, underneath your feet now.

DePue: When did they close the coal mine?

Ingram: I don't know just when it was; it was a long time after. I'm trying to think of the name of the coal mine that he worked at. It's there in Springfield somewhere.

DePue: Did he keep that job all the way through the Depression?

Ingram: It was after the Depression he quit because he went to work for Hummer's Manufacturing Company, out there on Nineteenth. Let's see. Was it Nineteenth? No, it was way out underneath the subway on South Grand Avenue there, on top of the hill there. There was a Hummer's Manufacturing Company. They made incubators for chicken eggs and cream separators and stuff like that. Things got a little better; he got a better job, and we moved out there on South Grand Avenue, in that area.

DePue: Was that while you were still at home?

Ingram: Yes, sir. I was just a little kid then.

DePue: But you described yourself as the hungry five, (Ingram laughs) so dad wasn't bringing in a lot of money, huh?

Ingram: No it wasn't; it wasn't a hell of a lot. When we lived out there in the south, the far end down there at Nineteenth and South Grand Avenue, we'd go out to the truck farms. It was right out there, over the railroad at Nineteenth and South Grand. They had little truck farms out there, and we'd go out there and pick like radishes. It all depends on how big you were, what you got. If you was like I was, a kid maybe seven, eight years old, I could go over there and pull radishes. I'd know what size to pull. We'd pull them all, put them up, and all the kids would go out there with my dad, all five us, and we would gather up all these vegetables. When it come time to go home, we got paid. He paid us in vegetables, you know. That went a big long ways with five kids.

DePue: Was your father a World War I veteran?

Ingram: No, un-huh, no. He had four brothers. A couple of them was in World War I. And there was one that had got gassed, and he walked over that city of Springfield all day long. That's all he did, every day, walked from one end of

town to the other. But he was gassed and he...I think it was two of them got gassed, but one wasn't that bad. But no, my dad wasn't in the service.

DePue: It sounds like your family had been in Springfield for a while.

Ingram: Yeah, all our lives. Never left that town.

DePue: Where did they come from when they immigrated? Do you know how far back that was, and what country they came from?

Ingram: (laughs) I asked my dad that same question. He said, "Hell, I don't know." He said, "I think down there in Kentucky somewhere." That's all I know. Well, my dad's side, they were Irish, and on my mother's, side was German.

DePue: What was your mom's maiden name?

Ingram: Hazel Cecelia.

DePue: What was the last name?

Ingram: Hazel Cecelia Weber.

DePue: Weber, okay.

Ingram: Yeah. It's out of Peoria, Illinois.

DePue: Did she have a job during the time you were growing up?

Ingram: She had five kids to take care of (both laugh). That's a pretty good job. There was no money, you know.

My mom and my aunt used to make pies, these little pies about as big as your hand. And we would put them on a big cart and push them all the way down South Grand Avenue, out there to the Hummer's Manufacturing, his place there, and get there at break time. We'd sell them pies for ten cents each. We had that whole wooden cart, with the big old wheels on the sides. We didn't have a truck, and we'd take them pies out there. Them guys at that factory really cleaned them out; they really did, at ten cents apiece.

My mom and aunt was working in a hot house and had a fire stove, a big old cook stove like. They had a little oven, and they'd make all them pies in that little oven in that hot house. That's how they did it.

DePue: And then you ended up being the salesman, huh?

Ingram: Yeah, me and my brother would push that cart out there to the Hummer Manufacturing Company. I don't know what its name is now.

DePue: I know that you've got an older brother. How many years older is he?

- Ingram: All five of us are about three years apart.
- DePue: Each one of them is three years apart?
- Ingram: About three years, yeah.
- DePue: Were you the second born?
- Ingram: No, I was the fourth. No, I was the third. Let's see, yeah, fourth (laughs). And my little brother Jack was five.
- DePue: So you had a couple of girls snuck in there, between you and your older brother?
- Ingram: Dorothy and Eileen, yeah, two sisters.
- DePue: Was your family religious? Did your folks get you to church?
- Ingram: No, they weren't into that very much. I don't know why. I went to St. Patrick's School out there, the Catholic school. Then when we moved, I went to a public school, and I got put back a half a year. Then I went back to the Catholic school a year later and got put back another half a year. So I was about a year behind everybody else in the school. [It] didn't make very good sense to me. I couldn't figure out why I was being penalized because we moved from one end of town to the other.
- I got up into the eighth grade, and I was going to McClermand School out there on Seventh Street, Seventh and Enos I think it was. A little Italian boy was getting a spanking from his teacher, and this other little Italian boy went out there and took the roll of newspaper away from her and cracked her across the butt a couple of times with that thing. We all thought that was funny. The principal walked in and said, "Who thinks that's funny?" A couple, three of us put our hand up. He said, "Out, out in the hall." And we got all of us—it was, I think, five or six, I think—expelled because we laughed because the teacher got whipped.
- DePue: Expelled permanently?
- Ingram: Yeah. I went to Peoria. I had an aunt and uncle in Peoria. I went up there and tried to get in; couldn't get back in. Them other guys that got expelled the same time, they were the same way. They could actually...did not get back in school. We didn't do anything, but we all got kicked out of the eighth grade. I think in about two or three more months I'd have been over to Lanphier [High School], but they—
- DePue: So you never made it to high school then?
- Ingram: No, I never made it to high school.

DePue: Before all that, did you consider yourself to be a decent student?

Ingram: Well, with moving back and forth and getting put back, I got to a point where I just didn't give a damn. I said, "What good does it do?" I just forgot about it. If I didn't want to go to school, I didn't go. Nobody cared, so—

DePue: Are you telling me that you played hooky once in a while?

Ingram: Yeah, well, I did. I don't know if it was playing hooky out there. But when I was outside, when I wasn't in school, I was making money, I wasn't...sold newspapers for the *Register*; I had a *Journal* morning route.¹ I worked at a skating rink down there, Silverleaf Skating Rink on Ninth Street there. I forget what the other street was. Right now, it's a block down from Producer's Dairy.

DePue: Springfield's changed quite a bit since the 1930s, you know.

Ingram: Yeah. Well, this all took place in... I guess it is in the thirties, yeah.

DePue: Tell me a little bit more about the neighborhood you grew up in.

Ingram: We was always in good neighborhoods. I don't know how they got them houses to live in, but they had to have a house big enough for five kids. It took a pretty good size house. We lived way down at Nineteenth and Cedar, I think it was, Cedar Street, out there on the south side.

DePue: Was Springfield pretty segregated? Were there any African-Americans in your neighborhood?

Ingram: Well, they were all over, yeah. In fact, we had another family of blacks, the Hogans, that lived out there. They still live in that same house, right down next to us, out there at Nineteenth and South Grand, where I was born. They had five or six kids. Hell, we ate over at their house. We went in there, and if there was anything to eat, with the kids they'd say, "Come on sit down, and eat with us." They'd feed us at their house, too. Mom and Dad would always...When one of them come over, one of the kids, they'd say, "Sit down and eat. We ain't got very much, but you can have some." We got along pretty good. It wasn't like it is now. They were on the down side then, you know.

DePue: Were they going to different schools?

¹ *The State Journal-Register* is the only local daily newspaper for Springfield, Illinois and its surrounding area. Founded in 1831, it claims to be "the oldest newspaper in Illinois." In 1942, the *State Journal* was Springfield's morning paper, and the *Illinois State Register* was the afternoon paper. They maintained separate editorial stances. The two papers merged in 1974 as *The State Journal-Register*. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_State_Journal-Register)

- Ingram: No, we went to mixed schools.
- DePue: The schools you went to were integrated.
- Ingram: Yeah, the public schools were, yes, uh huh. In fact, we had a guy in that...Of course he got kicked out of school. I think he had a brain problem or something. He was about six-foot-tall in the eighth grade, and they just scooped him on through the school. I guess, they'd make a number in there. They kicked him out the same day, and he didn't do nothing.
- DePue: Did he even say that he thought it was funny?
- Ingram: No (laughs). He didn't know the difference. He didn't know what was going on. I guess they figured he's alone. Then, we also had one Japanese kid there too, but they didn't kick him out. It was the two Italian boys and myself and that black boy there; he was mentally retarded.
- DePue: The African-American boy was?
- Ingram: Yeah, un-huh.
- DePue: What was the Japanese family doing in Springfield at the time?
- Ingram: I haven't got any idea. You know, that was strange. After I got in prison camp there, I said...I just wondered what in hell happened to that little Japanese boy. They gave him to me to see that nobody picked on him, because I guess I was the biggest guy in the class. I'm just a little old thing, but I took care of him. They told me to take care of him and see that nobody picked on him or nothing (laughs). A couple of years later, I'm fighting against them.
- DePue: Yeah, those are the ironies of life, huh?
- Ingram: Yes, sir. I tell you; it's strange.
- DePue: You mentioned you had jobs growing up. Tell me more about that.
- Ingram: Oh, yeah. I worked at the roller rink, there in Springfield. I made good money. I was skate boy, and I helped around the skating rink there, so I could hang around in there. We'd can clean up at night. And they'd let us go down to the Producer's Dairy down there and have a soda pop. The boss usually bought that for us...boss by the name of King, D. D. King was one of the boys, same age as I was.
- DePue: Cage you said?
- Ingram: The same age. One of the boys, the King family.
- DePue: Oh, King.

Ingram: They was the ones that owned the roller rink. We'd go up to Pekin or somewhere like that, put a tent up and stay up there all summer on that. And then I carried newspapers, sold magazines, anything I could do to make a few bucks.

DePue: You mentioned there were two newspapers in town at the time, right?

Ingram: Yeah, the *Register* and the *Journal*.

DePue: Was the one a morning paper and the other afternoon?

Ingram: Yeah, uh huh. The *Journal* was the morning paper and the *Register* was usually the evening paper. I'm trying to think what street that was on. It was practically downtown.

DePue: Did you deliver for both newspapers?

Ingram: Yes, sir, I did. One time I was working for both them, carried the morning one. I had a route to carry in the morning, and then in the afternoon I had the afternoon route.

DePue: Pretty much the same neighborhood for each one?

Ingram: No, there was two different neighborhoods, but nobody knew the difference. You only see your customer on payday, when they had to pay their thing, when you went to collect for the paper for the week.

DePue: I see also that you had some experience with the YMCA, right?

Ingram: Oh, yeah. Boy, that's what saved my life. Our gym teacher, over at McClernand there, he asked me one day, he said, "Do you know how to swim Billy?" I said, "No." He said, "Why don't you?" I said, "Ain't no place around here to go swimming." He said, "I work down at the KC Hall." He said, "If you want to come down, I'll teach you how to swim." I went down there. I got pretty good at it, and I helped him around down there, cleaning up and one thing or another. I got free swimming lessons, and I needed them on the night we got sunk, too.

DePue: We'll get to that; that's a fascinating story. I'm sure one of your worst memories. Did you get to be pretty good at roller skating too?

Ingram: Oh, yeah. That was the thing. When I come back from the war, I was on the roller rink down there. I see this cute little chicken. I thought, Boy, she's a sweetie pie, had one of them little foo-foo dresses on and all that there, (DePue laughs) little bug's ears. Boy, she was sweet as anything. I got to go with her. She was seventeen and I was twenty-one then. And we got married. We went off to St. Louis and got married. Her mother and father raised hell about it, but there wasn't anything they could do. We were already married.

DePue: What's her name?

Ingram: Beverly Ritchie. We got along pretty good there for, I guess, the first two, couple years that we was married. And then she found all them sailors out there at Norfolk. She figured she had to take care of all of them. So, when the ship was gone, she'd be out partying all night at the roller rink.

We had a girl who lived in the same house we did in Norfolk there, watched the baby for her. I don't how she paid her. She drew more money than I did. I made allotment out to her. She was getting all the money. I'd come home sometimes, and she'd be gone. Nobody'd know where she's at.

DePue: Let's get back to your years back in Springfield if we can. I wanted to ask you who you would consider had the biggest influence on you growing up.

Ingram: Oh, I don't know. I never thought much about that. We just went down to the roller rink down there and hung out down there. I never hung out with them guys over at the newspaper. All them guys. They were smoking...big guys, you know. They all smoked and all that stuff. They were roughnecks, too. I was too little to be a roughneck (laughs).

DePue: It sounds like your dad was working most of the time. Did he have an influence on your life, growing up?

Ingram: Well, coal miners was the influence. It was a hell of a job that he had. But then he worked at that Hummer Manufacturing Company. And then, after a... during the war or something, he went out to a bigger company, on Nineteenth and Converse Avenue.

DePue: What was the name of the company?

Ingram: They make them electric meters.

DePue: Oh, the meter company. [Sangamo Electric]

Ingram: It used to be there. I don't know what it is now, right down on Converse Avenue, Eighth and Converse I think it was.

DePue: Which one of your parents would you say you take after?

Ingram: Probably my dad (laughs). He was a little guy, but he would kick the hell out of me whenever I did something wrong (DePue laughs). He let me know who's boss.

DePue: I know that, before the war started, your older brother joined the Navy.

Ingram: Yeah.

DePue: Why did he do that? Do you remember?

Ingram: Well, I don't really know. He had a good education. He went through Lanphier. I guess he got out of school, out of high school. He was doing pretty good. He went to work for Frye Printing Company. Do you know where that's at?

DePue: The Frye Printing Company? [Now Frye-Williamson Press]

Ingram: Uh huh, it's over there on one of them side streets in the downtown area [Adams Street]. I think it's still there. He, I don't know, we done pretty good, but when my brother got old enough, he was like all the rest of the guys. They got out of high school, didn't have nothing to follow. They just got little old jobs, like working at the Producer's Dairy or something like that, being a soda jerk or working in a hamburger joint. After you got a high school education... Back in them days, if you had a high school education, it's like having a college education now. There wasn't that much difference in the schools. But he worked for that printing company down there for a long time and then he... One day he come home and went into the Navy in 1939.

DePue: I'm wondering if you or your brother were paying attention to what was going on in the world, especially with the Germans and the Nazis coming to power and more and more talk about war? The war in Europe started in 1939, and the Japanese were making rumblings too, at the same time. Were you guys paying any attention to any of that?

Ingram: I thought the United States would go over there and kick them down, right in the... with no strain. But I guess my brother, he got in there, and he went right up. He had two or three years, and he was a signalman and, you know, raised the flags and all that stuff on the bridge stuff. He was going right along. He was a second-class petty officer. When the war broke out, he was on the *USS Houston*.

DePue: I'm going to get to that in a little bit, but it sounds like you respected your brother, and you thought that going into the Navy would be a good option for you as well.

Ingram: Well, there wasn't nothing else to do. I didn't graduate from grammar school, let alone high school. I had about a month before we would have graduated. I would have went to Lanphier High School. If I got over to the high school, I think I'd have done a lot better than I did. Getting kicked out of school, I couldn't get back into school nowhere.

DePue: What was your parents' reaction when that happened to you?

Ingram: Well, what could they do? The school board said, "He's out. That's it." That was the end of it. Nobody... I think it was five or six of us got kicked out, all at the same time, and none of them guys went back to school.

DePue: In other words, they were going to make an example of you guys, huh?

Ingram: They did, yeah. It **was** funny because the teacher was whipping this Italian boy, and his cousin was in the room there with us. He was in the eighth grade. He went out there and took the roll... She had a roll of papers with some rubber bands around them, the newspaper. That was her weapon. She carried it around like a crutch, you know. But when she beat this little boy, the little guy, on the butt with it. It didn't hurt. I got whipped with it; you couldn't even feel it. And he was screaming bloody murder. His cousin took that roll of paper away from that teacher and popped her across the butt a couple of times. (DePue laughs) The principal come in and said, "Who thinks that's funny?" Three or four of us was laughing. "Out in the hall. Out in the hall. You too, get out in the hall."

DePue: I think you mentioned already that you ended up going up to, was it Peoria?

Ingram: Yeah. It went to Peoria with my aunt and uncle up there. They had five kids too, the same age as ours. My mom had a kid; she'd have a kid. My mom had a kid... There was five Gardners. But I went to school with them guys up there, I guess, for a couple of months. I guess my records got sent to Peoria, where they just come in and said, "Here, you're out."

DePue: You did sneak in a couple more months of school, huh?

Ingram: Yeah, uh huh, but it wasn't enough.

DePue: That's too bad. Did you work when you were up in Peoria?

Ingram: No. I just was going to school with the rest of them.

DePue: How old were you at that time?

Ingram: Oh, I probably was fourteen, fifteen, fourteen, thirteen, somewhere around there.

DePue: What did you do for the next couple of years?

Ingram: Well, I got with this roller rink. I stayed with that, and we went to like different cities. I mean, I'd always come home, have a pocket full of tips from putting on skates. I'd lay it up on the table and Mon would get... I had to go ask Mom, "Could I have a nickel?" (laughs) I gave her all the money I brought home from the rink and then asked her for a nickel back. Oh, boy, that was the days, you know.

DePue: Were you just biding your time, so you could join the Navy like your brother?

- Ingram: I had no idea about going in the Navy until he come on leave at one time. I got a picture here of me and him, me with his sailor hat on, and he got his whites on, and I had one of his hats on. I think that's what did it.
- DePue: Do you remember anything specific about his leave? What caused you to start thinking about it seriously?
- Ingram: No, I just...I went down to the recruiting station. It was in the...Where the hell was that at? It must have been in a courthouse, downtown there somewhere. I forget where it was at now. I'd hang around down with that guy and that chief said, "Well, it won't be long and we'll get you in." I was sixteen then.
- DePue: What was the legal age for enlisting?
- Ingram: Seventeen. But see, I left home...They took and sent me up to Great Lakes [Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Lake County, Illinois] when I was sixteen. When they got this new company, they were hiring guys. When they got them all gathered in and had enough of them, they swore them in. That's why, when I was sworn in, I was seventeen.
- DePue: That's what I read someplace, that you were sworn in on your birthday. The very same day you were sworn in, you turned seventeen.
- Ingram: Yeah, it was. The same day when I was in that company, when they swore all them people in, I don't know, I turned seventeen then.
- DePue: Did you have to have your parent's signature to do that?
- Ingram: Yes, sir, uh huh. My dad signed. He said, "The whole world's at war." He said that, "You ain't going to be able to do any good," he said. "You're just going to go and get yourself in trouble over there." I said, "Well, I'm in trouble here (laughs); what the hell difference does it make?"
- DePue: June of 1941, that's when you would have signed up. Most of the world was at war, but the United States wasn't yet. There were certainly plenty of people who thought we'd be there eventually.
- Ingram: Yeah, that's right. But we didn't think anything about the war. When I got on that big old ship, I said, "We can take the Japs." We thought we could take the Japs in just nothing flat.
- DePue: Here's a question I've got to ask everybody. Did you have a girlfriend at the time?
- Ingram: Down at the skating rink there I had a couple of them, a few, off and on, little teenage girls is all.

DePue: Nothing serious then?

Ingram: Nothing serious, no.

DePue: Your mom and dad already have a son in the Navy, and we're not at war in June of forty-one. Now you join the Navy. Were they proud of you, or were they worried about you or both?

Ingram: I guess they worried about us. But they didn't do the big worrying until my brother was on that ship. I put in to be on it, and he didn't know I did that. When I got on board the *Houston*, it was in July, August, nine months in the Navy. I guess I was born into that. I've got a picture. That book I give you, did it have a picture of me in 1941?

DePue: Yeah. I've got a picture of you at the same exact location in 1941 and then, I don't know, a lot of years later.

Ingram: Nine years, yeah. I was nine years in the Navy then...No, nine months in the Navy and I took that. I met a guy in California there, and he took that picture there.

DePue: This is the one where you're on Knob Hill, November 4, 1941.

Ingram: That's right.

DePue: Looking pretty proud in your Navy dress uniform. Was that what you were wearing?

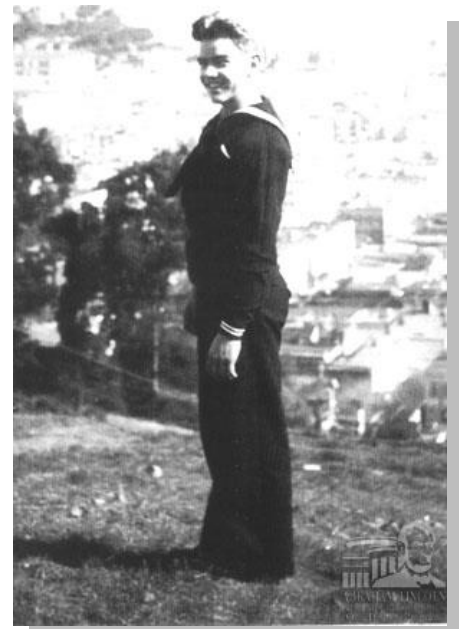
Ingram: Yeah, that was my Navy uniform. I was a seaman apprentice.

DePue: Well, let's go back—

Ingram: That's the lowest rank in the Navy.

DePue: Well, let's go back a few months. You join in June. What happened then? Where did you go to your basic training?

Ingram: At Great Lakes. I was up there for I think five or four or five months or something like that in training. I got in the drum and bugle corps because in school I was taking trumpet lessons. When I got out of school, I just forgot about the trumpet, and I got into drum and bugle corps up at Great Lakes. I wasn't out that there on that grinder, carrying that big old nine-pound rifle,



A proud seaman, Bill Ingram has his picture taken on Nob Hill, in San Francisco on November 4th, 1941.

that old Springfield rifle.² They had them in training out there, and boy, that damn thing got heavy after a while. (DePue laughs)

DePue: I wondered how big you were at that time.

Ingram: I just got out of the height. Hell, I ain't very big now (laughs). I was just under the weight measurements too, also with the height. The guy said, "We're going to sneak you in." They did. I guess they had a hard time getting people to go in the Navy then.

DePue: That was the time of the draft, but I don't know how much the Navy was drafting.

Ingram: No, that was after the draft.

DePue: Yeah Do you know how tall you were then?

Ingram: It was before the draft because they was taking all volunteers then.

DePue: I know the United States just started the draft in 1940, but I don't know if that was just for the Army or what the deal was.

Ingram: I don't believe it was for the Navy because they were having trouble down there getting enough guys to go in. That's why he snuck me in. He said, "They'll take you."

DePue: How tall were you then?

Ingram: Hell, I don't know. I was five-one or something like that (laughs). I was the shortest guy in the boot camp; I know that.

DePue: Does the shortest guy in boot camp get a lot of grief from the other recruits?

Ingram: Yeah, some of them called me Shorty. Everybody called me Shorty. When I got on board the *Houston*, they didn't actually paid no attention. When I got on the *Houston*, we stayed in general quarters almost the whole time I was on there. I was only on there for about three or four months. We stayed at our battle stations. I had a little bitty hole in the turret, just big enough for me to get in there. That's how I got the job up in the turret itself.

DePue: Wow. So, wherever you were going, you were the youngest guy and the smallest guy, huh?

² The grinder is the concrete-asphalt area at basic training, where the students do their calisthenics workouts. (<https://www.military.com/military-fitness/navy-special-operations/navy-seal-grinder-pt>)

- Ingram: Yep, everywhere I went. Even today, they call me “the little sailor” when I go to the reunion. (DePue laughs) The little sailor (laughs), the baby. I’m ninety years old; I’m still a baby (laughs).
- DePue: Back when you got to Great Lakes and going through... Do they call it boot camp for the Navy?
- Ingram: Yeah. There was quite a few guys in there, but almost my same age and same size. There was a lot of little guys, too.
- DePue: Do you have any memories, any stories that you remember from basic training?
- Ingram: No, I don’t. I got in, and they asked anybody if they played any musical instruments. I said, “I was in the drum and bugle corps in Springfield one time.” That was at that Sangamo Building, out there too, on Ninth Street or Eighth Street. Sangamo Electric, that was that place; you ever heard of it?
- DePue: Oh, yeah.
- Ingram: They made this bombsight out there or part of it.³
- DePue: That was back in the days when there was quite a bit of industry in Springfield.
- Ingram: Yep.
- DePue: Do you remember any of your drill instructors?
- Ingram: No, uh huh. Hell, I can’t even remember who lives next door to me anymore (laughs). No, I don’t, nothing. When you get in the Navy like that, you scatter just all over the United States and everywhere.
- DePue: Yeah. Well, it sounds like you were there for a few months at least, longer than your basic training. Did you get some kind of individual or advanced training, some kind of specialty training while you were at Great Lakes?
- Ingram: No. When I got out of boot camp, I told them I want to go aboard the *Houston*, and I was one of the first guys that got shipped out. I guess they needed people out there in the Pacific. On the way out there, I was gone. I don’t believe there was any guys who was on the *Houston* that went to boot camp with me, if I can remember. I think I was the only one.
- DePue: That would have been what, March of 1942?

³ A bombsight is a mechanical or electronic device used by military aircraft used by military aircraft to drop bombs accurately. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombsight>)

- Ingram: It was nine months later, whenever that was. Yeah. March of forty-two; that's when we got sunk.
- DePue: So I'm way ahead of schedule.
- Ingram: It was, yeah, March of forty-two, we got sunk. We had had four or five battles and a couple of air raids, and we got hit by a bomb on the back end, back there.
- DePue: I want to ask a couple more questions before we got there. You left basic training then about what, September or October of forty-one? Do you know when you actually got to the *USS Houston*?
- Ingram: No (laughs). It was in March because I was only on there three months.
- DePue: Right around December.
- Ingram: Yeah, something like that, yeah.
- DePue: Where were you on December 7?
- Ingram: We were on the *USS Chaumont*. It's a troop transport. We were five days out of Pearl Harbor when they bombed it.
- DePue: Do you remember how to spell the name of that ship? Looking it up, I found a couple of different spellings.
- Ingram: The *Chaumont*? No sir, I don't.
- DePue: *Chaumont*.
- Ingram: *Chaumont*. It's a troop transport.
- DePue: We'll see what we can find. You had left San Francisco heading towards Pearl Harbor when the attack happened?
- Ingram: Run that by again.
- DePue: Where exactly was the *Chaumont* when you heard about the attack?
- Ingram: Oh, we just left Pearl Harbor. We was, I think, five days out at five miles an hour because we had a bunch of little transceivers, little cargo ships that was going to the Philippines. They made a little group up there, and they all took off at once. We were five days out of Pearl Harbor when they bombed it.
- DePue: In other words, you were on your way to the Pacific where... Is that where the *Houston* was then, based in the Philippines?

- Ingram: Yeah, she was the Sixth Fleet. It was home ported in the Philippines, the *Houston* was.
- DePue: As best as you can, Bill, I'd like to have you describe finding out about Pearl Harbor and what was going on and what was going through your mind.
- Ingram: Well, like I say, I didn't know what war was all about, even. But we were on the *Chaumont* when we left there, and we escorted some other ships there. There wasn't no fighting ships with us, this was a transport. We must had had 1,000 guys on there. Some of them guys got sent to the *Houston*, too; I don't remember how many. We were at sea, and they diverted going to the Philippines. We went down towards Australia and Java. There was talk about war and one day an attack on the Philippines. I mean Hawaii, and all that. But who cares? I didn't know where Hawaii was anyhow, so it didn't make any difference to me. It was just another story.
- DePue: It didn't really make a big impact on you? Is that what you're saying?
- Ingram: On nobody. It seemed like they just went on about their business. I got a job in the crow's nest on the *Chaumont* for watching for airplanes. Them guys up there, they all got sick. That crow's nest up there just swings back and forth. Do you know where a crow's nest is on a ship?
- DePue: It's a lot higher off the water than the hull would be.
- Ingram: Yeah (laughs). I got sent up there, and the first thing I had to do was clean all the puke out of there. All the guys were puking up there. It didn't bother me. I got that thing all cleaned up. Then I asked the guys, I say, "Can I stay up here?" "Yeah, you can stay up there." Hell, you have fresh air, and down on that ship, guys[were] all heaving and puking all over the place. It was horrible, that thing. They must have had 1,000 guys on there. About half of them got sea sick.
- DePue: The *Houston* is based in the Philippines, and you were heading towards the Philippines.
- Ingram: Yeah.
- DePue: The Japanese attacked the Philippines about the same time as they attacked Pearl Harbor. Where did you actually get onto the *USS Houston*?
- Ingram: Oh, hell, I don't know, May, June, July, August, probably August, something like that.
- DePue: No, **where** was it? Was it in the Philippines or someplace else?
- Ingram: No, the *Houston*, they packed up and sent all of the admirals... They went to Corregidor. My brother was in the flag. He was a second-class sailor. He got

transferred to Corregidor. Five days later, we got to...got hit by a...attacked on the *Houston* at this time. We got a bomb that went down that turret, that tripod on the back end there. It killed forty-three guys in the repair party. I left after I got off. We got off the *Houston* at sea.

DePue: You got onto the *Houston* while you were at sea?

Ingram: No, the *Chaumon*; we got off the *Chaumont*. They took a whole bunch of us over in a motor launch and put us on the *Houston*.

DePue: So you guys are out in the middle of the ocean?

Ingram: Transferred, yeah. They brought the ship up to complement. The guys, they were just assigned to the Sixth Fleet out there, whatever. They just put them on the *Houston*, bring the *Houston* up to 1,100 guys.

DePue: Was that before or after this incident you talked about, where a bomb went down the turret?

Ingram: No, they had a tripod on it, a great big one, to hold up the radar stuff...not radar, but all kind of radio signals, antennas and stuff like that, up on the tripod. It was real high in the air; it was three or four stories up there. When the bomb went down...A whole row of bombs went down alongside the ship. The skipper, he seen the bombs coming down. He changed course real fast, and they all went down, all but the last one. It goes "boom" done, zig-zagging all over. It hit that tripod and went down below the armor piercing deck and went off on the next deck down there and killed forty-three guys in the ship, in turret three. All the guys that was in turret three got killed. We had some repair party back there too. We buried forty some guys in Java a couple to three days later. They had them all laying on the back, back there.

DePue: So that was after you had gotten to the *USS Houston*?

Ingram: Yes, sir. My boss up there, the first-class boatswain, he said, "Go back there, back at turret three there, to see if they need help to get them guys out of there." I went back there. My battle station was inside that turret, in a little powder box.

DePue: You were in turret number one?

Ingram: Turret one, yeah. Anyway, I went back there, and a guy said, "Where was your battle station?" I said, "In turret one, up there in the powder box." They called it the powder box. It was up on the main deck there. He said, "Go and see how them guys are in there." I went in there, and I said, "Hey, this guy's still alive." He was standing up there holding onto that rail, that little tray where the powder went on. He [the boatswain] said, "Well, get in and help him out."

I got in there, and I crawled in that hole. It was a little bitty hole; it was about sixteen inches square, and I could make that in nothing flat. I crawled in there. I got ahold of this guy and said, "Hey, come on; let's go." And all the meat peeled off his arm. They said he was just cooked. (laughs) I got out of that damn turret. I was forty shades of chicken shit or something. I was scared to death. I went over and told that guy there that told me to go in there, "Hey, that guy in there, he's dead." I said, "He's cooked to death." I said, "I just tried grabbing him by the arm, and all the meat come off his arm." I said, "I'm going up front; I ain't never coming back here again." (laughs)

I went back up there; I told that boatswain's mate that was in charge, I said, "Don't ever send me back there again. I'm never going to go back there." I don't know how they got them guys all out of them little holes. That little hole we was in up there, the one in the turret where I was at, it was just about sixteen-inches square. That guy, he was stiff, just holding onto that rail, that tray there. I didn't go back after that. I stayed up front of there.

DePue: That was your baptism of fire, huh?

Ingram: Yes, sir. That was a bad one. I had many nights of bad sleep over that one. I was seventeen years old.

DePue: I understand also that the *Houston* docked in Australia for a while, maybe right around the Christmas timeframe? Were you on board by that time?

Ingram: Yeah. I fell in love there, too (both laugh). I went over on the beach over there and got to the roller rink. In fact, I got a letter here that the little girl wrote my mother. It said I was over there, and we went roller skating, and I taught her how to do some new steps. But the little girl never put nothing else on there. I think that she sent that letter to my mother after we were sunk, because it didn't have no date on it. I can't find the envelope it come in.

Yeah, we was there just a short time. We couldn't go very far. We was in and out of Australia two or three different times. They got a twenty-four-foot tide in Australia. When I went ashore on a ship there, the water line was all the way up to the dock. When you come back that night, it was just getting dusk, and the ship was gone. I was standing... They usually get you on this. They'd say, "Whatever you do boy, don't miss the ship in a foreign port. They'll cut your balls off" and all kinds of crazy stuff like that. It's a no-no; you can't do that. I was standing there crying like hell because my ship had left me in Port Darwin. Some guy—it wasn't a petty officer—said, "What's the matter with you?" I said, "The ship's gone. We've missed ship." He said, "No, there it is, down there at the end of the dock." All you could see was a little antennas sticking up there.

Twenty-four-foot tide in Port Darwin, Australia, the ship was all the way down, and all you could see was little bitty antennas on the end of the

dock down there. But you could see none of the ship. The next morning it was back up again. I was scared to death [that] I missed ship.

DePue: It had to be a little relief when you realized the ship was still there.

Ingram: Yeah, the guy was laughing at me because I was crying (both laugh). That would scare the hell out of anybody. That scares you too, that you've missed ship in a foreign port.

DePue: Bill, you must have thought, when you signed up and you wanted to get to the *USS Houston*, this was a prestigious ship to be serving on. Is that right?

Ingram: Oh, yeah, yeah. Boy, it was a big one too.

DePue: I'd like you to spend some time describing the *USS Houston* and then what you were doing on that ship.



USS Houston, off San Diego, California, in October 1935. The ship was commissioned in June 1930.

Ingram: I don't know the tonnage or nothing like that for that ship; it's been some forty, fifty, sixty years now. It was a heavy cruiser. We had nine 8-inch guns on there, and the turret three was knocked out. That left us with six, but we had no ammunition.

DePue: Was turret three the one in the aft and the other six guns were in—

Ingram: Yes, sir, un-huh. Turret one was right up on the front, right on the deck, like. And then right behind it, they had turret two up there. It was all built up; it had all your magazines there. You had to have magazines. You come down, it's just a big room down there. You go down that ladder...that's the guys that work down there, them holes down there. I was in the turret. Anyway, when you get down, the guys say, "All present and accounted for." A guy's up at the top of the deck, over there. He hollered out, "Everybody down there? All present and accounted for." He'd drop that hatch down and take a big old hammer and beat them dogs in. We called them dogs, the handles. They dogged them handles down. The only way you could get out was the guys up there had to let you out. It was scary as hell.

DePue: Why did they do that?

Ingram: Waterproof. If you had a fire, like on turret three, where that thing...It hit so fast; the bomb hit. There wasn't a big fire or nothing; it just hit. The heat from the bomb just cooked everybody that was around there. They had another big

hole up in the ceiling up there, all them magazines. They called them magazines, where they stored all the ammo and big bags of ammunition, eight inches long...I mean eight inches in diameter about...It's about two-foot-long, maybe two and a half foot long. You got two of those would fire one gun. That's how you loaded them. When you got down in one of them holes and when they had a fire, they immediately opened up the valves up there and flood that thing in a couple of seconds with sea water, so it wouldn't catch on fire.

DePue: In the event that there was a fire, then all of the powder wouldn't burn off real quick?

Ingram: Yeah. Well, in some of them it did. In turret three it didn't. They didn't have much of a fire. It was down underneath the deck down there. They flooded that deck and got all that ammunition stuff put out.

DePue: I'm an old field artillery guy myself. Having worked with powder, I know that is incredibly hot when it burns. So, I can understand why they want to get water on it as soon as they can.

Ingram: Them holes up there, they were almost big as a five-gallon drum; that's how big them holes were because [that's what] they flooded the magazines with. It didn't take very damn long. They'd open them things all the way up, and that water, within a couple of minutes, that whole big room...like I'm sitting here in my kitchen, and the whole big room would be flooded in a couple of seconds.

DePue: You said you were a powder man on one of the guns?

Ingram: Yeah. I was in the powder box of turret one. What I did, they had a little elevator that brought the ammunition up, the powder. It's in a bag; it's all in a real cloth bag. You come up and drop by that hole, then come out, and the guy says—there was two hatches in there—he said, “When that hatch open over there, you shoot one bag way out to the center, and when this area opens up,” he said, “you put two of them in there” because it goes to that gun on that side, on the starboard side. It takes two big bags of powder to push that 8-inch projectile through that barrel. They come up pretty fast too.

DePue: I'm looking at the picture of the *USS Houston*, the six guns in front. There are three guns in each one of the turrets, so—

Ingram: Yeah, we had nine 8-inch. They could fire them all together at one time, or they could fire them individually. When we'd have a torpedo bomber coming at us, they'd elevate one two feet, then one four foot and one six feet. They'd put it right where that torpedo bomber would come. They'd fire that eight inch. It would splash water up, and they'd knock down a couple of planes like that. That ammunition that we shot and hit one of them Jap ships with was so damned old that they didn't even go off.

- DePue: The ammunition that you guys were carrying.
- Ingram: Yeah, because it had been on that ship since 1936 or something like that, when the ship was first made.
- DePue: I'm reading that it was commissioned in 1930.
- Ingram: Yeah, that was its commission.
- DePue: Was that considered to be a fairly modern ship or kind of outdated by the time you got there?
- Ingram: Well, that's a brand new ship, thirty-six to forty-one. Roosevelt used to go... When he'd come out there to the Philippines, he'd always get the *Houston* to go fishing. (DePue laughs) That was his fishing boat. That was a great thing for the ship to have the president come go fishing on it.
- DePue: That says something about the prestige that the ship has.
- Ingram: Yeah. It had some big names on it.
- DePue: I suspect that his quarters were better than your quarters on ship.
- Ingram: Oh, yeah. When I first got on the *Houston*, we was sleeping in hammocks. I had a bunk and a locker; I didn't know where either one of them was. And I had \$100 I'd saved in that three or four months I was on there, because there wasn't nothing to buy, without a geedunk stand. Have you ever heard of that?
- DePue: No.
- Ingram: The geedunk stand? Well, it's a little stand over there. You got cigarettes and candy, and they had a soda pop thing. They'd sell soda pop. They'd give you soda pop with a plastic cup or some kind of a cup or something and then the ice cream and a piece of candy and cigarettes. That was all there was to spend your money on. Well, I didn't smoke, so that saved me a lot of money. I think cigarettes were five cents a pack or something like that, back in them days.
- DePue: I always had the impression that practically everybody was smoking at that time.
- Ingram: Yeah. Well, I didn't. I had saved \$100. I made twenty-one dollars a month, and I had saved \$100 that was in my locker (laughs). We stayed in that turret...When I was on it, the three months that I was on that ship, I lived in that damn turret. You'd get to go down and take a crap, but then they'd bring you what they call a horse cock sandwich. You ever heard of that?
- DePue: Can you describe what that is?

Ingram: (laughs) They called it horse cock. It was big old long bologna, and they'd cut it real thick. I guess it looked like a horse's dick or something like that. That's what they called it, horse cock sandwiches (DePue laughs) and cold coffee. That's what you got on the turret up there for dinner or something.

DePue: Was that because you guys were in general quarters almost the whole time?

Ingram: I was, yeah. When I got on there, Pearl Harbor had already been bombed, and all battle stations was always manned all the time on there. They'd relax it, and you'd get out of the turret, but you couldn't go anywhere. You'd have to stay within two steps range or some crazy thing like that before you had to go back into the turret again.

DePue: In other words, if somebody was to spot an enemy aircraft coming in, they didn't want to have any wasted time getting ready to fire those big guns. Is that it?

Ingram: That's right. We didn't fire... The only time I ever saw them fire them guns at airplanes, the big ones, them eight-inch, is when the torpedo bombers was after us. And it worked sometimes; sometimes it didn't. The 5-inch 38s and the 50-calibers and the 1.1s would do all the fighting with the airplanes. But we never got to get away from that turret the whole time I was on there. I was on there about two or three months. Somebody told me it was fifty-some days that I was on there. I don't know how they figured that out. It wasn't very long.

DePue: Did you like the job you'd drawn?

Ingram: Oh, I got put on the *Pensacola* off the shell bombs. You know the *Pensacola* was a light cruiser. In only had 5-inch guns. They put me way down in turret four, way down in a room down there. The screws for the ship run through there, and all these hatches was all closed down when you come down there.

When I got aboard the *Houston*, I told the division officer, I said, "Mr. Hanlon, whatever you do, don't put me down in one of them holes again." I said, "I don't want to go. Put me anywhere but down in one of them holes again." When I got on board the *Houston*, that's how I got the job as a powder monkey. They called us powder monkeys.

DePue: You mentioned the *Pensacola*. Was that before you got to the *Houston*?

Ingram: Yeah. We got taken off. Right after they bombed Pearl Harbor, we stopped out there at sea, and all of a sudden, the *Pensacola* come over there. They took a whole bunch of us off the *Chaumont* and put us on the *Pensacola*. When we got into Australia the first time, they took us all back, put us all back on the *Chaumont*. Then they took us all off again, a whole bunch of us, and put us on the *Pensacola* to bring it up to quota, battle quota. When we got back there the next time, we went back to Australia with the *Pensacola*. I got off the

Pensacola, boarded the *Chaumont*, and then back onto the *Houston* again. It was to bring up the *Houston*, and the *Pensacola* came back to the States. That was the only good thing about it. But I hated that battle station I had down there.

DePue: In the *Pensacola*, that is.

Ingram: Yeah, back in turret four. It was down there where them screws was turning and the racket; you couldn't hear yourself think.

DePue: (laughs) I don't blame you there, and it sounds like pretty cramped quarters where you were as well.

Ingram: Yeah, when you got in one of them powder boxes down there, there was just enough guys to move around. They only had three or four guys on one side and three or four guys on the other side. They usually had it doubled up because they'd feed the guns off of both sides of the ship.

DePue: So what did you guys do? I mean, hour after hour, you're sitting down there waiting, in very cramped quarters. How did you guys pass your time when you were doing that?

Ingram: Just bullshitting with each other. The old guys would be telling salty stories and all that. But you was always ready to get into battle, you know.

DePue: Could you play cards or anything like that?

Ingram: No, I didn't. I don't remember what... I never did play no cards, no. There wasn't no place to do it. You had to stand up most of the time. Like when I was in the turret there, up on the front deck there, I could look into a porthole and see my division officer there. But that's all I could see, was just him in there.

DePue: Your world's pretty small in that respect, isn't it?

Ingram: Yeah. There wasn't no games played. They weren't playing no games. Everybody was on their toes.

DePue: I'm reading also that the ship's complement was 1,100. This was a big ship.

Ingram: Yeah, 1,100 guys we had. There's, I think, six of us, seven of us left, seven or eight of us left now. I'm still the baby of the group (laughs).

DePue: You mean of the 1,100 that were on the ship at the beginning of the war, you're one of a handful of guys left, huh?

Ingram: Yeah, I was the youngest one. I was the youngest one on the ship.

DePue: Do you know if, at the beginning of the war, were there any battleships in the Pacific, where you were in the Sixth Fleet?

Ingram: No, huh-uh.

DePue: The *Houston* was the biggest thing on the water?

Ingram: Yeah, that was the biggest. That's a pretty big-sized ship though, carrying 1,000 guys. A battleship carried, I don't know, about 1,500, 1,600 I think. They got them big guns.

DePue: Well, no wonder the *Houston* got sent in harm's way, huh?

Ingram: Yeah. We was out there by ourselves, really. We had an Australian cruiser with us at first. It was a light cruiser. I think the biggest gun they had on there was a 3-inch 50 or something. It was a waste of time and money and guys to build a ship like that for a warship. The Dutch was in charge of us too, because the Dutch... When you go in a foreign port in the Navy, whoever the senior commander is, the senior officer in both those allied countries, he's the guy that's in charge of that fleet. We was under Dutch command about half the time.

DePue: That's what I've read here about the battle that we're about ready to get to, the ABDA Naval Force, American, British, Dutch and Australian. You said it was usually Dutch commanders, huh?

Ingram: Yeah. The Australian ships, there weren't no size to them; they were little old light ships. They thought they were big ships. They was big ships for them, but put a battleship alongside, they'd look like a motor launch. They weren't very big, the Aussie ships. Them guys would come by in one of them Dutch ships. They'd all be sitting on the front of the ship up there, the fo'c'sle, and chairs underneath, a canvas hut, drinking beer.⁴ (DePue laughs). The Dutch and everybody but the American Navy, they have booze on board.

DePue: Yeah. There's a long British tradition for that.

Ingram: Yeah, well, the British, they have tea time; you get a drink. The Dutch have the same thing. They drink onboard ship.

DePue: Were you guys envious of the Brits and the Dutch, or were you proud to be American sailors?

Ingram: I was proud to be on that big ship instead of that little one (laughs). [I] guarantee you that. I figured we had a better shot at them.

⁴ The fo'c'sle is the forward part of a ship below the deck, traditionally used as the crew's living quarters. (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/fo-c-sle>)

DePue: From Australia where did you guys go?

Ingram: We went to Port Darwin, and that was it...Brisbane, Brisbane and Port Darwin. Port Darwin's where they have that twenty-five to twenty-six-foot tide. That ship, that *Houston*, was a big, tall ship. When that tide went out, all you could see was just a bunch of antennas sitting alongside the dock.

DePue: Do you remember shipping out from Australia and heading into the war zone?

Ingram: The whole Pacific was a war zone then. I didn't know who was with us and who wasn't because I was inside that turret, that little box there, with the gun. My battle station was right out, was in the turret itself, and you didn't get to see nothing. All you could hear... When the bells and jingles started going, that's when you know you're going to start putting some ammunition out. But then when we got in a big battle there, we was all standing outside the turret, and we had no ammunition.

DePue: Just a couple of questions before we get to that. You went out to the Pacific with the idea in your mind that you're going to join up with your brother on the *USS Houston*.

Ingram: Yes, sir.

DePue: It sounds like you never even actually saw each other when you get out there.

Ingram: No, huh-uh. When the war broke out, the admiral took his... The admiral, his gang's on the *Houston*. When we got to the Philippines—I wasn't on it then—they went and took the admiral. So his gang went to Corregidor.

DePue: So by the time you're in Australia and you're ready to head north from there towards the Java Sea, what were you guys hearing about what was going on in the Philippines and Corregidor? There wasn't any good news coming out of there.

Ingram: No. We had the flag, too. But at first, we knew a little bit about what was going on. That little peon like me found out what was going on. All that stuff was kept up on the bridge. Every once in a while, they'd come out and say, "We got some more dope on the Philippines," or something like that. It was never nothing exciting. They capitulated after we was in prison camp, a month after. They capitulated a month after the *Houston* got sunk.

DePue: So, when was it that you found out about your brother's fate? Was that after the war?

Ingram: No. It was when we went to the Philippines and got up there. He was with the [*Houston*]. I wasn't on it.

DePue: Well, let's get to the—

Ingram: My brother, he was up on the single bridge. They got transferred to Corregidor. Five days later, when we come to Australia, I got on the *Houston* then. So I didn't get to see my brother, and he didn't even know I was in there. (laughs)

When he come home, he come home, and he said, "You ought to be damned glad you wasn't out there to get that mess. You stayed in school." I said, "Well, I didn't stay in school. I was on the *Houston* when it sunk." He didn't believe me. He stood there with his mouth open and his eyes about that big around. "You're shitting me." I said, "No, I ain't either." I said, "Ask Mom and Dad." "Yeah, he was out there." Then I started talking about different signalmen I knew, that he knew. He said, "Well, you was definitely on there." I know it. I got home a month before he did. I got captured a month before he did.

DePue: I want to get something straight in my own mind. You told me already about this one bomb. I guess it was from a Japanese aircraft that hit turret number three. Was that—

Ingram: Yeah. That's when it come down that tripod.

DePue: Was that just a day or so before your ship was sunk?

Ingram: It was just the same time around there. I don't know when it was. It wasn't too much longer after I was on there I know. I guess I was only on there like fifty days or something like that.

DePue: I know that just reading about the *USS Houston*, the Battle of Java Sea, which is supposedly one of the biggest naval battles that they'd had since the First World War, you guys were in the midst of that. That was February 27, and this whole fleet of ABDA, Americans, Brits, Dutch and Australians—

Ingram: The Japs got them all.

DePue: ...Then it was just the very next day that you guys got the worst of it, wasn't it?

Ingram: Yeah, it would have been when that bomb went down that tripod.

DePue: February 28, then. Tell me about the rest of the story on February 28, when the *Houston* was sunk. Go into some details, as much as you can on this.



The USS Houston at dawn in February 1942.

- Ingram: The trouble is, see, I was in that turret; I didn't get to see nothing. The only time I got to know that there was any fire was when the bells and jingles started ringing in that turret. Everybody was hustling around. That bag of powder started coming up that conveyer belt, and we was out—I don't know, the Java Sea Battle or which one it was—but we was out of ammunition, and any ammunition we was using was all dead ammunition because it's been laying around so damn long.
- DePue: Do you remember when that bomb went off in turret number three? Could you feel that through the entire ship?
- Ingram: Oh, yeah, you could feel that. It was a pretty good shot. It rocked the whole ship. And that's a long ways back there too.
- DePue: Boy, I bet that'd get your eyes to open up wide.
- Ingram: Yeah. And then it wasn't long after that there, a couple of days or a week or so after that there, just a couple of days before we got soaked with a...A bomb hit the front part of the ship up there in the front. I think it hit the side of a turret because my friend that lives in Jacksonville here, Ray Goodson, he got blowed out of the turret and didn't even know it. He was standing there at the turret, I guess—probably was with the head telephone talker for the gunnery officer—he got blown right off the ship, right out of the turret, off into the water.
- DePue: If you have no ammunition, or maybe your ammunition is all bad ammunition, were you still in the turret in the midst of this battle?
- Ingram: Well, it was the safest place to be, really, because when you're up on deck up there, that shrapnel's flying all over, from hitting them bombs. They was hitting us and then torpedoes...Anyway, when we got sunk, it was during the night too. It was 12:00 or something like that. The captain got killed.
- DePue: Who was the captain? Do you remember?
- Ingram: Rooks.
- DePue: Albert Rooks?
- Ingram: Rooks. Yeah, Rooks, yeah.
- DePue: Now, I imagine you're just as—
- Ingram: He got killed. They'd already passed the "abandon ship," and then he got killed. So one of the junior officers run up there. They already had passed the word to abandon ship, and this junior officer, he was going to be Superman or something. He was going to get that ship a running again and make a run for it. But they told everybody to go back to your general quarters station. That's

why we lost so damn many people on the ship. The guys all went back to their battle stations, down them holes. The ship just rolled over, bing! Got the whole bunch of them.

DePue: How did you get out?

Ingram: When they passed "abandon ship" the first time, we was right there in the turret. We had no more ammunition, so we was just all standing by. We got outside the turret, when they passed "abandon ship." And that's when Red Clammer [?], the boatswain mate there, he goes down. He said, "Everybody back to their battle stations." Then he came back up; he said, "Everybody abandon ship." He said, "Anybody up here?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm here." "Where the hell are you?" I was underneath that turret to keep from getting hit by shrapnel or something, because it's about a foot high, underneath that turret, where you could lay underneath there, and the turret could turn and not hit you. So, I got out of there.

He said, "Come on. We're going to abandon ship." I said, "I got to go get a life jacket." He said, "I'll get you one." He run back there and brought me a life ring. Then we went up on the fo'c'sle. We was leaning over pretty far, way over. I don't know how much farther... It wasn't that much farther after we got off there that it sunk. The first-class boatswain's mate got that life ring for me, he was standing up there. He said, "I can't swim." He didn't even have his lifejacket laced up. He was lacing up his lifejacket, you know, tying it.

I got up on the front. I went straight out in front of the ship. And Red Clammer, the boatswain's mate, he went out on the side, about ten foot behind me. And then the division officer was back there somewhere. He, I and Red Clammer was the three went over the fo'c'sle. I never seen that division officer, but I did see Red. So I went off, and then Red was...he was getting in the water. He was walking down the side of the ship, getting in the water. I never heard from him after that. I was in that water all night long by myself, in the dark, since 3:00 in the morning until it was 3:00 or 4:00 the next afternoon.

DePue: How far did you swim out, before you even bothered to look back to look at the ship?

Ingram: I don't know (laughs). I must have been swimming 100 miles an hour. I was swimming like hell to get away from that ship. When the ship goes down, everything that's out there, it sucks it...it pulls it right down like this. I don't know how to explain it, but everything that's out there...It'll take a motor launch down too.

DePue: I'm sure you've heard, from talking to a lot of other of your buddies over the years, how it went down. Did it list and then just roll over, or did it go down bow first or split in half?

Ingram: It rolled over on its side. When I turned and stopped out there and looked back, at once I could see two holes where the fire was coming out of the side from the torpedo. I must have went 100 miles more because I was going about 100 miles an hour (laughs), swimming. I turned around and looked, and there was those two big old things was right on the water. You could see the water and the steam coming up, and then she went down. I was way out, a pretty good piece from it.

That's why I say that that guy, my gym teacher, taught me how to swim, down at the KC Hall. They had a swimming pool down there. He taught me how to swim. That's when it really come in handy. I never did get a chance to see that guy again and tell him what he did. Dale McGinnis was his name. He was the gym teacher for McClernand School. He done physical ed at two schools.

DePue: What was going on in your mind when you're watching your ship like that, this ship that you were so proud to serve on?

Ingram: The only thing that was on your mind then was to get away from the damn thing because you're going to get pulled back down if you didn't. When I hit that water, I started swimming, 100 miles an hour I was going. That current was taking me along, but I got out a pretty good ways away from it before I turned around and looked again. The next time I turned around, it was gone.

DePue: You said you got a life ring. Was there anybody else there in the water with you?

Ingram: No, the boatswain's mate, the first-class boatswain's mate, he went out to the side. And Mr. Hammel[?] went out to the side. They went out to the side of the ship, and I went off of the bow, way up at the bow, where it wouldn't be so much... I didn't know any difference, but I took the way... When that ship rolls over, it just pulls anything that's in that water, motor launches or whatever, it goes down. It's pulled down; it just sinks.

DePue: Again, just reading about the *USS Houston*, of the close to 1,100 men on board that ship, only 368 survived that.

Ingram: Yeah.

DePue: So there were still a lot of guys in the water but nobody around you?

Ingram: No. I was in that water all night long, until the next afternoon, before I seen anybody. I got to thinking, "Damn, I was the only guy that escaped off that

ship with 1,100 guys on it.” It was 3:00 the next afternoon before I seen anybody, and it was a damn Jap motor launch.

DePue: Were you happy to see even the Japanese coming to get you?

Ingram: Yeah, because I was getting waterlogged then. I was getting tired. I couldn’t get inside that life ring; I had ahold of the rope on it. I was done tuckered out. That water is just cold as hell and nothing to eat. I couldn’t believe it.

Then you’d see a body or something coming toward, floating. It was a dead Jap or something or a big, dead fish. It’d scare the hell out of you because it was heading right for you. But I kept hollering, kept hollering, “Anybody off the *Houston*?” all night long, and I never got no answer. It was scary as hell out there. Seventeen years old, your ship just sunk, and you’re by yourself in the ocean. It was kind of spooky.

DePue: How about sharks? Did you see any sharks?

Ingram: No, that’s the thing everybody asks, but when you get it going in there, with all them bombs and torpedoes and guns and everything going off, the concussion on the water down there, the guns going off at one another and big explosions, all them sharks, they head out of there. That kills them, concussion bombs, torpedoes. There wasn’t no sharks down around there. Now, like the Indianapolis, them guys were in the water nine days! Did you hear about that one?

DePue: Oh, yeah.

Ingram: Yeah. It was the same ship as the *Houston*.

DePue: Oh, was it? Same class?

Ingram: Yeah, identically the same. I think she was CA-35, I think. I went to a guy’s house one night, and they had a bunch of guys over there. There was a guy off the *Pensacola*. We kind of compared some stories. They got sunk by a submarine, a Jap submarine. It just blew the damn ship about half in two, in the matter of a few seconds, they were in the water. They were in the water nine days. I can’t imagine what that was.

DePue: What happened after the Japanese... Was it some kind of a small ship that found you?

Ingram: No, there was a Japanese invasion fleet heading for Australia. When we left Batavia... We got fuel there, then we left. The Dutch told us, “You guys can go. We have our reconnaissance planes that’s been out, and everything’s clear. You can make a run for Australia.” Then we gassed up; we got fuel at the Dutch fuel. We had to go up and pump our own fuel because the people all capitulated the island there, left the island. They kept pumping oil off the

beach there for Java onto the *Houston*. When they figured they had enough to make it to Australia, well, then they just shut the plant down and took off on it.

The Dutch said, "You're ready to go." We left and went to Perth. We got about halfway through that Sunda Strait there and found out we was right in the middle of the whole Japanese invasion fleet, heading for Australia. That's where all the fighting took place.

DePue: What kind of a ship was it that rescued you?

Ingram: Oh, I got picked up by a motor launch, a Japanese patrol, a little motor launch. There was only three or four Jap sailors in there. They stopped and picked me up and gave me water and tried to give me a cigarette and all that stuff. They took me over there and put me on this big transport. It was empty. I guess [it was] getting ready to load up with stuff from Java.

DePue: On that small launch, were there any other Americans they'd already picked up?

Ingram: No, I was the only one.

DePue: How about when you got to the transport. Were there any other Americans there?

Ingram: No, there wasn't. (laughs) Like I said, I hadn't seen a damn soul all night long and all morning, until 3:00 the next afternoon, and it was a Japanese motor launch. It was about, I guess, 3:00 in the afternoon then.

DePue: You had to be feeling like you're the lone survivor by that time.

Ingram: I did. I thought, "Geez, I'm the only guy off the *Houston*." There wasn't another guy off the *Houston* around nowhere. But anyway, they put me on this Japanese ship, and the Jap officer come out. They had a table out there and a chair for the Jap officer to sit down. He said, "You are a baby." I said, "Yes, sir, I am. Yes, sir, I am, yeah." Then he started asking me questions.

Well, every time that he asked me a question... There was a sailor standing behind me. He had his fist rolled up, and he'd hit you with the inside of his fist, right on the ear. The Jap would ask you another question. And you'd say, "I don't know; I don't know, and I don't know that." Every time I'd say, "I don't know," I got a shot in one ear and then the other side. I couldn't hardly hear what was going on, after about five minutes there.

They decided I didn't know anything. So he walked over to the side over there, and he threwed the life ring in. The guy turned around, and I seen this Jap sergeant went like that, you know, "Push him." They pushed me over the side. Hell, it must have been thirty, forty foot to the water. I hit that water.

I hit the water right. And then I went over, swam out there and got my life ring back.

I was drifting alongside the ship back there. I got out a ways from what you call the screws [propellers], but they were anchored. They [always] said, "Keep away from the screws." I was way out there; I was out there pretty far. The Japs on the Japanese ship, they was shooting at me with twenty-five caliber rifles. I was just out of range of them. You'd see the bullets, and it hit the water, and you could see it going down. Every time I seen the guy starting to aim, up on that ship there, I'd grab ahold of that rope and go under water. I could look (laughs) around and look out there; you could see the bullets going down.

I finally got out of range for them, then I got back there to that damn little channel there. A guy come along there... This guy come along in a little sailboat. He was picking guys up. If you had something to give him, a ring or a watch or something like that there, he'd take you aboard. If you didn't have nothing to give him, he wouldn't take you aboard.

Then I met my first *Houston* sailor, on that little native boat. He [the boat owner] wouldn't take this guy. He come along this sailor there, who had the whole side of his face burned off. His ear was gone, and down on his shoulder, all full of old black oil. He wouldn't take him aboard. We had six, seven guys off the *Houston* on there by then, by this time. I don't know where he picked them up, if they was coming in or what, when the fisherman found them. Anyway, he wouldn't take that one guy who was burned, so these sailors threw the guy over and took his boat (laughs). They turned around and went back down there and picked that guy who was burned up.

They went on down. The guys was going, "Man, we ain't never going to make it into the beach here" because the way the rollers was coming in and hitting that island, big waves and the rocks all over there. The guy says, "Hey, let's jump over the side. We can swim better." A guy says, "No, don't go over the side. The current will get you." A couple of guys jumped over. When they dove down, (whoosh sound) they're gone, and we never did see them again.

We made it into the beach on the... Went through all these boulders, got the boat landed on the sand. We got off the boat and was up there. I got on the highway, but nobody knew which way to go to go to where Batavia was. I didn't even know where Batavia was. I never heard the name of it, and that's the capitol of Java. It's got a new name now; I don't know what it is now.

We was walking on that highway, walking along on that road and one thing and another, eating coconuts and crap off of the trees out there. We see up on top of the hill, there was a building up there that had a Red Cross flag on it. "Oh, boy, we got it now." I guess there's about ten or fifteen of us, no clothes on. I had a pair of skivvies on; some guys didn't have no clothes on,

barefooted on that damn hot tarmac out there. We walked up to that jail. The guys in there, oh, they greeted us; they give us clothes and fed us real good, one thing and another. Everybody got to feeling pretty good. They put us in a cell they had. It was a jail; it wasn't a hospital; it was a jail. They fed us good and everything. Night come along—

DePue: Who were they, natives?

Ingram: The natives, yeah; they were natives. But anyway, they give us all of the food and everything and put us in the cell. It was a jail. They put us in the cell and [we heard,] “United States, United States.” We couldn't understand them. The next morning, [there was] all this screaming and hollering and clinging and clanging and clinging and clanging and screaming and hollering, a whole bunch of noise. We're locked in the damn cells; the Japanese locked us up. All the noise we heard out there, they was setting up five machine guns, alongside that building. They come in and was taking the guys out, one at a time. They was stopping, right outside the door there, and asking questions.

DePue: You're talking about the Japanese now?

Ingram: Yeah, the Japanese. He asked me, when I went out there, he said, “Who's the greatest man, Roosevelt [at that time, President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt] or Tōjō [Hideki Tōjō, General of the Imperial Japanese Army and Prime Minister of Japan]?” I was seventeen years old; I've never heard of Tōjō. Who the hell is he? I said, “Roosevelt.”

That son-of-a-bitch hit me with a saber. He had the sword inside his case, and he hit me with that thing. I went down; he knocked me out. He was kicking me with those old hobnailed shoes they wore, like golf shoes. He just kicked the hell out of everybody. I got a little nick on my face; it caused some blood. When I got up (laughs), the whole world was spinning. He says, “Who's the greatest man now, Tōjō or Roosevelt?” Roosevelt just lost his seniority. (both laugh) I wasn't going to let that sucker hit me again. I told him Tōjō was. He jabbered off something and then pushed me down.

They loaded us in the truck, took us out of the cells. Every guy that got out of there, he got the hell beat out of him in some way or another, with a club or... Whatever they had around there handy, they'd beat you with it. They loaded us in these trucks, and they took us into the next little town, the name was Serang, and put us in the theater.

In this theater they had little booths, where it looked like the rich people would have a booth, where they could go in and see a movie. And they had these little booths up there. They go in there. They had a pretty good crowd of guys in there already. There was no water, no toilet facilities in there. We was in the damn theater, I guess, a month anyhow. They'd feed us

once a day, rice. They come around to me, and they put a big armband on me, on my arm. They give me a yo-ho[?] pole, with two buckets on it.

DePue: A what pole?

Ingram: A yo-ho[?] pole. Did you ever see those natives with that pole and buckets they carried stuff on them?

DePue: Yeah, they carry it on their shoulder.

Ingram: Yeah, they carry it. You've got two buckets, one on each side of the pole. They had two five-gallon buckets on this pole, and they took me over there, to a grocery store in this city. They filled them buckets up with water, and I'd take them back to the theater. That's what I did all day long, by myself. I guess they figured I was just a kid. I carried all that water. Finally they got in there with the trucks, and they took us all out and took us into Batavia, Java.

I had this big armband on, and I asked one of them officers, I said, "I got this thing on. I don't know what it means." But, I said, "I was carrying water back there at Serang." We did that in Serang, I guess, a month or so, with no facilities of any kind. They picked out a corner, over in the building over there. That's where everybody would take a crap or take a leak or something. Just about all we had there was water and a little bit of rice.

DePue: Can I ask you a few questions? I'm going to kind of backtrack here for a couple of these questions. The first time you're pulled out of the water and you're interrogated by this Japanese, how good was his English?

Ingram: Perfect. He was perfect. In fact, he told me where he went to college, in the states. I don't remember where it was. I didn't remember it even after that. I told some of the officers what he told me; they had the same thing. But he had good English. He was a warrant officer, some sort of junior officer or something.

DePue: That ought to make you start wondering in the first place. You mentioned that, somewhere along the line, you lost your clothes and obviously your shoes too. The shoes I can understand, but what happened to your clothes?

Ingram: We took them off when we abandoned ship, took everything off. You didn't know how long you was going to be in the water, but most all the guys took off the pants, wore their shorts. Some of the guys didn't even have shorts on. It's the weight, like your shoes. You couldn't swim with shoes on, that length of time. All I had on when I went over was just a pair of shorts on, to cut out all that weight.

DePue: What did you trade for when they fished you out of the water the second time? You said you needed to have something to trade for.

- Ingram: Oh, that was that Japanese fishing boat, yeah, Japanese motor launch. We got aboard the motor launch.
- DePue: I thought that was the second time you got fished out by some natives.
- Ingram: I got the motor launch first. There was just me on that motor launch; I was the only one. I said, "Jesus Christ, no more *Houston* sailors." I went aboard that ship, and you got interrogated, I went over the side, and then I drifted down and this sailboat was coming along. That's the one that the guys had commandeered and threwed this fisherman over because he wouldn't take that one guy who was burned.
- DePue: Oh, so you got picked up after they took over that boat.
- Ingram: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah.
- DePue: Well, that explains it. All of this that you're explaining, you've lived a lifetime in just a month or so. This is one heck of a rollercoaster you were on, an emotional rollercoaster.
- Ingram: Yeah, it was. It was something. Like I said, I was seventeen years old, and I'd already had a ship sunk out from underneath me and wound up a prisoner of war within nine months from the day I enlisted in the Navy.
- DePue: Wow. I know you've been interviewed about this before, so I'm especially thankful that you are willing to have me interview you also. One of the things I read about was you and Tom McFarlane being wired together. Can you tell me about that?
- Ingram: He was a first class gunners mate, and he was about six foot tall. When we got into... I think it was before... It was somewhere along the line, they took bailing wire, like rebar wire. Do you know what that is?
- DePue: Oh, yeah.
- Ingram: Like the iron workers use. And they tied us guys, two guys together. Here he is, about six-foot-tall, and I'm down here at four foot tall. That's the way we went, him and I did. Yeah, we were wired. They took that wire off of me when I was carrying that water in there. Boy, you ought to seen our hands, black and blue, and they blowed up like a balloon. I forgot that there, yeah.
- DePue: What, from cutting the circulation off?
- Ingram: Yeah, hell yes. They put that bailing wire on, just like iron workers did, two of us together.
- DePue: And you still had no shoes, either?

Ingram: No, no shoes. Nobody had shoes. In fact, the guy that had big feet, in the prison camps after they got there, they'd get those shoes. I was wearing size five, and these other guys, they were wearing tens and elevens and all that big feet. I had the shoes pretty well, after they got into the camps. The Japs brought down a whole bunch of shoes. They was all little bitty old shoes, looked like they took them from the grammar school or something. I got a good pair of shoes out of that.

DePue: Was it at the Red Cross building that you spent a month doing all of this?

Ingram: Yeah. That's where we went to that Serang, the movie house. We got wired up between the hospital there—It wasn't a hospital—the jails, until we got to Batavia. They had us all wired together then, me and T. J. McFarlane. He was first class gunners mate.

DePue: Was there any medical care at all that anybody was receiving?

Ingram: No. They didn't have anything. They didn't have no medical stuff to give us.

DePue: I've got to believe that some of these people were dying.

Ingram: God damn right, they were. Doctor Hekking was our doctor when we got into camp there. He come over there one day, out here in Texas. A guy had, him and his wife, had their medicine laid up on an air conditioner. He goes, he said, "Oh, my God." He said, "That's more medicine than we got (laughs) in the whole four years we was POWs." The guy and his wife and his doctor, he made a big thing of that. He was quite a guy; Doctor Hekking was a great guy.



Bill Ingram with Dr. and Mrs. Henri Hekking while they attended a reunion in Houston Texas. Dr. Hekking, from Holland, is credited with saving countless lives while he was a POW. Hekking's two children, 10 and 12 years old, were also prisoners.

When we got into the prison camp, when we left Batavia and started up towards the jungle, they took all the young guys, all the young sailors and soldiers and put us in a group of 100. And then they give us four army officers and a Dutch doctor. That was the group that I was in. They called it Captain Fitzsimmons' group. And then the other group was... When they threw us in Batavia there at the bicycle camp... That's where they took us finally; it was a bicycle camp.

The reason they called it a bicycle camp was because all this Dutch army didn't have no motorcycles, no cars or nothing when they was to go in advance. You'll see it in an old newsreel once in a while. All them guys are all

riding bicycles, and they called it the bicycle camp. That's where we got hooked up with the army. They told us, "You go get somebody your size from the army guys and get you some clothes. They ain't going to need them." We went out and found guys our sizes and got some underclothes and stuff. The other guys was still naked.

DePue: This Batavia you've been talking about, where the bicycle camp is, where you were for a month or so, totting water, it sounds like, is that part of Java?

Ingram: Yeah, Java. Batavia is the capital of Java. They got a new name for it now.

DePue: Is the name Jakarta now?

Ingram: Yeah. Jakarta, yeah. It might be; I don't know. They change them. The other one was Serang, and they've still got that name. But the Dutch, when they took back over, they changed all them names of them countries over there.

DePue: There's a good reason then that the Javanese didn't necessarily like the Dutch.

Ingram: Yeah. That's right.

DePue: Did they like the Japanese?

Ingram: Well, they're the same class of people, the Japanese and the Javanese, but they didn't treat them any better than they did us.

DePue: I believe that. You were there for about a month, at Batavia. Then what happens to the group?

Ingram: They took us 100 guys, and we went off in an advance group, went quite a ways. They give us the four army officers. My first cruise in the Navy, I was (laughs) under the command of a Dutch, I mean an American captain, artillery officer. I got the Army Unit Citation for that too (laughs).

DePue: From what I read, though, you guys went on ship for a while.

Ingram: Yeah.

DePue: So from Batavia, they put you on a ship?

Ingram: Yeah, we went on a ship. We left there and went on a ship. They said, "You are going to go up in the jungle, and there will be plenty of food. It will be a lot better. You'll be treated a lot better. There's better arrangements," and one thing and another. We got up there, there wasn't a goddamn banana on the trees out there, that jungle. There was nothing, no kind of food at all.

DePue: I also read that you spent a little bit of time in Singapore.

Ingram: Yeah, we was there...Do you know when Singapore capitulated? We were there when that happened.

DePue: Oh, really?

Ingram: But we were outside the base, outside the army base there. They had a couple of barracks up there. They took us, the 100 group up there. We was just hanging around out there around. You wasn't allowed to leave the area right there. We was hanging around there. I went over to the army, the British army place, me and another guy did, going to see if we could get some food or something.

There were doing their drills with their guns and everything. It was, "How in the hell did these guys...All [had] been taken prisoners of war, [and] they got all their ammunition and guns and everything or another." But they did that because they didn't have no...Just like in the Philippines, they didn't have enough food and ammunition to last but maybe one day in a battle, and then that was the end of it. So, they figured they wouldn't go into battle with the Japs because it would save a lot of lives, both for the Japanese and the British.

They took about 10,000 British, 10,000 British, something like that, all at once, the same way they did in the Philippines. When the Philippines capitulated, they had all them guys; they just turned over their guns to the Japs. They did the same thing in Singapore. We couldn't figure it out. How in the hell them guys got all their guns, and they were prisoners of war?

DePue: About this time, I wonder what your frame of mind is. Did you think that the United States and the allies could actually win this war, or were you thinking that it was all over by that time?

Ingram: Well, it looked like it kind of was all over because they had everything from Japan to Singapore. The Japs had it all sewed up there. They could have undone all of us guys. We couldn't have got out of there. Anyway, we stayed in Singapore. Then they loaded us on... We called them hell ships.

You know how big a cargo ship is. They loaded it, packed them guys, just packed them in like sardines, and then, I think it was about ten days, twelve days, something like that, from Singapore to Mulvane, Burma. It was a pretty long trip, no water, no food again.

Some of the guys was drinking their own urine because they couldn't get no water. Your urine is, you know, is pure water; it's pure water; it's purified. It's good to drink. Don't let anybody shit you it [that it] ain't. I did it. I knew what it was, because you couldn't get no water. The only way you could get a drink of water was to take a piss in a little can or something and then drink it, let it get cool. A lot of guys did that.

DePue: To include yourself, you said?

Ingram: Yeah.

DePue: That's what I understand; if you drink it right away, it's okay. You just don't want to have it sitting around for a while.

Ingram: Yeah. It had a taste to it, but it was also water. You had to get water. And then after a couple of days, after we was on there, they put a couple of boards over the side. You'd get outside the handrail, hold on to, stand over to take a crap over the side of the ship. They stopped that. I guess the shit was all blowing up on the bridge or something. Anyway, we got into this little cove in there like, and we come into Moulmein, Burma, where they... Ever hear that song, "On the way to..."

DePue: I'm looking at a map that I think I'll include in your interview as well. It's got Moulmein as the terminus of the death railway or the Burma Road.

Ingram: Yeah, the death railroad; that's what they call it now.

DePue: I think this might be a good place for us to stop today because we're coming up to about an hour and fifty minutes, an hour and forty-five minutes, and we've still got a long way to go. How about if we pick up part two a couple of days from now?

Ingram: Yeah. That'll be alright. Get to some of the booboos we made. Get to go along with this here. I'm not reading anything, so it's not no bullshit story, like a lot of guys they come on... We had a lot of guys that was picked up that first night being a prisoner of war.

DePue: I have heard that. I'm going to stop, and then we'll keep talking after we stop.

(end of transcript #1)

Interview with William Ingram

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Interview # 2: July 1, 2014

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, July 1, 2014. This is Mark DePue with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here in my office today for part two of my interview with Bill Ingram. And Bill, you're where in Florida?

Ingram: Jacksonville.

DePue: How long you been living in Jacksonville?

Ingram: Since 1961.

DePue: We've got a good telephone connection. We had a great session yesterday. Not too many people can tell me stories like you did yesterday, that make my toes curl up. (Ingram laughs) What I wanted to start with today is to just throw out a few dates kind of frame the discussion that we've had and where we can pick it up.

You enlisted in the spring of 1941. You graduated from basic training and are heading towards the Pacific, December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor. February 15 of 1942 is the date that Singapore fell. It wasn't too long after that, a couple of weeks later, that your ship, the *USS Houston*, got sunk in the Battle of Sunda Strait. You were fished out of the water and lucky to survive, after being in the water, not once but twice. That part of the story absolutely amazed me. Then—we talked about this yesterday as well—Corregidor fell on May 6. That's the day that your brother went into captivity, and, of course, neither one of you knew what the fate of the other brother was

at that time. When we finished off yesterday, we had just gotten you from the ship to land in Moulmein.

Ingram: Moulmein, Burma, yeah.

DePue: Moulmein, Burma. Do you know roughly the date that you got there?

Ingram: No, I don't really. We didn't have no calendars or nothing. We was on one of them hell ships. Gosh, I don't know.

DePue: That's what I assumed. I'm sure a calendar was the last thing you were worried about, what day of the week or the month it was. I want you to pick up from landing there. I think that's when you had your own mini-version of the Bataan Death March. I want you to tell me about that experience.

Ingram: That Bataan Death March came a long time after that.⁵ That was maybe a year or so after we got on Moulmein, Burma, there. Moulmein, Burma is in Burma [now Myanmar], and the Bataan Death March was in the Philippines.

DePue: But I thought you had your own version of it, a forced march through the jungle that you endured, once you got there.

Ingram: Oh, yeah. We got off that ship, and we walked down to where they had the station. The railroad already started. I guess it'd been started sometime before we got there. They was waiting on more help (laughs), free help. Anyway, they got it. We went three or four miles or something, down into the jungle. We had no food; we had no clothes or nothing. Whatever we had when we got off that ship, that's what we had when we got up there. I think I got a mess kit and a blanket, was all I had.

DePue: But still no clothes?

Ingram: No clothes.

DePue: And no shoes?

Ingram: I had a pair of regulation skivvies on, though; that was all, no shoes. And we worked at that base camp there. I worked at that base camp. I think... I don't remember the number of the base camp. It had a name for it. It wasn't a number on that camp. It was right there; just by Moulmein, Burma is where that started. As soon as we got off them trucks, they put us in trucks and took us as far as they could down the railroad there. Then we got off the trucks, and we started walking, until we come to that base camp, the main camp there.

⁵ The Bataan Death March was the forcible transfer by the Imperial Japanese Army of 60,000–80,000 American and Filipino prisoners of war. The total distance marched is variously reported by differing sources as between 60 and 69.6 miles. Differing sources also report widely differing prisoner of war casualties, from 5,000 to 18,000 Filipino deaths and 500 to 650 American death. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bataan_Death_March)

Then we was all lined up and everything. They didn't know what they was going to do, so they just marched us right on down the railroad. We started working that day, started carrying dirt back off the ground. We had to carry one square meter of dirt per man in the camp. The guys that went out to work say they had twenty-five cooks and sick bay guys, sick guys as cooks and officers and them. We had to move that... We had 100 people. We had to move 100 square meters of dirt on that railroad with a yo-ho pole and a basket. A yo-ho pole is one of them poles that they stick a couple of buckets on each end of a pole, and you heap it up on your shoulder, and you carry that dirt up and put it on the railroad bed. You just made a big circle around.

DePue: These are wicker basket you were putting this dirt into?

Ingram: Yeah, uh-huh. That's right.

DePue: Did you have a shovel, or was somebody scooping it in for you? How did that work?

Ingram: You're in a line. You go down there, and there'd be two or three guys down there. You never stopped. They just kept throwing the... One guy might put two shovels full in, one shovel full in each one. The next guy put another shovel in, until you got down to the end down there, and it'd be full. Your pack would be full, then you'd start up the railroad bed. You might have to walk a quarter mile with that damn thing on your shoulders, in that hot weather, everything. It was hell.

DePue: This was in the rainforest, wasn't it?

Ingram: Yeah, it was. You had what they called a rainforest, where they have a... Is it a tsunami or something? What is it? The rain never stops.

DePue: Monsoon.

Ingram: Yeah, that's it. When that monsoon comes, there's about three or four months it rains day and night. But this was just an average day that we was there. I don't know what they called it.

DePue: Did you guys have to work even during the monsoon?

Ingram: Hell, we didn't stop for nothing. The only thing we stopped [for], we got a couple hours sleep at night. The rest of the time we're back out on that railroad.

DePue: I want you to describe a typical day for me, if there is such a thing. When would you get up?

Ingram: The breaking of daylight. Soon as they saw a little daylight, where they could see, they roused us out. We'd jump up out of that bed and fall in. They'd

count, hold muster and count us all, and off to the railroad we went. Whatever they had to do for that day or whatever, we had to be out there. Then we didn't come back until it was done.

DePue: Did you eat before you left the base camp?

Ingram: Nope. Hell, you got off that old bamboo thing and you'd fall out, fall in for quarters in the morning. They'd count us off, and then we would go right off on the railroad. The tools would be out there at the railroad from yesterday.

DePue: How many times a day did you eat, and when during the day did you eat?

Ingram: Once. You never knew what time it was going to be or what it was going to be. Usually you'd just... Sometimes they had boiled rice, like mush. And then sometimes they'd have a little jar of rice; they'd made into balls. You'd get a big scoop of that ball, a scoop full of that ball, and that'd be what you got. You just went over there somewhere to eat it with your fingers. If you're lucky enough to have a spork or a knife, you could use that, but that was it. That's what you had, or you'd get nothing.

DePue: When you first got up in the morning, when everybody got up, did they give you a chance at least to relieve yourself?

Ingram: Yeah, I think they did. I don't remember that. That's wasn't as bad there as it was getting the hell beat out of you because... They'd hold a muster, and they'd say they'd be missing two guys. All hell would break... Most of the time the Japs couldn't count, couldn't count to ten. They'd always be up short. And then one of them Jap sergeants comes out and beat the hell out of them if they didn't have the right amount of numbers. Then they'd have a Jap count them. He'd always come up with the right number.

But you had to get permission every time you wanted to relieve yourself. You'd better make sure that guy sees you going in that jungle. If you want to crap, you go in the jungle. If you take a leak, you just stand right alongside the railroad. They didn't even let you go off to take a leak. But you could go take a crap out there.

DePue: How did they organize the groups?

Ingram: How did they organize them? We'd all be standing there in line, at muster, and they'd just go down there and count say, five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, pick out twenty-five guys and say, "Okay, you go with that guard over there. You go with that guard over there." That's how they... They didn't have no organization at all.

DePue: I thought you mentioned before that they had you organized in 100-man group; they just identified 100 people at one time.

- Ingram: If they was going to cut a bunch of them out and send them to another camp for good, that's the way they would do it. They'd just count down the row until they got 100 guys there. They'd tell them to move down a little bit that-a-way, and then they'd march you all down there. You might walk five or ten miles to the next camp where they want you at. You'd left whatever you had. You had nothing to worry about. You had no clothes. You didn't have no suitcase to pack or none of that stuff. It was just what you had on your back; that's about all you had.
- DePue: Did you eventually get some clothing and some shoes?
- Ingram: I was lucky enough one time. They brought a bunch of Japanese shoes in there. They were all small shoes, so I got a pair, a couple pair of good shoes out of it. The big guys didn't get nothing. Some of the guys that wear eights and nines, they didn't never have a pair of shoes on, the whole time they were there.
- DePue: The whole time you were there, you had nothing but your shorts on?
- Ingram: That's all. That's all we had. I had a pair of shorts, and they were just about turned into rags. And I had a gunny sack and a blanket, like a little GI kit, plate, canteen, dishes. The dishes they had there's like the dishes you have in the Army. I got one of them from one of the Army guys. I think I got a lid or something. That's all I had.
- DePue: I want to go back and ask you more about organization, because being in the military, it's always about what unit you're in and how you're organized and the chain of command that exists and things like that. Was there any kind of structure that you had? Was there a chain of command among the prisoners?
- Ingram: Yeah. We had four officers, yeah. But they didn't go out on working parties. We had four Army officers in camp, a captain by the name of Captain Fitzsimmons, and it was Jimmie Lattimore; he was a lieutenant I think. I don't know what the hell the other was, two other guys. But they didn't go out on the working parties. They wouldn't have done any good out there anyhow. If they went out, they'd put them to work. They wouldn't let them stand around doing nothing. Their organization was that stick or that pickaxe handle they had. That was what they organized with.
- DePue: You're talking about the Japanese prison guards.
- Ingram: Yeah. No, all our guys were Koreans.
- DePue: Oh, they were?
- Ingram: Yes, sir. In the camp, the average camp, they had like 500 guys and one Japanese officer; he was usually a captain or something like that. Most of them were drunks. They had a captain up there, and then they'd have a Jap

sergeant, maybe a warrant officer, a Jap warrant officer, and maybe one or two Jap soldiers.

All their guards were all Koreans that went and got conscripted into the Japanese army. They beat the hell out of them, just like they did us too. If they caught one of them Korean guards and an American talking, by themselves, they'd beat hell out of both of them. They couldn't be no friends. You didn't have no friends.

DePue: I would assume though you're mixed in with not only Americans but a lot of other nationalities. Is that right?

Ingram: Yeah. We had Dutch. The Koreans belonged to the Japanese. They wore Japanese uniforms, but they didn't have ranking badges or nothing like that on the shoulder, like all the Japs had them, all kinds of buttons on them, pretty snazzy uniforms to be out there in that jungle. But we had Dutch and Australians, British. We had a lot of British. All the Dutch people was there. They kind of kept back in the camp by themselves. That's the only thing they didn't do. Some of them got scattered out, going into sick bay or something.

DePue: Were a lot of the Brits then formerly at Singapore? Were they part of those captured at Singapore?

Ingram: Yeah, that's what it was. I think they had 70,000 guys there at Singapore, and they scattered them all over. They had stuff going on all over down there, building houses on the railroad for the trains. They had different jobs for different people.

DePue: Reading about this, I also read that there were something like 180,000 Asians that they had working there.

Ingram: Oh, they had more than that. We don't know anything about the Asians out there. We didn't know how many was there or how many died. When them guys died out there, alongside the railroad where they was working, they just left them lay there. The animals, I guess, took care of them. But the British and all of us, we buried all our guys.

DePue: Where did you bury them?

Ingram: In the camp. They could go back out there that has a little spot somewhere and dig graves. Near the end, they got to where they had... They was dying faster than they could put them in graves, so they put two and three guys in a grave.

DePue: Were you the ones who had to bury them as well?

Ingram: Yep.

DePue: Were those just people who would die, right there working on the railroad, just die on the side of the tracks?

Ingram: Hell, they'd leave them. The Americans, we'd carry them guys back. But the Asians and the Japanese, all them foreigners, them black people there, all them foreigners there, they just left them laying. It's the way they live. They didn't give a damn. They tried burying them underneath the railroad bed there.

Anyway, they thought they were organized. At one time there, we had an Army officer—wasn't part of the field artillery—he popped up there one day. He was some kind of an engineer. He was an Army captain, and he was an engineer. I don't know how in the hell he got down there. We had him in our group then. He was our lead. The captain and them talked the Japs into putting him in charge of the working parties. They said they could get the work done a lot faster. He knew what was going on. Them Japs could, you know... Them Jap engineers wasn't no dumbbells; they had blueprints and everything. They helped him there. He was running the show for... I don't know what happened.

DePue: He was what, again?

Ingram: He was running the show there for a while, that Army officer.

DePue: Did you guys figure that he was collaborating with the Japanese, or he just really didn't have much choice?

Ingram: He didn't have no choice. I don't know where in the hell he come from. I never did hear the story. {he was} a guy named Roy Stenslin.

Oh, by the way, we'll step out here a minute. Today and tomorrow and the next day is in Dallas, Texas, the 131st Field Artillery officers, there are having a yearly get-together.⁶ There's not too many of them left. There was about 500; they got 100 or so, I guess, left now.

DePue: That's what I did read someplace, that the Americans that were there generally were in two groups. There were the folks from the *Houston*, something like 360 of those, and you just mentioned the 131st Field Artillery. Where were they captured?

Ingram: They got captured before. (laughs) When we finally got into Java, they said, one of the guards said, "You got Americans, Americans, beaucoup Americans

⁶ The men of the 2nd Battalion, 131st Field Artillery, 36 Infantry Division (Texas National Guard, U.S. Army, plus the survivors of the sunken ship, *USS Houston*, were captured by the Japanese on the island of Java in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) in March 1942. They were called the lost battalion because the fate of the men was unknown to the United States until September 1944. They were prisoners of war for 42 months, until the end of World War II. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_Battalion_\(Pacific,_World_War_II\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_Battalion_(Pacific,_World_War_II)))

down there.” They’re all POWs. They got captured in Java. When Java capitulated, the American field artillery was there. They were on summer maneuvers in San Francisco. When they bombed Pearl Harbor, there was a cop at the corner, and he just waved them trucks on down to the pier and loaded them on the ship down there and sent them over there. They was supposed to be reinforcements for the Philippines, but they never made it.

They got pulled off in Java. Then when we got on Java, we got in with these Americans, the field artillery. And what they did... I’ll tell you, about 100 guys they picked out. They picked out 100 guys. The Army and the Navy guys are all mixed up. So non-rated guys, all the non-rated personnel... I think the oldest one in there was about nineteen years old, and he was a corporal or something. That was the only rated man we had in that group of ours, besides the four officers.

DePue: Yeah, apparently these guys were part of the Texas National Guard, huh?

Ingram: Yeah, uh huh. That’s what they were. They were on summer maneuvers, on the way home. Another day and they’d been home. They didn’t get home for three and a half years. Imagine your family trying to find out... Probably half of the Army probably didn’t even know where them people were.

DePue: I want you to describe the camp in as much detail as you can. Tell me about the camp that you had to live in.

Ingram: They were open huts. I’ve got some pictures of them too, I think. The open hut.

DePue: So you had a roof but no walls.

Ingram: Huh?

DePue: Was there a roof but no walls?

Ingram: No, we had banana leaves—I call them banana leaves—big leaves up on the roof. The natives built them camps and all them places where we slept at. They were pretty well sealed for when it rained. Everybody got wet anyhow, because when it rained there, it rained like two or three months at a time and never stopped, the monsoon. The sides of these barracks was open. It wasn’t closed on the sides. When you was on the working party, your bag was up there where your head was. You got a hold of that shit, it was all full of water; all of your blanket, whatever you had, was full of water. They was just open huts.

DePue: Were there different huts for the guards?

Ingram: Yeah. They had all good, closed-in huts, way back at the end of the camp somewhere.

DePue: How about the barbed wire and enclosures and guard towers and things like that?

Ingram: They didn't need it. The Japs had everything from Japan down to Java. Where in the hell were you going to escape? We had no fences around them camps at all or the whole railroad. It was just wide-open spaces. And they told us, "Don't try to escape because you won't make it. There ain't no place to go." There's these open huts.

DePue: And you didn't have any reason to argue with them on that, huh?

Ingram: No, hell, no (laughs). It would be a waste of time putting fences up.

DePue: Did they even bother to have guards posted?

Ingram: Yeah. When you come into camp, there'd be a little road like that that that goes down where the Japanese officers lived at. It goes back there, and then the rest would just be patterns. It was all cleaned out around the huts so you could see that there was no fences, nothing.

DePue: How about a hospital? Did the camp have a hospital of some type?

Ingram: They had one bay... In one of them huts we were in would be the hospital. But the doctor had no... He had no medicine. They would bring a box, a cigar box out; it had a couple bottles of iodine in it or something like that and some old pills. Our doctor didn't even know what they were for. It had a couple little bottles of pills like that, a roll of bandages, a couple of Band-Aids or something. Here's your medical supplies for your gang, for one month, and that'd be it. We had nothing. They had a few little stocks of what the Army had had. But there wasn't anything that we needed. We needed quinine and Band-Aids and stuff like that.

The guy that got... When they got them tropical ulcers, you could see... Their legs, all the meat would be gone off the leg, and you could see through the two bones. If they got too bad, it got too infected, they'd just cut the damn thing off, just take a hack saw and just cut the guy's legs off and try to cover them up the best they could. They cleaned them with maggots. They'd take maggots and put on them sores, and just clean them, boy, just clean as a whistle, better than a doctor could do. They'd take all the big maggots and throw them away and leave the little ones go. That's how they cleaned their—

DePue: Were these allied doctors or were these Japanese doctors you had?

Ingram: The Army had... The artillery there, they had a couple of doctors in there, I think. One doctor, he was an old man. I think he was the oldest guy in the bunch. I can't even remember his name now, but he was an old, grey-haired man. He wasn't worth crap, you know.

DePue: I understand there was a Dutch doctor though that you felt pretty highly about.

Ingram: You better believe I did. He was my buddy (laughs).

DePue: What was his name? Do you remember?

Ingram: Doctor Hekking. In the back of that book, is there a page in there about him writing a letter? Did you see that in that book I give you?

DePue: Yeah, I did see that.

Ingram: I think it's on the back page of one of them books. He was also a healer, but he didn't let that [be] known to anybody. But he was a jim-dandy, boy, I tell you. He'd walk there in the woods, and we found sassafras trees out there. That was a big help. It was at least some kind of a medicine. He would get roots from different trees and leaves or something like that, mix it up.

I think we only lost... Out of that 100 guys that we had, maybe we only lost about three guys. One of them was a Mexican guy who died of syphilis. He had syphilis before, and the syphilis you never get rid of. When your system gets down, well then it comes out. That's what happened to him. But one kid who was there, who was a young Marine, he wouldn't eat rice. "I'm never going to eat no rice." He just died. You couldn't force him to eat it.

DePue: He just what now?

Ingram: This young Marine, he wasn't going to eat no rice, and that's all they had to eat. So he just starved to death, this young guy. That's one of the three that we lost.

DePue: In other words, he just essentially gave up on life.

Ingram: Yeah. He was a young guy too. I think he was about eighteen, nineteen, something like that.

DePue: Were the other guys trying to talk him into eating?

Ingram: Yeah. They had different things, tried to give him some sassafras tea or something. He wouldn't have nothing to do with it. He didn't want nothing to do with it.

DePue: How much did you weigh when you went into camp?

Ingram: I guess about ninety-five or 100 pounds, something like that.

DePue: Do you know how much you weighed when you came out?

Ingram: A lot less than that (laughs). Then I was skin and bones. We had no scales; we had no... Look at a guy and figure he lost twenty or thirty pounds anyhow.

DePue: What were some of the common diseases and ailments that the prisoners got?

Ingram: Them tropical ulcers. You'd get a little scratch on you from a bush, on your arm, and two days later that thing would be swelled up like a big balloon there. The pus would be running out of it and everything. The flies would be on you and you had no way to wrap it to keep it clean. And then the tropical ulcers and malaria and dysentery, bleeding dysentery.

When you get that dysentery, you had to go crap about twenty times, thirty times a day and seemed like you'd be up all night long, crapping. And, you know, just a little squirt, like that. And that's all it was, only it was pus and blood. When you got that there, if you was in good shape, you could shake it. But if you was like this other guy, they got down to where they were nothing but skin and bones. They got that dysentery, and they were gonners.

DePue: You mentioned that, in your group, the survival rate was pretty good. What was the doctor doing to help with people with malaria and dysentery?

Ingram: Some of them roots and stuff, he used for medicine.

DePue: This guy knew about that before he got there, didn't he? About some of the herbal cures.

Ingram: He was a pediatrician. He lived in Java for a long time. He had a wife and two kids. He had a kid, a son, I think, was twelve, and the daughter was eleven or something like that. John, the father, no the boy, he lives in Texas. I'll give you his name and address if you want; you can talk to him. He's interesting as hell to talk to, a lot of fun. And then his sister lives in Holland.



Fellow POWs Eddie Fung, Dr. Henri Hekking, Bill Ingram (in front) and Captain Archibald Fitzsimmons at a reunion in Houston, Texas sometime in the 1950s.

The doctor, when the war was over—this is getting out of line here—it took him almost a year to find his wife and two kids over there. He had no money. He asked somebody, and they'd say, "Well, the last time I seen her, they were loading on a ship for somewhere." He never could find them. Finally, he contacted one of the guys in Texas, and the guy sent him a bunch of money, so he helped him get his family all together. The son, he lives in

Texas, in some little town. But if you'd like to have his name and address, I'll put that in too. He's a guy who's got some good stories too.

DePue: How about other things like lice or rats? Any problems with them?

Ingram: Lice, everywhere... Them bamboo poles that we slept on was full of lice. At certain times, they'd come out of that bamboo; they eat you alive. You'd be up all night with them and have to work all day the next day. You had lice in your blanket. The only thing you could do it is lay it out on a bed and hope nobody steals it before you get back in that night.

DePue: I would imagine they got in your hair as well.

Ingram: Your whole body. Those lice that was in that bamboo, and you're sleeping on all night, they'd come up and get lunch (laughs), whenever they got ready.

DePue: Probably the only reason you got some sleep is you were just physically exhausted.

Ingram: That's about the size of it, yeah. When you come in off that working party, you wasn't wanting no hanky-panky or nothing like that. That's why we really... The British, they had them bubbly boys. They called them bubbly boys. They set up a little corner, where you could get a blow-job or something like that. But we didn't have none of that with the Americans, none of that sex stuff like they have in prisons.

DePue: What can you tell me about the operations that were being done? Was Doctor Hekking actually doing some of the amputations?

Ingram: I don't know of any he done, but I seen some of the work that he was doing. Otto Schwartz had one of them big full ulcers on his leg. He saved Otto's leg, and Otto finally got back in. He had both his legs, and all the skin had grown back onto the bones. He had to be real careful with that. But he got them guys pretty well. He'd go out there and get a little bark off a tree and put on a guy's sores. I think a lot of it was just mentally, that he did good things that made the kids think that they were getting some doctoring out of it. He was a comical guy, but also being a serious doctor.

DePue: I've got a really curious question for you. You might think me even kind of strange, but I'm wondering how you guys were able to shave, and I'm wondering how you handled toenails and fingernails, because you can seriously screw yourself up ripping your fingernails or your toenails off.

Ingram: You just bite them off, I guess. I never thought about that there. It never even dawned on me about something like that.

DePue: Were you able to shave?

Ingram: Yeah, they had shaves. One of the guys...because you wasn't supposed to have no weapon. That was a weapon. But them guys, some of them had beards; some of them didn't. (laughs) I didn't worry about that. I had a couple little fuzzies on my cheek area; that's all I had. (DePue laughs) I didn't have to worry about it.

DePue: The advantage of still being a young kid, huh?

Ingram: That was it. I didn't have to worry about shaving.

DePue: How about teeth? I'm sure there wasn't a dentist around.

Ingram: No. Our doctor, Doctor Hekking was our dentist. When them Japs they'd come down there, they'd bring some blue bottle of stuff to get injected to pull a tooth or fix a tooth. He would put it aside and fill that syringe full of water, (laughs) inject that Jap with that water. He [the Japanese patient] said, "It's no good." He'd already switched bottles with the guy, you know. He'd have some medicine there to kill a guy's aching tooth or something like that. He pulled it out without any medicine.

DePue: Yeah. Most people, when we think about those conditions, you get to the dental work and you really start to cringe.

Ingram: Yeah. I don't believe the teeth was even a question out there, because all of the Americans were young guys. They were right fresh off the boats of coming over there like... Where them British and them there... Some of them British we had was prisoners of war with the Germans. They just got back, and they sent them to Singapore. Turned around, they had two or three years in German prison camps and stuff like that. The Japs added a couple more years in prison camp.

DePue: Boy, by that time, you got to be thinking you're living life wrong somehow.

Ingram: Yeah, something went wrong here somewhere.

DePue: I've read some parts of this other interview you had. There was a story in there about a native of some type, sneaking up to you one day and offering you drugs.

Ingram: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I was working inside that one time. The guy that was working for the officers, he got sick. They picked me and put me in as an orderly for the officers. I went out there in that little room that was alongside the camp there. I was washing dishes, and this guy come out. He says, "Psst, psst, psst, psst. Hey, you want some medicine?" If I got caught talking to that guy out there, I'd got the hell beat out of me. I probably wouldn't be here talking to you now. That was really a no-no.

Anyway, he gave me a couple of these pills—he had them wrapped up—and I stuck them in my G-string that I had. I put them up in my crotch and hoped that that didn't pull that G-string down on me. If it would and they'd seen them pills, I would've got beat to death. You weren't supposed to be out there talking to them natives. Anyway, I took them in, and I showed Captain Fitzsimmons what he had. So he give a pill to Doctor Hekking. And doctor had this... I didn't know what kind of pills they were, but they were something Doctor Hekking needed. There was a name on the pill; it was MMB693. I never did find out what that was. I asked a couple of pharmacists what it was. It was written right on the pill, MMB693.

DePue: MMB.

Ingram: Yeah. 693. Myers Brothers, you know?

DePue: Was this native wanting something in return?

Ingram: He wanted some money, so I made another trip back out there. I told him I'd be out there the next day at a certain time. I got out there washing dishes and scrubbing some of the officers' clothes; that's what I did then. The guy come out of the bushes again, and he showed me he had two bottles of them. I took one bottle in, and they give me the money to take back out to him. He had another bottle. I had to make two trips on that. I was lucky; they never bothered me, the Japs.

DePue: Where did the officers get money?

Ingram: Well, they had their money. They had a payroll.

DePue: They were receiving pay?

Ingram: No, they had the money from the headquarters department.

DePue: Oh, when they were captured?

Ingram: Yeah. I think they give each officer a handful of money, just in case they could use it.

DePue: And the Japanese didn't take that from them?

Ingram: No. I don't know why. It's one of those things. Really, nobody knew about it because nobody said anything about it. I didn't even know the officers had any money, but I took a check and some money. [I] never did know how much the money was on there. It was wrapped up, rolled up in a paper. And I'd stick in down that G-string and hope the Japs didn't pull that G-string down.

They was always fucking around with you and make you take that G-string down. They could get a stick and come over and play with your peter. I worried they were going to do that, but they didn't. I made four trips, and they never... They just seen me come in and out with the dishes and clothes and stuff, but they never said anything about it.

They used them. I don't know if they ever used them pills or not, because the pills disappeared. They had to hide them pills because that wasn't something the Japs could... I never did hear anything. There was only three guys that knew about that; it was Doctor Hekking, Captain Fitzsimmons, myself and the orderly, a guy, Wright. He was a medical orderly. He picked up a medical bag on the beach when we got on there, and they made him a doctor (laughs); he was a PFC in the Army (both laugh).

DePue: He's probably thankful they did.

Ingram: Yeah, because he had that Red Cross bag, they made him a doctor (laughs). They put him in charge of the guys who were all officers and everything. That was a big joke then.

DePue: You've mentioned a lot here about the guards, that most of the real guards were the Koreans that had been conscripted. I wonder if you can explain if they were disciplining you. Let's say you're out working on the railroad. How would they discipline you there?

Ingram: You'd get the same treatment that the Japs give them if they didn't do it. They beat you. They'd beat you with whatever they had in their hand. If they had a rifle in their hand, they'd give you their rifle butt. If they had a pick-ax handle, you got the hell beat out of you with a pick-ax handle or a club off of a tree or something.

DePue: Where would they hit you?

Ingram: They'd just hit wherever they could get, any part of you. It didn't make any difference if they hit you in the head or hit you across the back.

DePue: Were there any particular stories you remember about the treatments the guards gave you?

Ingram: Just them ones when I was at that Serang jail there, that first jail where we went down there in Java. They beat the hell out of me out there with that. He had his sword, but he had the sword and his saber in the case. He bopped me a couple of times with that thing, knocked me down and knocked me out. He went on down, and he hit three or four more guys on down the way there. They didn't give a damn what they hit you with; it didn't hurt them any.

I got a movie that shows them shooting at these... We had three British guys that tried to escape. They went out, and the one guy died in the jungle,

and the other two come on back in. What they did, they took them up to base camp, and they used them for digging graves. They just come out there one day, and what they did, they come down the railroad. The reason I know about this, I was one of them picked because I was in camp then. They took about five guys from each camp, up and down the railroad, to put them down at that base camp. When they got them all there, we was all in a group by ourselves.

We figured they was picking us out to kill us. We didn't know what the hell was going on. They brought them guys over there digging graves. And they brought these three or four Japs down there, all this screaming and hollering and their rifles, doing the goose step, you know, and all that. They go to where them guys had been digging them graves, and they called them up out and stood them there and shot both of them, for trying to escape.

DePue: Just like that.

Ingram: If you were alongside of me and you and another guy decided you were going to escape...and a couple guys on the other side decided to escape, [when] you guys were gone, they had to find out where them guys was bunking at. They'd come down and beat hell out of the guys next to them because they should have told on them. Some of the guys got hell beat, bad beatings, about that. It'd be like the one Jap sergeant, and then he'd get the Koreans to do the dirty work.

DePue: Was getting beaten or even just being smacked once or twice to get your attention an almost everyday occurrence for you?

Ingram: Somebody got bopped every day, down the line. It makes you think. If you happen to go by one of them guards, and didn't salute him... We had to bow to them. The thing was, he had his back turned. If you didn't bow and he seen it, whatever he had in his hand, you got the barrel across the back of your back or on top of your head or somewhere. They would knock the living crap out of you. Once they started, they never stopped.

DePue: The kind of conditions you guys were working under: It's hot; you mentioned it was over 100 degrees a lot of times. It was very humid, I'm sure. People were suffering from all kinds of maladies, getting exhaustion or heat stroke. What happens if you just kind of collapse there on the spot?

Ingram: You probably got kicked a couple of times to see if you was still alive or you was unconscious. They'd kick you around. They'd come over and kick you to see if you were doing a phony thing. They'd just leave you lay there until it was time to go in. They'd carry them back in, but sometimes they'd beat them, even when they were laying there being exhausted.

DePue: What did it take to get admitted to the hospital then?

- Ingram: When one of them guys got done beating on you, you just about had to go to the hospital. They beat you until you couldn't hardly move. That's how they put you in the hospital. Like the guy with the big ulcers that went from their knee down to the ankle, an ulcer. And then the guys would get them on their back. Or [if] you just get a little scratch on there, about three days later you'd have a big hole there, where that thing just travelled that fast, them ulcers did.
- DePue: Was there any way of communicating with these guards? Did they understand English at all, or did you guys know some Korean or Japanese?
- Ingram: No. They tried to teach us Japanese when we first went down there in Batavia, at the bicycle camp. They found out that wasn't going to work because a guy stood up on a... He had a platform out there. He'd stand up there with a big megaphone, like you had at the football games back years ago, a long time ago, just a megaphone. He hollered out some Japanese words that we were supposed to pronounce, and (laughs) it wasn't working out. So they just finally quit it. They didn't need it anyhow.
- DePue: It wasn't working out because you guys had no intention of learning Japanese or because—
- Ingram: That was one of the things. My brother, when he got in there, he started learning Japanese right off. He was smart about stuff like that, and he was a base interpreter when he went out to Japan. But none of them was interested in speaking any English. You didn't have time. If you got caught talking to one of them guards and one of them Japs caught you, they'd beat the shit out of both of you. You ain't supposed to be talking to them guys like that, you know.
- DePue: Were there some prisoners who wanted to collaborate, so they could get a little more food or better treatment?
- Ingram: It wouldn't have done any good. The Japs...If you got a Korean to help you to speak languages or something like that, and he got caught, he got the hell beat out of him, just like the guy he was trying to teach the Japanese to. You had no choice.
- DePue: I think I know the answer to the next question, but the question is, did you see any acts of kindness or surprising things that the guards did, to show that they were, after all, human beings?
- Ingram: No. They, especially them Korean guys, if a guy dropped out, they'd just step over him or take a shoe and kick his head to see if he's still alive or something, and then he'd go about his business. If he had given sympathy down there, he would be right down alongside of you. Them Japs would get them.

DePue: Were there certain quotas that you had to meet for work every day? Did they keep track of that?

Ingram: Oh, yeah. They'd lay it out before we went home the night before. Like we was moving one square meter a dirt. They would get it all laid out with stakes out there, so many feet on that side of the bed and so many feet on this side of the bed, the railroad bed. Every once in a while, we'd get lucky. We'd have a couple of Korean guards that wasn't watching us. We'd move them stakes in about a foot. (laughs) It cut down on the amount of dirt we had to move.

DePue: Were you running into rock and things like that, as well?

Ingram: Yeah. Later on, right near the end there, they had a big mountain, solid rock. They went right through it. [It was] called Hellfire Pass. In fact, I think one of the movies I got has the story about the Hellfire Pass in it.

DePue: Did the Japanese have anything like dynamite to blast that rock?

Ingram: That's the only place on that railroad where they used any dynamite, and they used it sparingly. I never got into that. I went out there once, and I come back in. I didn't want to go back out there again. I just didn't go. I got away with it. It was a son of a bitch, that thing there. They worked twenty-four hours a day on that thing.

They used that dynamite. They didn't know what they were doing, and they killed a couple of people, killed a couple of Japanese with it because they was careless. That Hellfire Pass, I'm trying to think of what... That thing on the *Houston* there, you went there on the Internet. There should be something in there about the Hellfire Pass.

DePue: I did find out a little bit about that. I'm wondering, it sounds like your particular crew was moving dirt the whole time, so you're obviously working on the rail bed. Were there other crews that were doing other parts of the job?

Ingram: Oh, yeah, like them guys was building bridges. They had hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of guys building them bridges because they had them bridges going all up and down the thing. And when they got to where they needed big logs pulled out of the jungle, they'd go down and get big long trees, and they'd pull them out—they'd put POWs out. They'd tie ropes on them, tie all the ropes on there and drag that thing. The guys had to drag them damn things out of that jungle.

They had one elephant on there. I tell this story about the elephant. He would work eight hours, and he quit, and he wouldn't budge. They couldn't get him to move. They'd beat on him, and one guy even shot him; one of the Japs shot him. He still didn't do it. When he got his eight hours in, he just went over by a tree somewheres, stood there. He was finished (DePue laughs).

That Jap that shot that elephant that time, trying to get him to go to work, he thought he was a funny guy. Anyway, about a week or so later, this Jap walked down in front of that damn elephant, and the elephant got out there and reached under there with that trunk of his and held him up in the air and screamed. You could hear that goddamn Jap screaming for miles. He didn't forget which one of them Japs had shot him. And if they used any of their bullets up, they'd get hell beat out of them for that there too.

I got a funny story to tell you about this. We were coming back off of a job somewhere. I don't know where in the hell we were at. We come to this little creek bed. We was all dirty and sweaty, and we asked the Jap, "Hey, let's go, you know. Come on. Come on." We showed him about jumping in. "No, no, no, no." He got down; he felt the water, and he stood there a little bit. He said, "Okay, I go first. I go in the water first." He handed one guy his gun belt and the other guy his rifle (laughs), and he took all his clothes off and jumped in that creek bed there. It was real nice, pretty water. And he come out of that damn thing screaming bloody murder. He was just covered with them little black things. What in the hell are they?

DePue: Leeches?

Ingram: Yeah, leeches. He was covered with them. The guys, they had to chase him down and pull them things off of him. That would've been something if one of them Jap sergeants would have come out there and seen all them guys trying to pull them leeches off that guy, and he was screaming bloody murder. (laughs) Boy, he was patting all the guys. He was hugging and thanking them and all that. You know, we got in that pond, and not a damn leech got on us. There was just something in his body that they liked. (DePue laughs) We got out of there, and he couldn't believe it. He must have had 1,000 of them on him. He was really covered with them. It was so funny. It wouldn't have been funny if the Japs had seen us chasing him down and pulling them things off of him. He laid there screaming and hollering. Four or five guys was pulling them off of him.

DePue: You talked a little bit about the diet you had. Essentially it sounds like every once in a while, maybe once a day, you were getting' a little bowl of rice. Was there anything else that they gave you to eat occasionally?

Ingram: I know one time we got us a snake, a giant. Boy, that son of a bitch was a half a block long. He had a pig inside of him, down about four or five feet down from his head, in his stomach. But the other one, the boar that was caught the second time, he had... When the snake caught him, he caught him by the upper part of his body and got his head in there. When he squeezed down on that pig's head, the pig's horn there, on his nose, went up through that snake's head and killed him, killed the snake. And they give us... They had us cut the back end of the thing off. They took that pig in there. They took all the meat off of it and give us the bone. That's one time.

Another time, it was a couple years after we were in there, they drove some old bony cows down. I don't know how in the hell they even walked. They give us one of them, but they took all the meat off the bones and hide and everything and let it lay out there for a day or so, and then they'd give it to us. But boy, I tell you, you could have got \$100 for a cupful of that juice off them bones.

DePue: What was the animal again?

Ingram: A boar, a pig, a wild pig.

DePue: There are a lot of diseases that we get because we don't have a good diet. I'm thinking especially like scurvy or some other things. Were those problems as well?

Ingram: Yes, sir, they did. That's what caused some of the tropical ulcers too. I had some worms. After I come back, I went up to Great Lakes, and I come back down. There was a soldier sitting across the aisle from me on the train, from Chicago to Springfield. He said, "Hey, sailor, come over and have a drink with me." I said, "Man, I don't drink." I said, "I don't drink." He said, "Come on, come on." So, I went over there. He give me a drink, shot of that whiskey.

I got on the train there, and I got off the train in Springfield. I started getting a bellyache. Boy, I was cramping and dry heaving and all this. And so that was on a Friday, I think. All day Friday, all day Saturday and Sunday, I still had the dry heaves. And late Sunday afternoon, I started dry heaving again, and a whole worm come up in my mouth. I pulled him out. It looked like a big night crawler. You know what a night crawler is.

DePue: It wasn't a tapeworm?

Ingram: No, it was just like a night crawler. They got all kinds of worms that you get in your stomach. I said, "Damn, I feel good now." I started to feel good. I drank some ginger ale. My mom was there, and my intended wife was there. I started coughing again, and up come the second one. He didn't get all the way out. I had to reach in there and pull out this one. (laughs) I stretched him out. My little old wife—I just married her—she went and fainted (DePue laughs). I put them two worms in—Mom did—put them in the jar with some... I don't know what in the hell she used, anyway some kind of preservative for stuff like that.

When I went up to Great Lakes, I was four days over leave. I went up to the captain there, and he said, "Well, what's your excuse?" The POWs, they couldn't do anything with them. They didn't give a shit. If they'd say, "You can't go ashore tonight." They'd all stand there and say, "Well, I'm going; I'll see you guys," and walked right off and leave us.

This guy, he couldn't figure out where the hell them worms was coming from. I said, "I threw them up." The captain, he took the jar. He said, "Okay, you can go." There was two captains there, and they walked off. This little guy was waiting to be court marshaled, not court marshaled but be punished for being late or something. When he got to me, and I give him them worms, he just walked off and left the whole gang there.

DePue: Wow.

Ingram: That worm, I've seen it. I got a great big thick dictionary. One day, I was in there. I was just thumbing through big old book looking at words, and I seen them. They've got them worms in there. There are all kinds of different worms. You got them tapeworms that come out. When you pull on them, they just all break off like a... You put some of them in the trash can; the others stay inside of you. But that cured me of then. I never had anything like that again.

DePue: Were the officers given a little bit better food or better treatment?

Ingram: No. They come out the same way. The only thing they got... They had... Like when I was working, that little time I was working over there, you'd go up there, and they had a bucket, a little bucket, just big enough to feed the five officers. They'd fill that up full of rice, and they got to eat it down in there. They had one section of barracks there for the officers, and they split that up between the five of them.

DePue: You had to be starving the whole time you were there and probably were constantly thinking about food. What were the things that you had cravings for, that you were dreaming about eating?

Ingram: (laughs) Anything you could get your hands on. It didn't make any difference. Like my dad said, "As long as it made a turd." (laughs)

DePue: So nothing in particular, huh?

Ingram: No, it didn't matter what you ate. You been there three years; you ain't got nothing before and nothing after, so you just wait until tomorrow to see what happens tomorrow. Sometimes the guy didn't make it until tomorrow.

DePue: You said that you got up at first light. How long were you working before you came back to the camps at night?

Ingram: Whatever they had laid out for us.

DePue: You working twelve to fourteen, eighteen-hour days, something like that?

Ingram: Sometimes, yeah. If they give you 100 meters of dirt to move that day... If they had 100 guys in camp, they'd give you 100 meters of dirt to move. The

guys that went out... They'd take the cooks out and the doctors and that. What guys you had in sick bay, you take them all out of there. You might have thirty-five guys to move 100 meters of dirt. You didn't go in until that 100 meters of dirt was done.

DePue: What did you guys do to keep your spirits up, to keep optimistic about life? Or was that even possible?

Ingram: When you got off that railroad... I don't know if you seen that movie, *The Bridge Over the River Kwai*? You see the British come back, they're whistling and all that there. I tell everybody, I say, "When we come off that working party over there on that railroad," I said, "We couldn't even fart, let alone whistle." (laughs) That's about the way it was too. We didn't have no energy, drag your butt and forget it. When you got a chance to drop, as soon as... Whether you was hungry or not, you dropped down there. You was just so exhausted from working all day.

DePue: So it was just a matter of just trying to survive until the next day.

Ingram: The next day, yeah. You know you're going to get the **same** thing the next day.

DePue: But you talked about this one person who just essentially gave up.

Ingram: Um-hum, he was a young guy. I think he was eighteen or nineteen. He was one of them old guys (laughs), eighteen or nineteen, you know.

DePue: Did you guys try to buck up each other's spirits, though?

Ingram: Yeah, you had a couple of buddies. Everybody had a couple of buddies to spur you along, help you along.

DePue: Tell me about your buddies.

Ingram: The one I had there, Pinky King, he was a PFC in the field artillery there. We just met one day, and we just got to be buddies. We'd just hang out with each other whenever we had a chance, you know, just like your brother. I'm glad my brother wasn't there. I'm glad I wasn't with him.

DePue: Why?

Ingram: It would have been... You had enough to worry about you, yourself, let alone worry about your brother. A guy down here in Jacksonville, down south—he's dead now—I met him on the road. I followed him in behind a car. He had a POW tag on his car. I went up to the horn and passed him, and then I dropped back, and he passed me. We pulled over to that curb, pulled over off the road, and we got to be good buddies. Him and his buddy were both in the

Corregidor. They were them seaplane tenders, the scout planes; SOC they called them, scout and observation.

DePue: This is going to sound kind of bizarre, but when you got back and you were talking to your brother, were you guys comparing who had the worst experience and trying to compete with each other in that respect?

Ingram: No. We was about the same, only a different latitude. They was working in the coal mines. I guess they had to shovel so much coal there. He wouldn't talk much about it. If they would ask me, I'd say, "Hey, things was just hell over there. That's it."

DePue: Did you have a chaplain in camp with you?

Ingram: No. We didn't; the main body of the Americans there, they had a chaplain. I know some guy, he was... One of the guys was a holy roller, you know.⁷ He got up and done the praying and all that stuff, whenever he got a group around to do it.

DePue: You mentioned you weren't from a religious family growing up, but did you do your share of praying while you were in camp?

Ingram: I guess so. I went to a Catholic school for a couple of years. But my mom and dad... My dad, he was nothing, but my mom was Catholic. She put us in Catholic school. I don't know; I don't even remember. I guess I did, because everybody else was doing it.

DePue: But you don't remember any kind of religious services?

Ingram: No. They didn't have them, as far as I know. They didn't have time.

DePue: Were you able to keep track of the calendar at all?

Ingram: No.

DePue: So you wouldn't know when Fourth of July came and went?

Ingram: No. Some of the guys would say, "I think it's the Fourth of July," or something. You weren't allowed to have no pencil and paper. You couldn't write anything down. Some guys had notes, but if they ever got caught with them, they got the shit beat out of them. They'd beat the hell out of them.

DePue: So you weren't even able to even know when Thanksgiving and Christmas came around, did you?

⁷ Holy Roller is a term for some Protestant Christian churchgoers of the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions. The term describes dancing, shaking or other boisterous movements by church attendees who perceive themselves as being under the influence of the Holy Spirit. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Roller)

Ingram: They had a rough idea. I don't know how they kept track of that. That wasn't my department (laughs). I was looking out for myself, mostly.

DePue: Do you remember any of those days, though, when somebody said, "Hey, it's Christmas today?"

Ingram: They said it was Christmas Day. Yeah, I remember that, but the Catholic holidays, anything like that, I don't remember anything. Some of those guys was... It wasn't no interest to me because we had more to worry about than saying prayers, I guess. That's what I thought. I never did give it much thought.

DePue: So you were out working, whatever the day was.

Ingram: Yeah, whatever the day it was, I didn't give a damn.

DePue: Did they give you an occasional day off?

Ingram: No. I think we got one or two of them. I don't remember what it was for, but you're days off over there... See, that thing was run on a tight schedule. They had a schedule to finish that railroad. When we got down near the end, where we was running out of people, everything was "Speedo, speedo, speedo, speedo." It was, "Hurry up." That's all they knew was speedo. Less people were going out, and the guys who was out there was doing more work. You got speedo, and they got a little tougher with the clubs they beat you with and stuff like that, "Speedo!" If you stopped and wiped your brow off, the sweat, [and] he caught you doing it, he'd hit you with the damn butt of rifle or something, "Speedo!" They got pretty hard. It was a speedo job on the Hellfire Mountain that they moved.

DePue: That was towards the end.

Ingram: Yeah.

DePue: Were they moving the camp occasionally then, to keep up with the part of the railroad you were working on?

Ingram: Yeah, they kept moving down there towards the end of it.

DePue: Are you saying that they built from north to south?

Ingram: Yeah. They did all that. When we went out there, they'd show us where those pegs was out there. They'd say, "*Isogu. isogu.*" That's "Hurry up" in Japanese. You learn a few words. You had to know how to count, and you had to know your POW, you know. Mine was *Goy Yong Sun De-5430*.

DePue: *Goy Yong Sun De?*

- Ingram: Yeah, *ichi, ni, san, shi, go, shichi, hachi, hachi*. That's counting one to ten. You had to know that. And you had... Like if you wanted to go out there and take a crap, you say "*benjo*." That's toilet. Words like that you needed, you learned how to do them.
- DePue: Did you get any mail, or did you have a chance to send any mail out?
- Ingram: I got one, one little letter, like a postcard thing. I don't know whatever the hell happened to that one. But I got two or three of those ones that... I think one of them was my brother's.
- DePue: Did they allow you to send something out, though?
- Ingram: No. They did when **they** wanted to send it out, like a propaganda. They'd make sure you didn't sign it, couldn't sneak any words on the back or anything like that there.
- DePue: But it sounds like your parents at least knew you were in prison camp. Was that right?
- Ingram: About two and a half years for each one of us.
- DePue: In other words, not until what? Nineteen forty-four, maybe?
- Ingram: Somewhere around there. It's on them things there. I'll make a copy of them. You should've came down here. Dammit, we could've had a couple of beers. (laughs)
- DePue: So this was something you were able to finally send out to your parents.
- Ingram: Yeah. It was organized by the Japs. The top of it, it was about a five-inch square. And on the top of it, about half of it, three-quarters of that five-inch square, there was all typed stuff, what they wanted to put in there. "We are well. We are treated right. We have a canteen in our organization" and this, that, there... It was all bullshit. It was all a lie. And then there was a little line down at the bottom, where you could say five or six words. I'm going to have to switch my phone. Wait a minute.
- DePue: Do you need to take a break here?
- Ingram: Well, if you want. I got another phone here somewhere. Here it is.
- DePue: I'm going to pause for a second.
- (pause)

IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY

I am interned at The War Prisoners Camp at
Moulmein in Burma.

My health is (good, usual, poor)
I have not had any illness.


I (am) (have been) in hospital.

I am (not) working (for pay at 1.00 \$ per day).

My salary is _____ per month.

I am with friends WILLIAM INGRAM
MERRY CHRISTMAS
HAPPY NEW YEAR

From WILLIAM INGRAM



While Bill Ingram was a prisoner of war held by the Japanese in Burma, his captors allowed him to send this postcard to his parents in Springfield, Illinois.

Our present place, quarters, and work is unchanged since last card sent to you. The rains have finished, it is now beautiful weather. I am working healthily (~~well~~). We receive newspapers printed in English which reveal world events.

We have joyfully received a present of some milk, tea, margarine, sugar and cigarettes from the Japanese Authorities.


We are very anxious to hear from home, but some prisoners have received letters or cables.

Everyone is hopeful of a speedy end to the war and with faith in the future we look forward to a happy reunion soon.

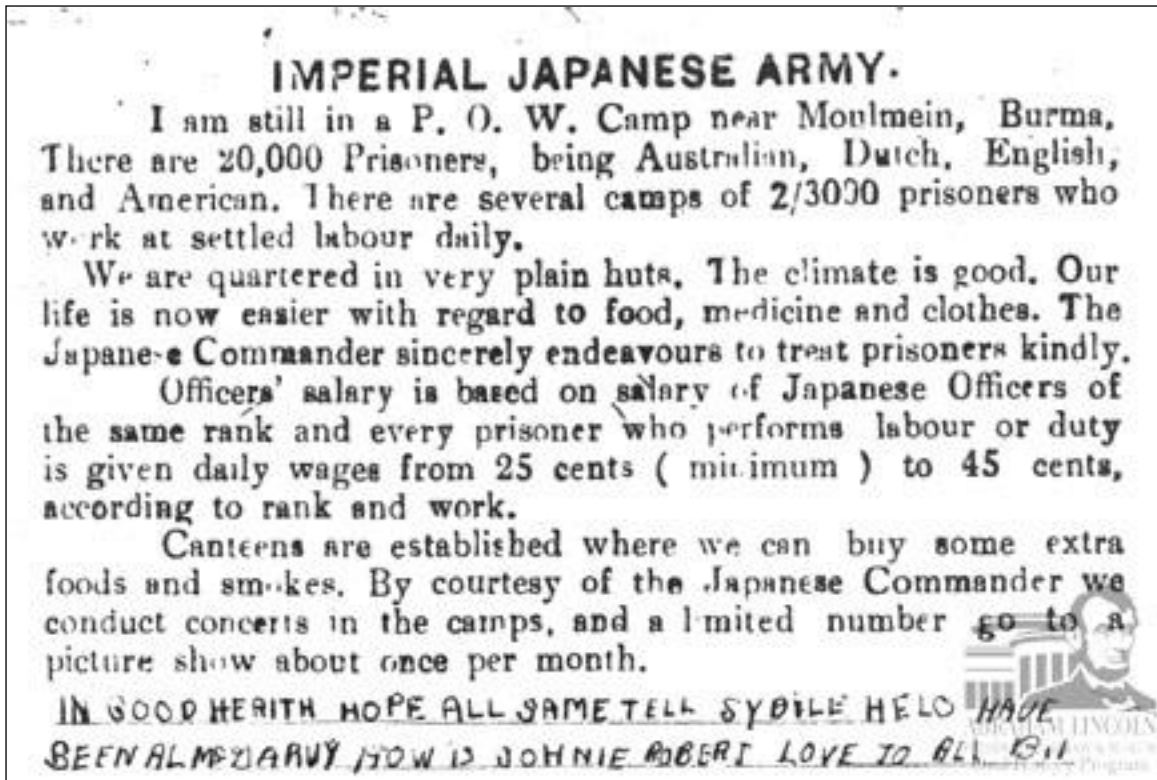
With best wishes for a cheerful Christmas.

I WISH I WAS HOME AND WAR WAS OVER. I AM ALL RIGHT
WELL GIVE MY LOVE ALL THE BEST TO YOU SOON.

From BILL INGRAM JR.



This is the second postcard that POW Bill Ingram was allowed to send to his parents in Springfield, Illinois by his Japanese captors. The typed comments provided by the Japanese were largely untrue.



This is the third and last postcard that POW Bill Ingram was allowed to send to his parents in Springfield, Illinois by his Japanese captors. Note the propagandistic language created by the Japanese.

- Ingram: Okay, now. You there?
- DePue: Yes.
- Ingram: We got a hell of a static noise on that now.
- DePue: It sounds okay on this side.
- Ingram: It sounds like you got your head in a bucket.
- DePue: Again, I'm on the speaker phone.
- Ingram: We can go ahead. I switched phones.
- DePue: Tell me, were you able to get any kind of news about how the war was going?
- Ingram: Absolutely nothing. Nobody had no kind of radio equipment. You couldn't get no information from nobody, even the natives out there. If you got caught talking to one of them natives or something like that, your ass was in mud, buddy. You're going to get the hell beat out of you.

- DePue: At the point you guys were captured, the war was going horribly for the Allies.
- Ingram: Yeah. Well, it was a long, long time, like way past how fast road building was there, where some 29s was coming over. We said, "Oh, oh, it's getting close." Then they went up and down that railroad, bombing all that shit we just got done building. And then they... There was the P—
- DePue: P-38s?
- Ingram: Yeah, a P-38 came over one time. I was up on the side of a hill up there, was moving some ammunition around one their big caves they had built. A P-38 come over there, strafing us. Well, the guys said, "If they got P-38s," he said, "boy there's something going on. This thing ain't going to be much longer." And it wasn't long after that they finally give up.
- DePue: Before that time, before you saw any bombers or P-38s or anything like that, were you guys thinking that the United States was losing this war and that it was looking bad for your future?
- Ingram: We didn't know because there was no way to get any information in and out. We're down in that jungle, and there wasn't nothing down there but bugs and wild animals. There was no information. Some of the guys was talking about there was an air base. They was pretty sure about it, but we had no way of knowing. You're out there hundreds and hundreds miles, thousands of miles from nowhere, in the middle of a jungle. There ain't no way to get any information, because the Japs didn't even have a way.
- DePue: What I'm curious about is... It would be awfully easy to give up hope, to think that we're going to lose this war and that this is the rest of your life. This is how you're going to live and you're going to die.
- Ingram: That's what the thought was, because we was pretty damn close to it, anyhow. Ninety percent of us wasn't worth a plugged nickel, you know. We'd all lost all our weight, got sores on our feet and all that crap like that. But we didn't give up. That was the thing.
- DePue: Were there any new prisoners arriving in the camps?
- Ingram: No. When we'd move over, we jumped over, say, like two or three prison camps. If you hollered, and that Jap heard you, well he'd come out and beat the hell out of you. It went our way or nothing, them guys use. Walk on that road and go right past that camp and better not say a damn word.
- DePue: When I was studying for this, I read that they actually finished the railroad in October of 1943. I'm curious what happened to you guys after that. Did you stay and continue to maintain that rail line or what?

Ingram: I don't know, forty-three. That railroad wasn't finished in forty-three. Where'd you read that at?

DePue: I got it off of the Internet, but it was footnoted. I'm not surprised that was your answer because everything you've said, you've spent your entire war working on that line.

Ingram: Yeah, that was it. There was no information coming or going either way. One time, the bombers came over and threw some candy in the camp. If you got a piece of that candy, you were lucky. And if you got it, you better give it to the Jap, because you get the shit beat out of you if he catch you eating it, stuff like that. There was no information at all coming in or going out. It was impossible.

DePue: Do you remember when the war ended?

Ingram: No. That's when I had the malaria. I don't remember anything about saying, "Hurray, the war is over," and all that stuff there. I don't remember anything about it like that there. I didn't realize it until I was over at Calcutta, India.

DePue: Why don't you walk us through, as best you can, step-by-step, what happened at the end of the war for you personally?

Ingram: Well, when I come out of it [unconsciousness] one time; we was down in Bangkok. They were getting us ready to load up on one of them hell ships and take us to Japan. The next thing I know is some Americans was coming in by C-47s. You know what they are. They loaded... I remember getting on the airplane, but I don't remember anything about the flight or nothing.

I got to Calcutta, and I come out of it again. I met a guy who was having a tug of war over my blanket. He wanted my blanket, and I said, "Get your own damn blanket. That's all I go to my name." And one of the guys comes over—I do remember this—"Let the man have that," he says—he didn't know I was out of it neither—"The man's going to give you some new clothes." I didn't know where I was at. I was out of it, you know. I don't know whatever happened to the damn blanket that I had.

I remember they gave us some money, and I bought a shirt. The guy said, "I'm going to get mine tailor made." I went with him. We went in the shop over there; we left our shirts there (laughs). The next thing I know, I was at a bar in New York City with some of the guys.

DePue: You don't remember anything in between that, huh?

Ingram: No, sir, I don't. I'd never been on one of them big airplanes before. I don't remember anything about the flight of that C-47 from Bangkok to—

DePue: Bill, it sounds like you were out of it for a lot of days.

Ingram: The reason I got to... These guys would be bullshitting, telling stories and one thing or another. "Hey, you know. You were there." And I says, "I don't know. I wasn't there." See that picture of me or that group of guys that come in on one of the big silver airplanes. They had us all down there and took a picture of us. If I can find that picture, I'll send you one.



This group of veterans flew into New York City in the fall of 1945. Bill, front row in dark sweater, still recovering from malaria and the ravages of his POW experiences, does not remember the flight.

I've got a black Navy sweater on, a high neck sweater, like they used to wear, and a white hat, a sailor's hat. Another guy in that picture... Some of them other guys had them hats, and I asked them where they got them. They said, "I don't know." They didn't even know where they got them. I would have kept that. It got disappeared too.

DePue: Do you know roughly the month that you got back to the United States?

Ingram: Nope. I got no idea.

DePue: Was the war over in Japan?

Ingram: Yeah, it must have been because they said that the C-47s...Not C-47...What the hell were they? The little twin-engine airplane, work horses.

DePue: The C-46s.

Ingram: The C-47, yeah. That's the first time I'd ever seen an airplane, I think. I was on a plane. I remember getting on a plane. But after that, it was nothing, until I was fighting with this guy over my blanket in Calcutta.

DePue: Did it feel kind of strange to be wearing clothes again?

Ingram: At that time we didn't have clothes. We got clothes when we got on there. They took everything we had. You could keep anything metal. They'd spray it with bug spray, and they deloused us and give us soap to wash with and all that stuff and took us out there and dried us all off and took us over to the place there where they have issue clothes. I don't know what the Army calls it.

DePue: Do you remember your first meal when you were in New York City?

Ingram: No. When I was at the bar with these guys, they were all drinking. There was about four or five of them living right around there in New York. One of them asked the other, "What are you going to do?" He says, "Well, I ain't going to the damn Navy." They didn't send us to a Navy hospital. They dropped us off at a civilian airport. Then guys, they took me. I went along with them guys.

DePue: How long were you in New York City?

Ingram: It wasn't very long because, when I got done, the bartender took his apron off and took me down and put me on a train to Springfield. I didn't even know how to get home.

DePue: It sounds like you didn't spend any time in the hospital in New York City.

Ingram: None of us did.

DePue: But you said you woke up in New York City, so you must have been in a hospital when that happened.

Ingram: No, it was at the airport. We went and left the airport and went right to a beer joint. After that beer joint, the guy put me on a train to Springfield. They didn't miss us, I'll tell you. I was home about, I guess, about two or three months before I decided I better go up to Great Lakes and see what was going on. Guy says, "Where'd you come from?" I said, "I just come in on an airplane here."

DePue: In other words, it sounds like the Navy kind of lost track of you for a while.

Ingram: Oh, they even lost track of the *Houston*. Them guys at Great Lakes there, they had so damn many POWs and veterans and that coming back at the Great Lakes that they were completely swamped. They had like three or four guys trying to check all these people coming in right after the war. It was right after the war, I guess.

DePue: I wonder if you could tell me how you got from New York City back to Illinois.

Ingram: The bartender took me to the train station and bought me a ticket, and I got on the train. I don't even remember the train ride. I remember getting on the train, but I don't even remember the train ride. I got down to Springfield, standing on the platform down there at the train station.

DePue: Right down here at Union Station, right across the street from us?

Ingram: Yep. I looked all around the station and kind of made me...it woke me up a little bit. I stood there a while, and I seen the taxis. I had sense enough to get in a taxi, and I told him where I wanted to go. I lived out there on Ninth, on Eighth Street, 814 North Eighth Street, when I went in the Navy. My folks had moved twice since then, so I didn't know where they lived then. But Mom said that I called her the day before, from Calcutta. I don't remember calling my mother.

Anyway, we went to that...Down there on Eighth Street, there's a grocery store on the corner; it used to be a grocery store there. When I went there, it was a bar. Mom and Dad, they lived upstairs at that bar thing there, that restaurant. It was a grocery store when they moved in, then changed into a bar, but the bar was

downstairs. I went in and asked the guys. I said, "Does any of you guys know where Willy Ingram lives at?" And one of the guys says, "Yeah. They used to live upstairs here. They live right across the street from the high school." That was Lanphier High.

I went over there, the cabby and me. I stopped him and was going up, knocked on doors. "You know where Willy Ingram lives at?" "No, I don't know." I kept going. I see a mailman down there. I said, "Hey, that guy will know." He said, "Yeah, about two or three houses down from there." I went up and knocked on the door.

My mom come, and she damn nearly fainted (laughs). I had to catch her because she was so shocked about me coming home (DePue laughs). It



Bill Ingram, with his mother and father during a visit to Springfield in 1946. "The happiest day of our lives," his mother wrote. "Our second son, Billy, had arrived home after three years and eight months in a Japanese Prison Camp."

was a shock to me to get home too. It took me a while to get straightened out. I was home about...I think it was two or three months or maybe even more. But I was out of it, coming in and out of it. I'm not going to worry about the Navy. Hell, they didn't worry about me.

DePue: When you say you were coming in and out of it... Now we talk all the time about post-traumatic stress disorder. Do you that was part of it or just all the other medical conditions you had going on?

Ingram: Probably a little bit of everything, because we were completely out of this world, you know. We had that little world of our own on that railroad, and that was all we knew, that railroad. Everything else was just out in the world. We didn't know anything about it.

DePue: Are you saying that it just didn't feel real when you were back home?

Ingram: Well, it was funny. I didn't know anybody. All the people I knew when I went in the Navy, hell, they were all in the service. After a couple or three days, after I got well, I was calling around. "No, he hasn't come back from overseas yet." "He got killed," or something like that, all the people that I knew.

DePue: Do you remember having any nightmares or problems sleeping or anything like that?

Ingram: For a while I did, and it just disappeared. I couldn't eat. Mom would make a big meal, and I'd just sit there and pick at it. My stomach was shrunk so damn little from that damn rice diet for three years that you couldn't eat. You couldn't hardly eat anything. I'm told a lot of guys are going down, getting drunk every night and all that. No, I didn't do it. I didn't hardly leave the house. I was afraid to. I didn't know if I was going to get caught in a prison camp again. It was crazy things like that you remember. It made no sense to worry about getting captured again.

DePue: I take it that your mom wasn't feeding you rice all the time. Was rice something you didn't care to eat anymore?

Ingram: I eat rice now, yeah. I got over that stuff and just forgot the whole damn works, until... I never talked about it, until three or four years ago, five years ago, I guess. I got in with these people wanting to do interviews and one thing or another. I said, "Well, hell, I know all that shit's in my head," But, you know, all that I do is I put it out with you, just like I'm put it out with you. What I knew, I put out there.

DePue: Why was it for so long that you avoided talking about this?

Ingram: I think it was at a party I had at my house. They had a house party for us. This was a year or so later. I don't know, a birthday party or something. I don't know what it was. I started talking to a couple of the other guys from the

Navy, guys who'd been overseas too. I got talking to them, and I didn't realize how much problem I was really in, at the time, how bad it was.

DePue: So you just stopped talking about it all together?

Ingram: Yeah, for a long time, maybe a year or so, I wouldn't even mention it.

DePue: How about to your wife when you got married? Did you talk to her about your experiences?

Ingram: Nah, she wasn't interested in it. I was too good looking and had money then. (both laugh)

DePue: I did want to ask you, when you got released... You were locked up in early 1942. You get released in 1945. Did you get some back pay?

Ingram: Yeah, I got \$3,000. I got paid for PFC [private first class].

DePue: You got promoted then too.

Ingram: Yeah, well, that was later on. That was a year or so later. I got, I think it was \$3,000 for that three years, about \$1,000 a year.

DePue: That doesn't sound like much now, but I bet \$3,000 to you was like a fortune, huh?

Ingram: It lasted three months (both laugh). I blew it all in one big wad.

DePue: What did you spend it on?

Ingram: I guess, just running around with a bunch of guys and drinking with it. I got to start drinking. All them guys... You go down to a bar down there, "Hey, come down here and have a drink." Yeah. I got over that. I went Coke. I thought it was stupid to get all that money and blow it in two or three months, just on booze.

DePue: I know your brother was in very similar circumstances. Did he get released and arrive home as well?

Ingram: Who, my brother?

DePue: Yeah.

Ingram: He was just like me. They never got no word from him at all. They got these two little letters, one from me and one from my brother, when we were about to depart. They got to our house.

DePue: Did he show up while you were at home?

- Ingram: My brother got home a month after I did. We was both around the house all the time, but we never talked about the prison camp or nothing.
- DePue: You didn't even talk to each other that much about your experiences?
- Ingram: No, very little. Every time you start talking, everybody start asking all kinds of silly questions. I'd just get up and leave, didn't want to remind myself of it. Everybody has a different way of looking at it.
- DePue: Gosh, I've been spending the last two days asking you all kinds of silly questions.
- Ingram: (laughs) Yeah, that's is the way it is, you know. It don't bother me now. Hell, I go through this stuff, and I don't even think about it five minutes from now.
- DePue: What were your plans at that time? What did you think you wanted to do for your future?
- Ingram: I had no idea. I went to work with my brother-in-law. He was an iron worker, a structural iron worker. I went down to the union hall with him one night when they had a meeting, and he had it all set up. The meeting was over, and the guy at the head of the big table, he said, "Has anybody got anything to say?" And my brother-in-law said, "Hey, this punk over here, I brought in here, he thinks he's tough." He said, "He thinks he could be an ironworker, just because he spent three years in a prison camp over there in Burma, building a railroad." The guy says, "How many of you guys want to vote him in?" They all stuck up their hand. I got a journeyman's card (laughs).
- I went out on the damn jobs over there, on ironwork and all this, by myself. When I went out on a job by myself, I got paid for foreman's pay, along with being a journeyman iron worker. It was pretty good when I was hanging around Springfield there and working on them little jobs. When I got working them big jobs now, like natural gas pipelines in Pittsburg, I think, Pitts, Pitts...some little town that started with P.
- DePue: Pittsfield?
- Ingram: Yeah, Pittsfield, yeah. They put in a natural gas pump plant down there. That was a big job. I worked on that one. I was home about two years before the Navy even bothered to call me back.
- DePue: Before we get there, I have a couple more questions. Did you have any lasting medical problems after the war because of your experiences?
- Ingram: Nerves is all. I get jumpy every once in a while.
- DePue: That's about It, huh?

Ingram: Yeah. I didn't have no bad sickness when I was in prison. I did that, that malaria but I never got... I had dysentery once, and I had yellow jaundice. How I lived out of that, I don't know. That dysentery knocks the hell out of you. You had to go in and crap about every five... By the time you get down to the crapper down there, it's time to go back. And then, by the time you got back up to the barracks, it would be time to go back down again, all day long like that. That really takes the sap out of you. I lived out of that, how I don't know.

DePue: Was that right about the time you got released from prison?

Ingram: Yeah, uh-huh, just a short time before.

DePue: I know, Bill, that you never completed school. Did you want to go back to school?

Ingram: I figured I was too old then. Well, when I went back up in the Navy, I knew what a chief was. I went back up to the Navy and they said, "All you guys made chief." And I go, "Holy shit, what do chiefs do?" (laughs) I took it, and when I went over to consignments up there, they had a guy ask me, "Where would you like to go?" I said, "Send me somewhere where there's no big gang of Navy guys as officers."

He sent me to Akron, Ohio, to contract termination with... Goodyear had closing contracts with the government. My wife was pregnant, and there was only four or five of us over there. The only thing I had to do, every morning—they had five cars—every morning I'd come in there; I'd take my car, park it, then get the skipper's car, gas it up, bring it back, then gas all four of them cars up, and then go in and get the mail, take it to the post office, bring the other mail back from the post office and then go home (laughs). That's it. I was on subsident quarters too. That was a pretty cushy job.

DePue: How long as it before you actually went back to the Navy?

Ingram: That was in the Navy then.

DePue: I mean, you got released in 1945 and then, what? You signed up again a couple of years later or was it just—

Ingram: I think I had about four and a half years in the Navy before I even knew what the hell was going on. That, with three and a half years in prison camp, half a year getting out there and another four years there; that was four years in the Navy that I had. When they promoted me to chief, I got two jobs, where there was no big hustle and bustle about it. After that... The people try to help you out, you know. They knew the shit that we went through, and there wasn't

nobody... There was a couple of smartasses, “Hey, goddamn Tojo chief.”⁸ They called me Tojo chief and Boy Scout chief and all that.

But after I got a little sea duty and one thing and another, then I was getting a little smarter. I didn’t take any crap off of them guys. I made it. I was a harbor pilot and a tug captain, and I was on a small ship that had a small group of people. I just worked my way in, until I knew what the hell I was doing. It took about six, seven years before I was even getting anywheres near what I was supposed to be doing. But it worked.

DePue: There’s one thing I’m still confused about. You came back in 1945. Did you stay in the civilian world for a couple of years before you went back into the Navy or did you go back right away?

Ingram: We stayed at home because they had so damn many people they was trying to process, they just sent us all home. They said, “Give us a call back or come up.” I go back up there to get me some money. I go up to Great Lakes from Springfield on a train and then come back. The guy says, “Is that phone number still the same? Okay, go ahead; I’ll call you.” That went on for almost a year like that before they even got all the people processed, because we had no records.

DePue: What you’re saying is that it just took the Navy that long to sort things out.

Ingram: Yeah, to get all them people back in where they belonged. There’s hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of us after the war, just going back up there to get out of the Navy, draftees.

DePue: You were back in the Navy by the time the Korean War happened. Did you get shipped over to the Korean theater?

Ingram: No, I stayed on the East Coast. I went and found out where the guy was that does the assignment, another chief, chief yeoman. I got to be pretty good buddies with him. The first place I went, I got on a small ship. I come back in, and he asked me, he said, “How would like to go up to Newfoundland?” Hell, I didn’t know where Newfoundland was. I says, “How many people they got up there?” (both laugh) “You’ll just be in a small group. You’ll be in a service craft.” I didn’t know what a service craft was, but I found out it was the tugboats. We had two tugboats, a little oiler that they used around the yard there for taking oil off... They had a ship repair thing there. A ship come in and go into dry dock. They took all that oil and stuff on that little tanker we had there, and we’d accumulate it. When we got ready to go out, we’d go in one of them tugboats. I snapped into that real easy; I did real good on that.

⁸ Tōjō Hideki, was a soldier and statesman who was prime minister of Japan (1941–44) during most of the Pacific theatre portion of World War II. He was subsequently tried and executed for war crimes. (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tojo-Hideki>)

DePue: When did you finally retire from the Navy?

Ingram: In sixty-one. I went in forty-one and got out in sixty-one.

DePue: So, even while the Navy had kind of lost track of you, you're still in the Navy?

Ingram: Yeah. They were just overwhelmed with people coming back. Then they were, I guess, in the 9th Naval District. In the Navy, Great Lakes is in the Ninth Naval District; all the central states are right there, in the 9th Naval District. Boston would be the 1st Naval District, and they had all different ones, like California; I don't know what theirs is. But they had all them people to process, and they just couldn't do it, as fast as they was coming in.

DePue: I wonder, Bill, if you can just give us a minute or two and explain what you've been doing since 1961.

Ingram: Let's see, 1961, I got out of the Navy. I come to Jacksonville because they had three naval bases here. I had a wife with a baby boy; we had a little baby boy. There's three hospitals here and nice warm weather. I left Springfield up there in sixty-one. The snow was about four-foot-deep, and the only thing that was running was the city busses. We lived out there on North Grand Avenue and Converse Avenue. That bus come down there. He had that big truck down there. You couldn't even get out of your driveway with that damn, big old truck. So I called St. Louis at the air base down there, and I asked the guy, "You got any planes going south?" He said, "How far south?" I said, "Right just past that snow line," I said, "where them states are, anywhere they ain't got snow."

He said, "We're going to South America. You want to go?" I said, "No, but can you put me off in Jacksonville?" He said, "No, we just fly right over that, but [we] might stop there on the way back." I said, "Alright." They let me off at Atlanta, and I rode a bus from Atlanta to Jacksonville. That's where I started.

There was a warrant officer that I was on a tanker with, and he was working for some guys down there at a filling station. He said, "Let's buy this filling station off these guys. They're making plenty of money," he said, "but their family's stealing it all off of them. Everybody in the family is coming there, gassed up their cars for free." Him and I bought that filling station. We was in it about three years. Third year, he come up there and says, "I'm getting out of this." We was only taking seventy dollars a week each home. We busted our asses trying to make a living at it. I kept it for about a year by myself. It was just too much. You had to be there every minute of the day. If you wasn't, the guys you had hired would steal it from you. Your gas pump was never equal with the cash.

I went to Firestone, and I went to front-end school in... Where in the hell was it? In Ohio, I think. Yeah, Canton, Ohio. I went to a front-end and brake school up there. That was all I worked on for seventeen years. I went to work for Firestone, and then I went to work for Chrysler. All I did was brakes and front-end alignment. I made some pretty good money at that.

DePue: I'd like to kind of finish off; I've got some closing questions. But before that, I wanted just to quote some statistics that I have found here. You can verify if they sound pretty accurate to you. These are the casualties, the deaths, especially of those who were working on the railroad. Apparently there were about 688 Americans who were on that railroad, and 388 and sixty-eight of those were from the *USS Houston*. Pretty much the rest of them were from this 131st Field Artillery Battalion. Of those 688, 356 Americans died. Does that sound about accurate?

Ingram: Well, I know, I think we lost three guys with that 100 I was with, because we had that doctor with us.

DePue: But otherwise, that's close to 45, 50 percent of the Americans that were there.

Ingram: Yeah, well, I don't know how many people died. They had another camp over there. We had no contact with them. Everything we come back with was... The Army and the Navy was all mixed up. We had no idea who was what. You might have been in the Army. Brothers together like that, you know.

DePue: This Doctor Hekking must have made a huge difference where you were at.

Ingram: Yeah, he was a real go-getter, buddy. I'll tell you. He had a personality that wouldn't quit. He was funny, but... Like the guys come in there, they said... One of the guys from New Jersey went to sick bay, and the doctor says, "What's the matter with you?" He said, "Doctor, I've got a bum ticker." And the doctor says, "My goodness—in that Dutch accent of his—I've been a doctor for forty-five years, and I've never had anybody, a patient, with a bad ticker." (both laugh) He didn't know what it was, you know. We had more fun about that.

DePue: I'm just going down the rest of the casualties here. Again, this is the official reports; I think the Australians collected these after the war: 6,318 British died; 2,815 Australians; 2,490 Dutch; and then—nobody knows for sure—but of the over 200,000 some Asian natives—I think a lot of those from Java and other places—they estimate something like 90,000 of them died, while they were working on that railroad.

Ingram: That's right; that sounds right. We knew how many people we had in our little camp there, but we didn't know how many... And then when we come back, we weren't anywheres near them people. I think we met up with them in

Calcutta. Most all them guys was from out there from Texas and out west there because they were in that 131st Field Artillery.

DePue: Those are staggering numbers. It's hard for me to even begin to comprehend what you guys went through. It's amazing that anybody survived, I think.

Ingram: That's right, a lot of them didn't. The British, they lost a whole bunch. They was burying... In that British camp, it was like four or five guys a day, all in one grave. How they ever sorted that out, out there in that jungle, I don't know, because after you put a stick in a ground out there, you come back a week later, the damn bugs would done eat it up or something. The jungle just went over them graves. I don't know how in the hell they counted.

DePue: Did you join some veterans groups? After the war, did you try to keep up with your buddies that you knew in the prison camp?

Ingram: Yeah, we had Otto Schwartz, who was the guy with the big ulcer on his leg, I was telling you about. Him and his wife and two kids, they organized the *Houston* organization. It's still in effect today. He died, and his wife is still alive, and both of his sons is alive. I don't think they had any daughters. I think they had two sons. They're both still alive.

But the field artillery outfit... Like I said, we were so damn mixed up, we didn't know who was who. It was crazy. But I kept in track with Otto Schwartz. He picked the guys up, one at a time. I knew a couple of more guys that was living in Jacksonville that was POWs. I turned in three or four names into Otto, and each one of them guys turned in two or three numbers. That's how he finally got all the guys on the *Houston*, where they was at, where they died and the numbers there.

That's the kind of people that had all these statistics, you know. But his files are all about... He talks to that gal that's in charge of the *Houston* down there, that's in charge of our organization, because it's just about petered out. There's only... Our reunion last year, there was myself and another guy. The year before that, there was just the two of us, and there was only two of us there last year. He [the other survivor] fell



A contemporary photo of Chief Petty Officer Bill Ingram, still able to wear his dress uniform some fifty years after his retirement.

down this year, so I'll bet—It comes up in March—I'll probably be the only representative of the *Houston* left, who can make it to the thing.

DePue: That's got to be kind of sobering, isn't it?

Ingram: Yeah. Our organization's going to go to pot. They have no members. There's only, I think, eight or nine. A couple of guys has died in the last couple of months. One of them was ninety-three, I think. I don't know what the other one was.

DePue: How old are you now?

Ingram: I just turned ninety the other day, June the seventeenth.

DePue: Happy birthday to you.

Ingram: Yeah. I was going to invite you down to the birthday party. You should have come. (DePue laughs) I had a mob in my house here. Goddamn I had a mess here.

DePue: You sound like you're a very lively ninety-year-old.

Ingram: Yeah. I'm in good shape, yeah.

DePue: Bill, do you regret having signed up for the Navy, back in the spring of 1941?

Ingram: No. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. I was sitting on top of the world, and I was just going to the Navy. I wouldn't have a dime if I didn't have that Navy retirement money coming in.

DePue: You paid a dear price for it for a while, though.

Ingram: They didn't get back to the records. They go back and try to find out what—all these people records, one thing or another—they was so goddamn confused, and so was we. But I got that \$3,000. I thought that was a bunch of money, boy, back in 1941.

DePue: Apparently you figured out what to do with it.

Ingram: Yeah, I blew it (both laugh), partying.

DePue: Looking back at all of this, how do you think that experience in the prisoner of war camp and on the *USS Houston*, how did that change you?

Ingram: It give me a life to look forward to, something I hadn't. I had nothing when I went in the Navy. I had no school housing and didn't know any trade or nothing like that there, so I was just one of the tag-alongs.

But when I got that chiefs thing, well, then I started getting responsibilities, and I had a girl. I didn't have a good education. I got to run that tugboat, and I was one of the best tugboat operators they ever had up there, Newfoundland. I went back up the second time. The second time I went back up there, I was in charge of the tugs and of the whole outfit down there. I was the chief in charge of that. I was also a harbor pilot, and that's a pretty damn tricky job there too. So I made it.

DePue: Are you one of those who thinks that military service would be a good thing for a lot of young men?

Ingram: I think they should put every one of them guys, before they go into high school, maybe a little later, but put everybody in some kind of a service. I tell you, it gets them some discipline. And I think they should have a CCC camp. You ever heard of that?

DePue: Yep. Civilian Conservation Corps.

Ingram: Yeah. Well, that was a good thing for young guys, because they got in there; they had a little money coming in; they wasn't out stealing and shooting each other, like they are today. Down here in Jacksonville, we lose one or two people every day here in Jacksonville right now.

DePue: Gang violence you talking about?

Ingram: Gang violence. And then them blacks are out there saying, "Why don't the government help us? Why don't the government help us?" You know, they've killed a lot of people. There was a guy here last year, he pulled into a filling station. The jigs had a car there. They had the volume turned up, clean to the top of it. The guy was trying to talk to his wife, and he yelled, "How about cutting that thing down?" They give him some shit, and he shot one of them. Now his ass is going up the river for the rest of his life. He's put it off now. You got to put it off now. That other guy that shot that guy down there, and the guy jumped him and all that crap that went on down there for what, about a year? The guy, I think... They never did settle that thing.

DePue: That one made the national news. I remember that one. I wonder, Bill, if you have any words of wisdom you'd like to pass on, as we finish this off.

Ingram: (laughs) I don't know what it is. I couldn't think of anything. I ain't got much wisdom to pass on. (DePue laughs) I've had a lot of bad experiences, but I'm a happy-go-lucky guy. I guess that's why I made it through that damn prison camp. Nothing bothers me.

DePue: It sounds like you just lived every day, and you took it as it came, and you made the best of it.

Ingram: That's the only thing you could do. You couldn't make friends with the Japs or try to find out anything. You weren't allowed to do that, actually. The few guys that you was with there, you had two or three buddies. You had groups of guys, you know. Different ages and things like that got together. But I don't know what it would be.

DePue: Any final words for us?

Ingram: (laughs) No, I don't think so.

DePue: I want to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity. I know you've been interviewed a couple times before, but this is going to be an important addition to our collection. Once we get it up, we'll get you a copy. Then I'll let you get to the word out, so people will know where to hear your story.

Ingram: I was the guest of honor at the... You ever hear of the Florida-Georgia football game?

DePue: Yeah.

Ingram: We got that stadium down here where they play it every year, and I was the guest veteran down there. I was supposed to be out there in the middle. You see the guys in the middle there before the game starts; they introduce one veteran. Well, I got that done here last year. But they... I got shit around on it because another group was putting two guys through the hall of fame, two football players, one from Georgia, one from Jacksonville's people here. They got the main stand on it before the football game.

They had me down at the end down there, and they put a camera on me and took some pictures, but I never got any pictures because I don't believe the guy had any film in his camera when he took them of me. I sat out there in that field, 85,000 people; they introduced me to 85,000 people. The goosebumps were so big on my arm I couldn't hardly lift it (laughs). That was a thrill.

DePue: Yeah, you deserve that, Bill. You guys deserve all the accolades you get. It's amazing to hear these stories. I'm going to go ahead and stop the interview, then you and I can talk about a couple of admin things at the end here.

Ingram: Yeah.

(end of transcript #2)