1982

Sam Sortland of Ambrose: Japan, World War II

Sam Sortland

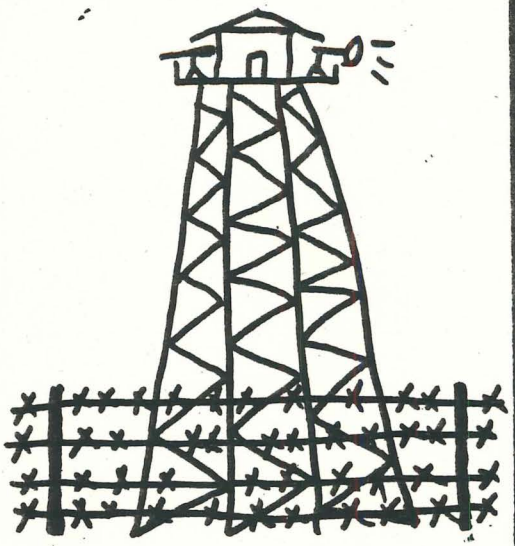
PRISONER OF WAR

A TRUE STORY

BY: SAM SORTLAND

AMBROSE, N. DAK.

AMERICAN PRISONER IN
PHILIPPINE PRISON CAMPS
WORLD WAR II 1941-1945



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EX-PRISONER OF WAR QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name: Sam Sortland Sam Sortland.

Current Address: Rt. # 1 Box 218, Ambrose, N. Dak. 58833.
RT # 1 Box 218
Ambrose. ND 58833

Address at time you went into service: Same as above.
Same as above

Birthday: April 19 1914 April 19, 1914.

2. Family: (spouse and children) Alice J Sortland.
wife Alice.
3 Sons Richard A. James C. Gary Lee.
3 sons Ricard A. James C. Gary Lee.

3. Work and educational experience prior to going into service?
I worked on farms + Ranches

4. Dates and place of entry into service?
Ft Snelling. Minn. May 8. 1941

5. Summary of events from time of entry into service and until just prior to capture or entering status as a POW?
I was sent to Ft Leonard Wood. Mo. Engineering Co. after Brst Camp Westover Field Mass. to a aviation. Engineering Co - 803 rd. Engineers Bt. (avn) About Oct 1. 1941 we were shipped to Calif. for embarking for Philippines Clark Field to build airfields.

6. Unit, Country, time, area, weather, etc., at time event occurred which resulted in POW status?
Unit - 803rd eng Bt. Co. A,
time - May 5th. 1942
Country - Corrigador. P. I
area Bataan + Corrigador
weather was very warm.

7. Describe military or other events that resulted in your POW status?

We were at Clark Field P.I. Working on that airfield and we were also building a field at Camp O'Donnell. We were bombed and strafed at about Noon on Dec 8. 1941. which is Dec 7 in U.S. a few hours after Pear Harbor later we built airfield at Cabcaben Bataan and built bridge and roads We lost over half of our outfit at agaloma Point. we had to drive out a Co. of Japs who had landed behind our lines from the Sea. In Feb. we went to Corregidor to work on Kindley field. at which time we were captured - May 5 1942

8. Following your capture, describe what happened. How many men were involved? Where did you go? How did you go? What type of personnel (military or civilian) took control of you?

at about noon we were ordered to destroy our arms we went to Malinta tunnel and waited for the Japs. there were a few thousand men. We were stripped to Manila Bilbid prison. they marched us through Manila to humiliate us to the Filipino people. It was military who took charge after a few days we were sent to Cabanatuan prison camp in small box cars. It was a rough trip and many of the weak died or were killed by the Japs

9. Were you able to hide or escape? If so, tell what happened. Where did you hide? Food? Clothing? Water? Weather? Sleep? etc.

No. there wasn't any place on Corregidor to hide or escape.

10. How did your escape end? Returned to U.S. control? Discovered by enemy?

did not escape If anyone escaped they would kill our whole death squad

11. Could you describe in sequence the various places you were interrogated and the methods of questioning the enemy used?

I was only a private so I wasn't questioned very much they only asked if I was married or if I had any Children Just Curious I guess

12. Did you have a weapon on yourself when you were captured? Did it effect your treatment?

no. we were orderd to destroy our Weapons.

13. Were you at any time considered a civilian or an enemy spy or a wrong nationality? If so, how did this effect your treatment?

no.

14. When captured or escaping, what clothing or equipment were you wearing? What changes did the enemy make in your clothing?

I had my one set of fatigue clothes which we wore when we were fighting. they didnt give us any clothes or shoes. they took some of our shoes.

15. What was your first food you received after your capture and what was your food from that date on? xxxxxxxx

I didnt recieve any food for abouta month after captue. We had to scrounge for our own. I sneaked out at night to gun implacement where I knew was some G.I K ration took them back to canp. A lot of the boys didnt grt any food for quite a while. After we were in prisn camp we only got a little rice, about 2 cupfulls a day, which menet we were hungry all the time and loseing wheigh fast.

If we had been caught out of camp we would have been shoot .

16. Did your nationality, religion, or race have a bearing on your treatment from the enemy?

I don;t think so

17. What was your impression of your captors? Were they arrogant, considerate, professional, troubled, confused, anxious, etc.?

They were a bunch of slobs, ignorant, arrogant, mean. they would beat a prisoner for no reason at all. We had to bowto the lowest private, if we did,nt we were beaten, kicked spit on a humiliated in front of ever one.

18. Were you alone or with others? How many? Same unit? Other units? Other services? Other nationalities, etc.?

We were togeather in a large canp . We lived in ~~Jap~~ Japanese Army barracks built of bambo an grass . I guess we were crowed into these barracks about 150 or more. I was very crowed, we slept on bambo slats some without blamkets. It was overrun wih rats and mice, bed bugs and lice was very bad.I don,t know how many were in camp. somewhere be tine 15,000and 20,000

19. At time of your capture, did you have higher or lower ranking persons with you? Did the difference in rank effect you?

The ranks were all mixed togeather, . They did have the highter ranks as commanders of the barracks.

20. Following your capture, how did you feel about your family at home, and at what point or time did you feel they probably knew about your POW status?

At first I guess we were pretty much in shook after the heavy fighting on Corregador. but after a few days I began to think more about my family. I was not married at the time. I don,t think my family knew about me or if I was alive until the middle of 1944.

21. When did you receive your first letter, package or information that your family knew of your capture?

Sometime in 1944 I believe.

22. In regards to your interrogation or questioning--was this conducted formally at a special camp or location? Did you have special or skilled interrogators? What did they want to know? How long were you there? Then where did you go?

I was a ~~Private~~ Private so I was,nt intrrogated at all.

23. How did you feel the war was going when you were captured?

Not very good because they didn,t send us any help.

24. Did you think you would eventually get home?

I didn't believe we would ever make it.home. The men were dieing like flies , we were all starving to death, we didn't have any medacine and most of us were sic

25. Did you have an opportunity to observe the enemy in combat, training, camp, or moving from one place to another?

No. only when we were fighting on coregador and you couldn;t see much from a fox hole.

26. Did you suffer any injury at the time of your capture? What was done about your injury or illness following your capture?

No.

27. At your permanent camp or camps, would you describe your conditions. Food? Living area? Beds? Food ration? Health? Water? Weather? Number of men? Guards? Size and location of camps? Organization in camp by enemy and by U.S. forces?

They were lousy, very little food just a little rice and at times a few greens which we called wistle weed because they gave us the trots.No beds slept on bambo slts, rats, bedbugs, lice. Health was very poor, 50, 60, to 70 died each day.at first water was scarce but later on we got a little more. Weather was usually hot until the typhoon season it became a little cool.
About 15,000 or 20,000 men in campGuards were usuly young kids except the Japs in charge were usually higher rank.They were a mean bunch.U.S . officer had to see that all the rules the Japs made were followed by the prisinors but the Japs run the camp with an iorn hand.

At first my job and many other priseners was to carry the dead out to the grave yard. I often wanderd when I looked at the dead man on the litter when I would be carried out on that litter.I felt very sick and hungary all the time.

28. While in your permanent camp, did you know what was going on in the war? What did guards say about the ending of the war?

We didn,t hear anything but rumors that didn,t come true. The Japs told us that the Americans were losing the war that our navy had been sunk and that we would never see our homes again. and if the Americans did try to rescue us we would all be killed.We didn,t know what was going on util about the last few weeks when some navy and army radio men managed to sneak in enough material to build a small radio.

29. If you worked in camp or lived in work camps, please describe your daily transportation, work, food, punishment, etc.?

I was in the permenant camp most of the time. If we had to work outside of camp such as cutting wood we would be transported in trucks.
when we were building a airstip not to far from camp we had to walk.
For food we were each given a rice ball about the size of a baseball. It was usually eaten before we got to work because we were so hungary.
Punishment was a beating with a big club. I was beaten one time beeause I accidently pulled up some small onions with the grass i was pulling.
Several mem were beaten so bad we had to make a litter to haul them home.

30. Was your camp or camps ever bombed or damaged by the enemy or friendly military action?

No.

31. Could you describe your roll call or counting procedure in camp?

We were lined up in formayion and had to count from right to left on the first row and from left to right on the second row and so on, .
At first they wamted us to count in Jap. but so many of the POW s couldn,t learn it.

32. What type of guards did you have? Age? Rank? Weapons? Number? Service, etc.?

Most of the guards were young boys in there teens.Most of them were privates.
The carried Jap bolt action rifels mostly.
Out on work details one guard to about every 25 men.

33. Could you describe your camp? Size? Fences? Guard towers? Latrine? Ration distribution? Hours? Lock-up? Heat? Recreation, etc.?

I was a pow camp at Cabanatuan P.I. It was a very large camp It was a p.i. Army training camy. On the left side of the road was the POW s and on the right was the Jap camp.There was a high bardwire fenceAbout ten feet high around our side. This fence had high voltage current runing through it. Gaurd towers were spaced about 200 feet apart all around the camp. Tuere was also a barb-wire fencse about twenty feet inside the main femce, and if a POW got within 5 feet of the inside fence he would be shot. This happend several times while I was there. Thelatrine was a large hole in the ground with a wooden floor with a foot sqiare hole for the men to sqaut over. THe latrine smelled pretty bad and it was crawling with maggots so a man didn't spend any more time than nessary there. There were several kitcens and we hadto stand in line for the few or little rice we got.The rice was brought in in sacks and American cook boiled it in large pots, with a wood fire under it.We were up at sunup and to bed at dark. We didn;t have any lights in our barrcks.WE wern't locked up but we had to be in our beds . No heat it was warm enough most o the time without it.

34. Could you describe the men close to you or the men you knew best? How did you get along with them?

I got along with the men in my barracks. It didn't pay to get to well aquainted because they die or be shipped out on work details. Ididn't get shipped out brcause I went blind the first part of 1943. I lost my sight completly for awhile,but later when we recieved Red Cross packages it got better, but I am still leagaly blind.

35. Could you tell about epidemics or sickness in camp? What were the medical facilities? How were you medically treated in camp?

There was a lot of illness in camp. malaria, dysentary, bari bari, scurrvy,, palagera,dyptheria,large sores or we called it jungle rot.Malnutrition caused most of the sickness

Also a lot of other illness and very little medical supplys and medacine. The American doc's in camp treated us as best they could but they couldn't do much with the limited supplies and medacine.

A lot of the men had mental problem also, but very little was done for them.

36. Were any prisoners killed in camp or taken from camp and disappeared? Yes, early in our prison stay four men were shot for triying to escape. They were not try ing to escape they were just walking to the prison to give them selves up after the surrender but the japs accused then of trying to escape/ Several otters were killed by clubs and rifle butts on detail.

37. Could you describe the ration or food distribution system? How much? Fresh, canned, stale, dried, etc.? Local foods, Red Cross parcels, parcels from home, trade with guards or civilians?

About the only food we got was rice and most of the time that was full of worms, and other stuff like dirt rocks broken glass.They brought us some green weeds which we called whistle weed as it gave us the trots. I received one Red Coss package Xmas 1943 and I divided one with another man on Xmas 1944 and that is all I got. An occional camote(sweet potatoe). A few mongo beans which we had to buy fron the Filopinos. that is about all we got, and not to much of that.

38. Describe the type of work or responsibilities you were assigned within the camp from friendly or USA prisoners?

WE had to stand gauard at night at the front door of the barracks more to keep watch that no one left the barracksnot to watch for anyone coming in. Some men were out of their heads from sickness atc. so we had to watch them so they woulden;t goo to the fence and get shot.

39. What were some of the things that kept you going while in camp? Your health? Age? Faith in U.S. Armed Forces? Religion? Family? Aid from other prisoners?

I think my faith in God, my country, and I was sure they would eventualy come th rescue us, but my biggest concern, would they make it in time.
I was young 24 at the start of the war and I was in excellent physical conditon and I exercised in camp , tried to take as good care of my self as possible.

I had some good friends in canp and we tried to help each other out when we could. Also my great desire to see my fanily again kept me going.

40. Did any prisoners become mentally sick or irrational in camp and were they removed?

There were a few who were that way but they were kept in camp and most of them evetually died. One off them got out one might and managed to crawl through the fence with out the gauards seeing him, how we never knew.. The Japs were getting ready to shoot 9 men from his shooting squaf but they found the man out in the garden dead, so the Japs decided the men wouldn;t be shotbecause the American had gone out of his head.

41. Did you have any secret radios, newspapers or outside news sources in camp from which you received information? What information did the enemy give you?

We didn't recieve any outside information. We had only rumors and they never did come true. The Japs would tell us that they were wining the war that our navy had been sunk and xxxx that they would soon be landing in the U.S. and the war would be over and we could go home. We didn't beleive the of course.

42. Did you have any serious illness in camp?

I had stomach ulcers, dry bari bari, blindness due to malnutriton palagera, I lost 10 teeth I had kidney stones. A man sleeping beside me died one night from dyptheria but I didn;t get it. I lost a lot of wieght. I weighed 70 lbs. at liberation, from 150 my usual wieght.

43. Did you have any riots in camp?

No,

44. How did you first know that war was coming to an end?

When large formations of American planes stsrted flying over in November. Yhey bomed a small airfield close to camp which POW;s were building . There were no American POW' on the field at the time. Also the Jap. gairds were geting pretty mean, more beatings and they were very nervous.

45. What were some of the tricks you played on guards?

One gaurd wanted the POW;s to call him by the name of a great movie star. He asked us which was the greatest one. We told him that Donald Duck was one of the greatest and best looking, so he gave the order that he was to be called Donald Duck from then on. Some POW told one young Jap. gaurd that he could get a trill from urinating on the fence wire. So the Jap. wemt over and did so and was knocked on his but by the high voltafe wire. A Jap.officer saw him do it and had him beaten for it. The gauard didn;t mention it after that.

46. What about escape procedures and methods used by you or others that you have knowledge of or direct information about?

We didn;t attemp to escape at our camp because we had death sqauds .. if one man escaped nine others in his squad would be shot.and we made a pact that if any one in our squad was going to attempt an escape he was supposed to let the rest of us know so that we could have a chance to escape also. No one made the attempt to escape from our squad.

47. Were you ever bombed by friendly or enemy aircraft?

No.

48. Describe any special train or ship trip you took while a prisoner?

After the surrender ~~wex~~ at Corregador we were put aboard a large cargo ship and transported to Manila. We had to stay in the hold for about 36 hrs. without food or water. Several men died . After we reached Manila, we were put into small box car made of steel about 100 to a car and shipped to Capis over a hundred miles. The doors were closed and we were so crowed we couldn;t set down or fall dowm when the men passed oit. It was very hot and not enough air. Several men died on that trip.

49. When were you close to death or felt all was not worth living and you probably would die or be killed?

Ever since the war started I felt close to death. We knew that most of our Navy had been sunk and there wasn;t much chance of help. The Japs. said that if we didn;t surrender before a certen day we would all be killed, no prisoners would be taken. A fter the surrender and the death march we didn;t have much hope of getting out alive. I made my peace with my God and was pretty sure we wollden;t survie, especialy when men stated dieing 40 to 70 a day

Most of the POW;sverw sick and hungery. Dysentary and malaria was killin men by the hunderds, and survial seemed very dim.

50. Could you tell about any special religious observances by the enemy or special occurance when they relaxed or tightened security rules?

At first they wouldn;t allow religious services but later tehy let us have them but the sermon had to be cesered.

51. Would you describe in detail any particular holiday, if observed, by enemy or prisoners, such as, New Years or Christmas.

I don;t recall any holiday that the Jays. celebrateed. We sang Xmas songs and had churgh services, that about all.

52. How did you feel about food in camp? How did enemy food agree with you? What was food? What were utensils? What did you make to eat with? Pots, pans, cups, plates?

Food was very scase and not very good. A cup of rice twice a day and sometimes a few greens that usaly gave us diarea.We used our army mess kits and cups. If anyone didn;t have one they got a piece of tin and made a dish,The kitcen cooked the rice and greens and if we cooked some food ourselves we us our mess kits and cups.

53. Were you aware of any other American or Allied POW camps in your area? Civilian camps?

Yes. Bilbid POW camp in Manila, O Donnell POW camp near Capis P.I.
Also a civilian camp inIn the Far Eastern University in Manila P,I,

I spent the lsat two months at bilbid POW. Camp in Manila, They were trying to get a ship in to ship us to Japan but the American Navy kept sinking ther ships so they couldn;t get one into Manila.

54. In reference to your mind or yourself, how do you feel you held up in camp? Did you suffer periods of depression, crying, hysteria, headaches, loss of memory, etc.? How about the other men in camp? How do you feel you and others were able to live without nervous breakdowns?

Faith in America, God, Our families,kept us going. Talking to other POW;s. I didn;t cry when a prisoner but when we were released and we metthe meh who released us I cried , I guess the relief was so great we couldn;t help it.

Sometimes when things go wrong or I feel depresed and I thimk back the some of my friends and others who didn;t make it back I cry, But after a good cry things get better and i think it helps a lot.

I made up my mind that I wouldn;t probably make it anyway so I just made ease with God and leave it in his hands and try not to worry about it.

When the American planes started flying over and we knew the Americans were back it made us feel better. But some of the gaurds told us that we would never get back home as they had orders to kill us if the Americans tried to rescue us. That didn;t help the moral very much, but we dicided to take as many of them with us if the tried to kill us. It didn;t turn out that way, the American army came in so fast that they didn;t have enough time to kill us, They were killed before they had a chance to get us.

55. How do you feel other American POW's behaved or acted while in enemy hands? Please do not name an individual by name if you feel their behavior was not correct or up to the standards you set for yourself.

I didn;t see or hear anything unusual in our camp.

56. Towards the end of the war, what were first signs that the war was coming to an end in our favor?

There was a lot of American planes around. There were several dog fights over camp. There several small planes of the american who were spot and giving information to our arrtillary L think and they were also looking our camp over.

57. How did the enemy guards or administrative personnel treat you towards the end of the war or when it was apparent the enemy would lose the war?

They became very hostil and slapped the POW;s apound more.

They became very worried and excited when americn planes few over.

58. Could you describe how your POW status ended?

I was at Bilbid Prison in Manila. One night after supper, or that handful of rice ,we were sitting around talking and listnig to an old phonograph, when someone said he heard shooting and machine gun A few minutes latter all hell broke loose. The first cav. made a dash the Bilbid to keep the gaurds from killing us. They killed most of the gaurds They surrounde the camp and fought almost all nightto protect us. The next day we were moved to a temporary camp at a shoe factory, out of the enemy territory.

59. When or where did enemy guards leave? Did guards say or do anything at the end of the war?

They tried to leave but were killed before they got very. They didn;t have time to harm us. It was reported later that the camp was mined but the Japs didn;t have time to set it oof, it probably would have killed us all if they set off the explosive.

60. What did the American staff at the camp do at the end of the war?

They told us to stay calm and not to go out of camp as we could protect us out.there.

61. At the end of the war, where did you move? What was your food? Your health? Your morale?

We stayed in camp for three or four days and then we were taken to an airfeild neae Lingayen Gulf. Ther we were loaded one transport plane and foen to New Guinea, and from there we boarded a ship9 The Luxline Ox (Luraline crusie ship and sub shiped to good old U.S.A. The first few days we recieved c and K rarions but when we left camp we got good food. On the ship home we ate in the officers mess , by orders of GeneralMacArthur. He said nothing was to good for us and we were to get all the food and cigarettes we wanted

62. Could you describe some of the confusion that took place when you were liberated at the end of the war? Time, place, friendly or enemy forces involved, food, health, morale, POW discipline in camp, contact with U.S. military forces, etc.?

There wasn;t to much confusion everybody was very happy.
Timr was Feb. 4th 1945. All the food we could get was the ration the troops carried with them. They felt so sorry for us they gave us their food.
Moral was very high about this time. Our health was not to good at this time. I weighd 70 lbs. my usual weight was 150.

POW disapline was good, they were to happy to do otherwise.
The military forces were very good to us. They couldn;t understand how why the days would treat a person as cruel as they had treated us. The said they were;t going to be to particular how they treated them if they ever took them prisoner.

63. After liberation or the war ending, what happened? Did you move as an individual or group, go by foot, train, bus? Where did you go, to another U.S. camp?

We went by plane to New Guinea and took a ship from there. to U.S.A.

64. What happened at your camp prior to returning to the States? Did U.S. military officials interrogate you, examine you physically, give you food, clothing, etc.?

We were given a very little physical so tuey could see if we were able to travel.They gave us food and new cloths.

65. How, when and where did you arrive back in the United States? Did you stay at some camp? Did you go home by train?

I returned to U.S.A. San Francisc, About Mar. 15, 1945. I was put in the hopial at Letterman General for awhie than I took a 2 week stay at home before I went to an army hospital at Menlo Park , Calif.I stayed there for 8 months trying to get my sight back and also my health and weight. I was dicharged from the service on Oct. 12, 1945. With a 100% disability which I still have,

66. What things today remind you of prison life in your day to day living?

Movies, radio, T.V. and books on the subject.They don;t bother me to much as my sight is to poor to watch much of them.

67. Do you have an complaints about how you have been treated since your POW days?

No not to many, I an treated very well and with respect from most people. The V.A. has been pretty good I recieve good medical treatment and fair compensation also.

68. Do you have a picture of yourself prior to being a POW, preferably a picture in uniform? Do you have a picture of yourself following the war? Do you have a picture of yourself and your family recently taken, or taken within recent years? Any or all of these pictures would be appreciated. They will be returned to you after we have made copies of them.

I dont have a pictuer of myself in uniform, as I never had a pass after I was inducted. I have a few pictuer to send.

69. Do you have any copies of telegrams from the War Department or the U.S. Government regarding your becoming a POW? Or your release, or war time status as a POW? These or copies of these would be appreciated. If you wish them returned, they will be sent back to you.

Yes I have some article to send.

70. Do you have any letters or copies of letters you sent home or received from home during war or during period you were a POW? These or copies of these would be appreciated. They also will be returned if you so indicate in your reply.

Yes I have some

71. A few POW's were able to return to the U.S. or home with a few articles they may have made, been given or in some way secured in POW camp. Some of these could be: paper notes, camp regulations, clothing, cigarette lighter, insignia, hand made pans or pots, special cans used in camp, small tools, etc. If you have any of these, we would appreciate a picture of them. If you desire they could be sent with this report and we will take a picture of them and return them to you if you so desire.

I have a few

72. The above questions or suggestions are limited and you may write or explain many items not included; therefore, feel free to express yourself in any manner you desire.

Elmer T. Lian
2520 Chestnut St.
Grand Forks, N. Dak.

Dear Sir,

I have anserd the questions as good as I could, It is,nt easy when your mostly blind. There are a lot of mistakes, hope you can make it out.

I am enclosing a few articles which I would like to have back after you get done with them.

I would like to have writen more at length about my POW days but it is very hard for me to expres myself,I hope you correct all my mistakes before you print it. I can't see when I make a mistake when I'mtypeing so you will have to excuse the mistakes.

I was drafted into the A rmy on May 8, 1941. and was in the combat Enginers at Ft. Lenard Wood, Mo. After boot camp I was sent to Westover Feild Mass. in the 803rd (Aviation Enginers. Batt.) In less than five months I was sent overseas to the P.I. to build airfields. We arrived inP.I. about Nov. 1st.were sent to Clark Feild to work on the Feild there. On Dec, 8th the sane day as Pearl Harbor I was operating a D8 cat bull-dozer on Clark Feild when the Japs hit us with bombers and fighters. I lay onder the cat for at least 2 hours until the attack was over. A bomb destroed the cat, the hangers were ablase, people were laying around dead and wounded. It was hell. Most of our planes were destroyed, some of the pilots who tried to take off in their planes were burned to death sitting in there planes. This was my baptizm of fire and I thought my God what had I gotten myself into now. It turned out to be just the begining. The hell of the prisn camp was much worse.

The 803rd faught on Baatan, untin Feb, when we were sent to Corregador to enlarge the airfeild there (Kinney Feild).We were captured there on May, 5, 1942.They (Japs) kept us on the island for a couple of weeks, we didn'nt get any food except what we could steal and pick up around the island. Another boy (he Died in prison camp) and I would sneakout at night to some of the gun inplace ments and pick up some C ration that were stored there. It meant death if were caught, but it kept us alive and we also gave some to our frieds who were sick or wounded.

WE were sent to Bilbed Prison in Manila for afew Days. We were put aboard an old freighter one after noon , put into the stinkink hold and kept there until the next day when they took us to Manila. It was hot no air and a few men died that night in that stinking hold. Next day we were put on some landing craft, we had to crawl over the side on landing nets, a few of the sick and wounded fell off the nets and were never seen again. We were put ashore in about ten feet of water and those who couldnt swim were drowned if they could'nt find anyone to hrlp them. A few men died there. We were marched through Manila so the Japs could show the Filapinos what a sorry sight the Americam Army was. Beleive me we were a sorry sight, ragged cloths dirty skinny and sick at both heart and soul and body, It was indeed a low and sad day for the Americans in the P.I. s.

We were shipped a few days later to Cabanatuan prison canp in small steel boxcars. 100 to a car and it was really crowed. We could'nt fall dowon if we wanted to. It was about 120°F inside the cars and very little air. A few guys died here also. At cabanatuan prison thing really got bad, they began dieing about 30 to 70 a day. I was on the burial detail for the next two years, always thinking about when my turn would come for a ride out to the cemetary. We had to dig a big hole or grave and just thow the bodys in, the Japs would'nt let us lay them out in a orderly fashion, that took to much time.Thank God I didn't take a ride on those litters, Im here today to tell the story about those dirty so and so's Most of the deaths were caused by starvation and when they got so weak the desease goy them, When I was released I wasonly 70 lbs. and so weak I had a hard time just to walkIn Dec. of 1944 I was sent to Bilbid for the purpose of being shipped to Japan, but the American Navy kept sinking the Jap ships so they couldn;t come in to pick us up, thank God for that. The last ships the Japs sent out with POW s aboard were sunk and most of the POW s were lost. Wewere liberated on Feb. 4th, 1945. The 1st Cav. Charged into Manila and surronded the camp killing all the guareds and freein us It had to be the greatest day in my life. I didn't cry very much during the war or prison camp but the flood gates opened when we were liberated. The relief was just to much and we also didn;t think it possible after such along time and after takeing so much abuse,It was a great day, and also when we set foot on American soil. God bless America the greatest country in the world. It has its faults but you can't find any better especially when you thought you would never see it again. In closeing I want to thank you for helping to keep alive this part of American history and my part in it, We shouldn't let anyone foget it. Thank you. Sam Sortland.

If you want more information or more of my experiances let me know and Ill do my best to give them yo you. My wife helps me a lot on this matter,
I also have some books on POW of the Japs which I'll be willing to loan to the library.

Sam.

CLASS OF SERVICE

This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

(44)

1201

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

NEWCOMB CARLTON
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

J. C. WILLEVER
FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

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NT=Overnight Telegram
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MRS KAREN SORTLAND=

633 1/2 NORTH SYCAMORE HOLLYWOOD CALIF=

YOUR SON PRIVATE FIRST CLASS SAM SORTLAND CORPS OF ENGINEERS REPORTED A PRISONER OF WAR OF THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT IN PHILIPPINE ISLANDS PERIOD LETTER FOLLOWS=

ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.

SAM & ALICE SORTLAND
R. 1 BOX 218
AMBROSE, ND 58833

WAR DEPARTMENT
SERVICES OF SUPPLY
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
WASHINGTON

JAU

IN REPLY REFER TO

AG 201 Sortland, Sam
(5-22-42) EB

May 22, 1942.

Mrs. Karen Sortland,

Colgan, North Dakota.

Dear Mrs. Sortland:

According to War Department records, you have been designated as the emergency addressee of Private Sam Sortland, 37,028,940, who, according to the latest information available, was serving in the Philippine Islands at the time of the final surrender.

I deeply regret that it is impossible for me to give you more information than is contained in this letter. In the last days before the surrender of Bataan there were casualties which were not reported to the War Department. Conceivably the same is true of the surrender of Corregidor and possibly of other islands of the Philippines. The Japanese Government has indicated its intention of conforming to the terms of the Geneva Convention with respect to the interchange of information regarding prisoners of war. At some future date this Government will receive through Geneva a list of persons who have been taken prisoners of war. Until that time the War Department cannot give you positive information.

The War Department will consider the persons serving in the Philippine Islands as "missing in action" from the date of the surrender of Corregidor, May 7, 1942, until definite information to the contrary is received. It is to be hoped that the Japanese Government will communicate a list of prisoners of war at an early date. At that time you will be notified by this office in the event his name is contained in the list of prisoners of war. In the case of persons known to have been present in the Philippines and who are not reported to be prisoners of war by the Japanese Government, the War Department will continue to carry them as "missing in action," in the absence of information to the contrary, until twelve months have expired. At the expiration of twelve months and in the absence of other information the War Department is authorized to make a final determination.

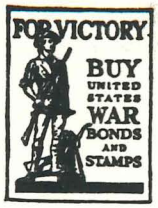
Recent legislation makes provision to continue the pay and allowances of persons carried in a "missing" status for a period of not to exceed twelve months; to continue, for the duration of the war, the pay and allowances of persons

SAM & ALICE SORTLAND
R. 1 BOX 218
AMBROSE, ND 58833

known to have been captured by the enemy; to continue allotments made by missing personnel for a period of twelve months and allotments made by persons held by the enemy during the time they are so held; to make new allotments or increase allotments in force to certain dependents defined in Public Law 490, 77th Congress. The latter dependents generally include the legal wife, dependent children under twenty-one years of age and dependent mother, or such dependents as have been designated in official records. Eligible dependents who can establish a need for financial assistance should be advised to approach their local chapter of the American Red Cross who will assist them in obtaining any benefits to which they may be entitled. In the event dependents require financial assistance and are eligible to receive this assistance the amount allotted will be deducted from the pay which would otherwise accrue to the credit of the missing individual.

Very truly yours,

Major General,
The Adjutant General.



HEADQUARTERS ARMY SERVICE FORCES
Office of The Provost Marshal General
Washington 25, D. C. mfw

25 August 1944

RE: PFC Sam Sortland,
United States Prisoner of War,
Military Prison Camp #1,
Philippine Islands.

Mrs. Karen Sortland,

Colgan, North Dakota.

Dear Mrs. Sortland:

The Provost Marshal General has directed me to inform you of the transfer of the above-named prisoner of war to the camp indicated.

You may communicate with him by following the inclosed mailing instructions.

Further information will be forwarded as soon as it is received.

Sincerely yours,

Howard F. Bresee.

Howard F. Bresee,
Colonel, C.M.P.,
Assistant Director, Prisoners of War Division.

1 Incl.
Mailing Circular.

SAM & ALICE SORTLAND
R. 1 BOX 218
AMBROSE, ND 58833

24-63094ABCD

AMERICAN RED CROSS
Washington, D. C.

Form 1616
Rev. Sept. 1942

International Red Cross Committee
Geneva, Switzerland
CIVILIAN MESSAGE FORM

Sender

Name Mrs. Jessie Sortland Donovan
Street 117 N.W. 15th Avenue
City Camas, State Washington
Citizen of U.S.A.
Relationship to person sought sister
Chapter Clark County Date Dec. 18, 1944.

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

Dear Sam: Just informed by Red Cross we could write so will take advantage of opportunity. You will be surprised to hear from us at this address as the last you heard perhaps Bud was at San Haven I working in Crosby. He came home in May 1943 and we moved here in September. I've been working in the office of the paper mill here and Bud is with the State Highway. Colleen is four and growing up fast. She stays at nursery during work. Magnus married a Scobey girl in 1943 and had a boy last month. They live at Scobey. Jennies had a boy, seventh for them. They live on Ole Haugo's farm. Kenneth's had a girl in June. Named her Karen. They just got home to take over farm. Folks bought Weins house and moved to Ambrose. Emma's bought the Christianson place. Buds folks came west with us and live three miles east of here. His sister and Walter Anderson also live there. Walter works at Vancouver. Crosby has changed the last years. Many farmers own homes there. Most of young fellows are in service. Crops have been wonderful so Divide County is in good

Addressee

Name Pfc Sam Sortland
Address Interned in Japanese Prisoners Camp #1
Country Philippine Islands

Identifying Data

Birthplace and date of birth Colgan, N. D. Feb. 14, 1913
Citizen of U.S.A.

Reply on the reverse side Réponse au verso Antwort umseitig

shape now. We were thrilled to read your Radiogram in the Journal. They have published most of your communications and we all look forward to your return which we feel will not be far off. We attended two Dakota picnics at Portland last summer and saw many Divide people. Saturday we had a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Emil Thompson. Do you know Angus Stewart or Raaum? Can't write about "Kelly" as he went across the highway once too often. Was a faithful old dog though. Kenneth and Clifford used to see one another occassionally. You have some new relatives to get acquainted with too, haven't you. Took Magnus and Clifford quite awhile to find the right one but did alright by themselves. Even John Selle isn't a bachelor anymore. Now Martin and Arnold are the only bachelors in the older group of Twin Butte. We tried to convince the folks to come and spend the coldest part of winter with us. Rains a lot here but not any snow. We miss the snow but not the zero weather. We hope this finds you in excellent health and that you will be homeward bound soon. We are all just fine.

With all our love, Jessie, Bud, Colleen (Donovan)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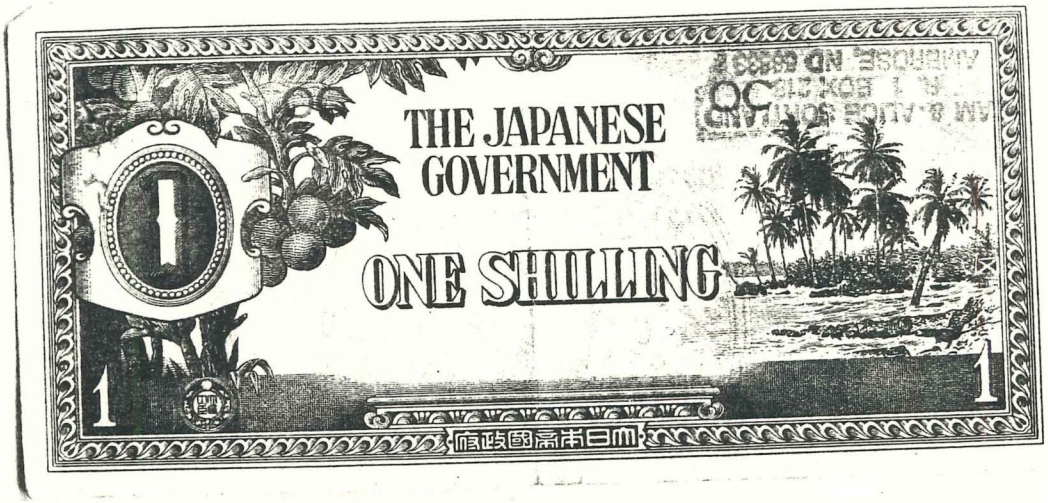
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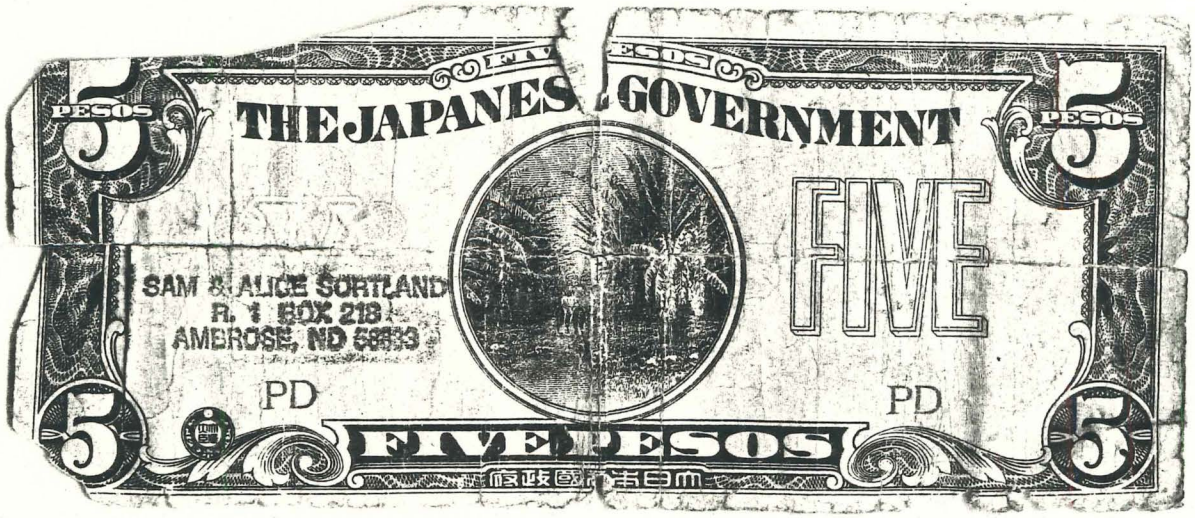
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SAM & ALICE SORTLAND
R. 1 BOX 218
AMBROSE, ND 58833
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SAM & MARIE SORTLAND
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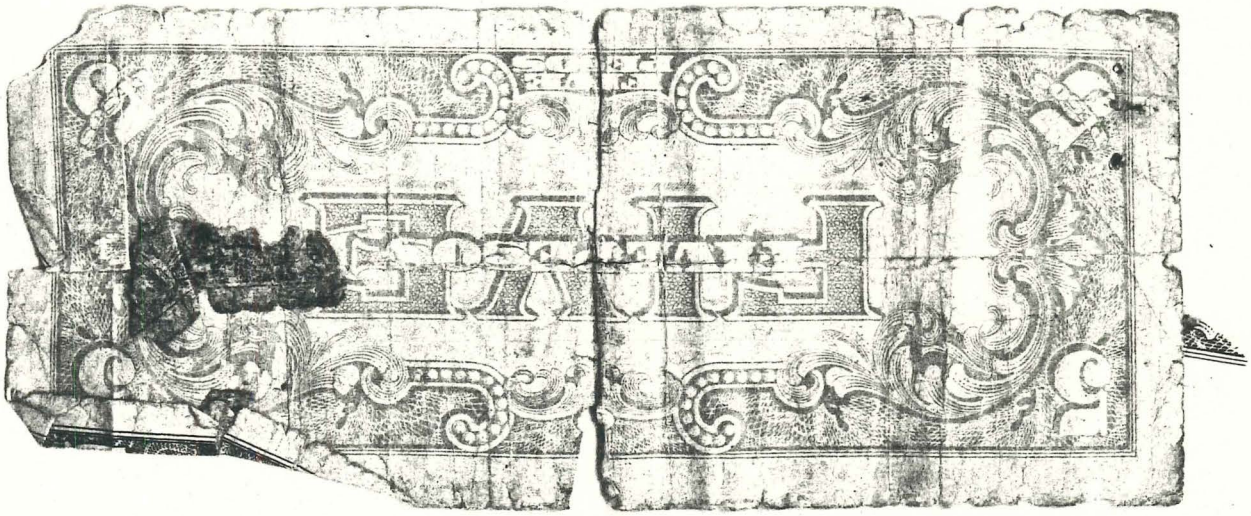

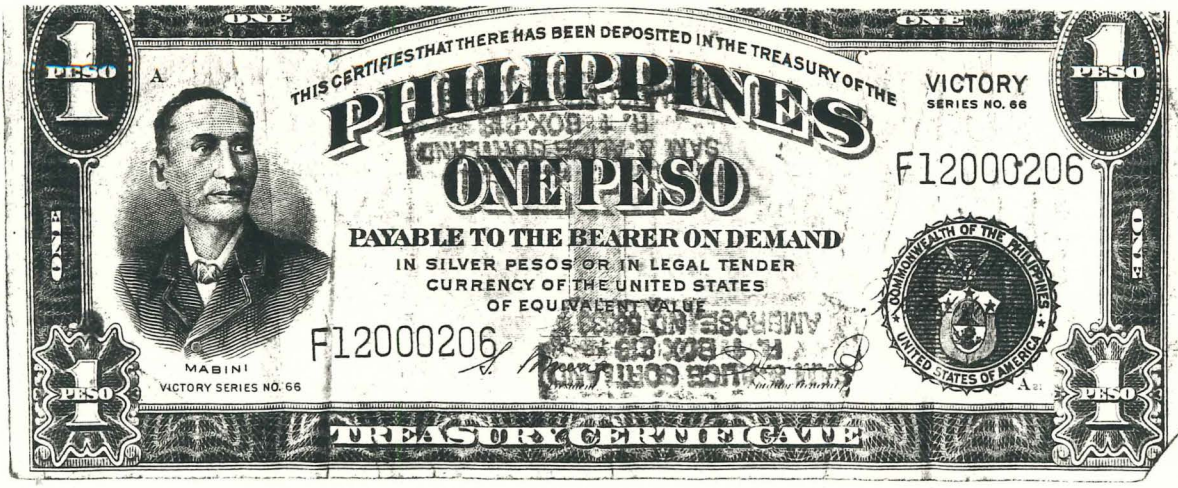
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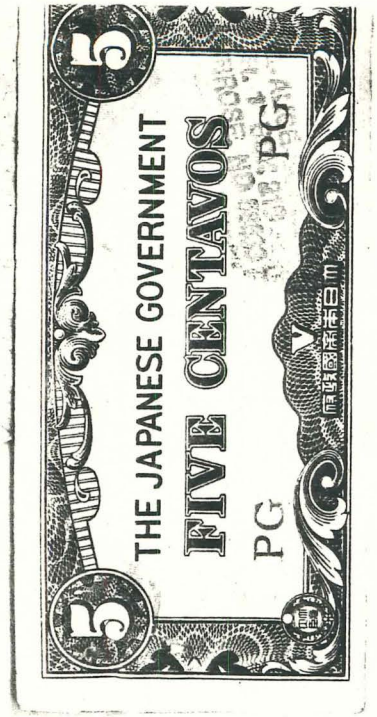
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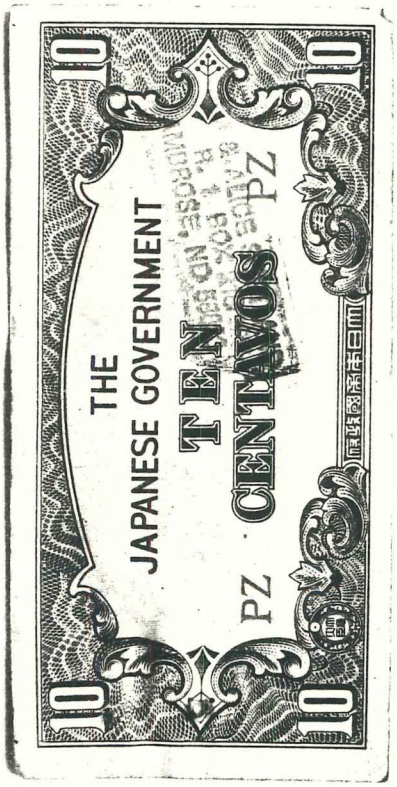
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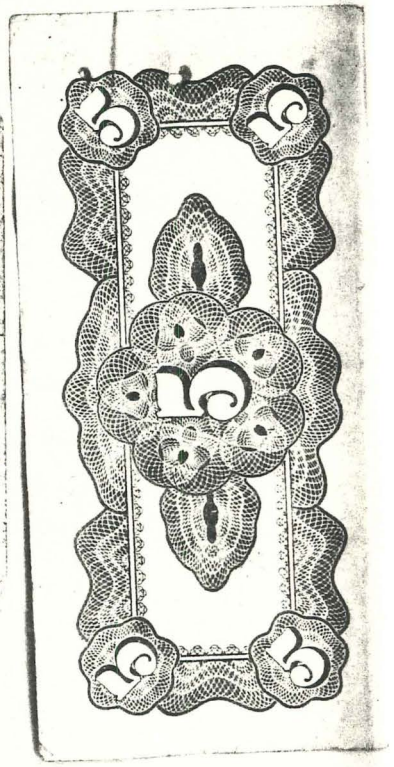
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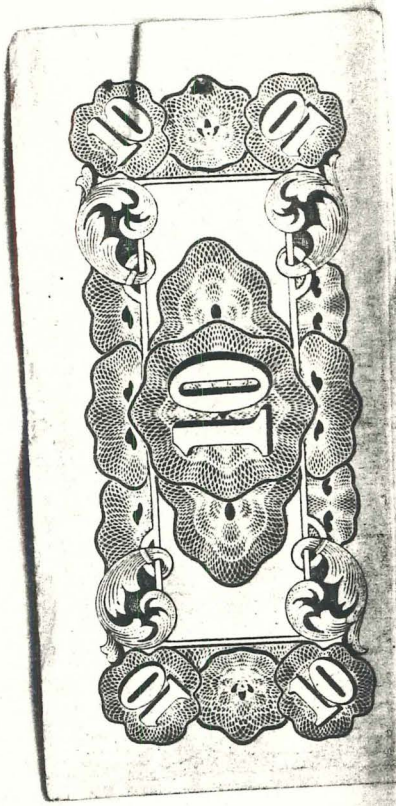
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3/16/45

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

eato members of united states ARMED FORCES LIBERATED
IN THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS:

It gives me special pleasure to welcome you back to your native shores, and to express, on behalf of the people of the United States, the joy we feel at your deliverance from the hands of the enemy. It is a source of profound satisfaction that our efforts to accomplish your return have been successful.

You have fought valiantly in foreign lands and have suffered greatly. As your Commander in Chief, I take pride in your past achievements and express the thanks of a grateful Nation for your services in combat and your steadfastness while a prisoner of war.

May God grant each of you happiness and an early return to health.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

SAM & ALICE SORTLAND
R. 1 BOX 218
AMBROSE, ND 58833

3/16/45

ARMY PORT
SAN FRANCISCO

Homecoming

ON THIS DAY, PROBABLY THE GREATEST OF YOUR LIFE, WHEN YOU RETURN TO THE LOVED LAND FOR WHICH YOU SO GALLANTLY FOUGHT AND SUFFERED, WE OF THE TRANSPORTATION CORPS, PROUD TO HAVE SERVED YOU, EXTEND OUR HIGHEST PRAISES, BEST WISHES, AND WARMEST WELCOME HOME.

SAN FRANCISCO PORT OF EMBARKATION
TRANSPORTATION CORPS

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In Co-operation with
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GOOD MONTH OF
MARCH — 1945

31 SIGNATURE OF GUEST

Sam Sortland

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on March 26, 1945, by bearer and party when presented with proper identification by a Bataan hero or heroine.

San Francisco Only

To be filled in and signed by person to whom pass is issued.

856

FROM _____ TO _____

Sam Sortland
SIGNATURE

NOT GOOD UNLESS COUNTERSIGNED
Citizen's Committee
By Hazonie
SIGNATURE OF PERSON AUTHORIZING

HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES WESTERN PACIFIC
RECOVERED PERSONNEL DIVISION

APO 707
20 July 1946

Dear Pvt. Sortland:

All American recovered personnel who were interned during the Japanese invasion are being circularized for information relative to individuals who may have rendered any unusual aid to prisoners of war or civilian internees during the time that they were under the control of the Japanese forces.

It is therefore requested that you inform us of the names of any persons in the Philippines who may have rendered any outstanding or unusual services or who worked actively to relieve the misery of yourself or other American internees or prisoners of war. Will you kindly furnish this headquarters the name, last known address, a brief statement of the activities in your behalf and the period of time covered by these activities?

An official self addressed envelope which requires no postage is enclosed for your use in replying at your earliest convenience. Any assistance which you may be able to render in this matter will be deeply appreciated.

Very truly yours,

Morris H. Marcus

MORRIS H. MARCUS
Colonel, AGD
Director

AFWESPAC Printing Plant

Jap Prisoner For 33 Months; Sortland Lost 85 Pounds, Nearly Blind

By DAN HALLIGAN
Herald Staff Writer

He was 30 years old but he looked three times that age. He weighed only 70 pounds — 85 pounds less than his normal weight of 155.

He was almost totally blind. His emaciated body was a mass of open, festering sores. When he talked, a listener had to lean close or he wouldn't hear the rasping words. His walk was the erratic side-to-side painfully slow gait of a mortally wounded animal searching for a patch of sunshine on the quiet side of a mountain where he could lay down and die.

But Sam Sortland didn't die. He won — and he lived. The Crosby, N.D. native, a prisoner of war for 33 long months, had taken everything inhuman his Japanese guards had thrown at him and had won.

His victory was sweet and savory in his parched mouth that Feb. 4, 1945, when American troops liberated him and others from Bilbad prison after a fierce fire fight in Manila.

TODAY — more than 22 years after that liberation date — Sam Sortland is making plans to join nearly 500 other ex-prisoners of war in a sentimental return journey to the Philippine Island of Luzon, to its largest city of Manila, to Clark Field, to Bataan peninsula and to the island of Corregidor.

Lives Near Crosby

Sortland, a farmer and electrician who lives with his family near Crosby, will board a chartered plane in Chicago April 3 and two dyas later will be reunited with comrades whose names he has all but forgotten but whose deeds will never be

Marines — into unmarked graves or into prisoner of war camps.

Sam Sortland was one of the 25,000 and at times in the months ahead, one of the "unlucky Americans" because he found no grave that wanted to claim him.

How did Sortland and the others find themselves on the peninsula of Bataan with no escape? The answer to that question can be found in the months prior to May 5, 1942, when Corregidor fell.

Sam Sortland

At Clark Field

ENTERING the Army on May 8, 1941, Sortland found himself stationed at Clark Field — an Army Air Corps base 100 miles from Manila — on October 1, 1941, with the 803rd Aviation

months. But for Wainwright there was to be no triumph — at least not until the ending of the war. His orders were to hold out on Corregidor for as long as possible.

Conditions were deteriorating rapidly on Corregidor because of the daily bombing attacks and shelling. The Americans were down to two small meals a day and toward the last were eating freshly butchered Army mules. Sortland remembers joining hundreds of others as they waded into the sea and picked up dead fish killed by off-target bombs hitting the water.

Bataan Falls

BAATAN FELL to the enemy on April 9, 1942, and tiny Corregidor — less than a mile wide and only five miles long — was crushed by the 100,000 Japanese May 5.

The prisoners were crammed into boats for the trip across the bay to Manila but en route the cramped quarters proved to be the coffins for hundreds of the captives who died of suffocation.

More hundreds drowned in deep water in the surf as they were forced to jump into the sea by the Japanese.

The Americans then received the final humiliation of being forced to march to Manila and through it to Bilbad prison where they were kept about a week.

They were then transported in steel box cars and on foot 100 miles to another prison camp — the dreaded Cabantuan prison.

Cabantuan housed about 20,000 prisoners of war, mostly Americans, who did construction work and who raised gardens with which to feed the Japanese troops.

Although on this March 22, 1967, Japan is considered one of this country's staunchest allies, in 1942 it was America's

Bataan and Corregidor, Inc., will mark the 25th anniversary since their capture by crack Japanese Marines early in the dark days of World War II.

The 52-year-old ex-Army Air Corps corporal isn't returning to the scene of his pain and suffering with the thought of reliving some of that history. He lives with it each day. What he suffered is branded deep into his soul and can never be forgotten. Instead, the 10 days will be a get-together of one-time buddies, the opportunity to laugh with those who once believed there never again would be anything to laugh about and to proudly show snapshots of grandchildren.

Although America has found itself in two wars since World War II, neither the Korean War nor the present Vietnam War saw the nation as militarily unprepared as it was on Dec. 7, 1941, when the Japanese air and sea attack on the Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Naval Base plunged this country into the most awesome and deadly shooting conflict in the history of the world.

And neither Korea nor Vietnam ever produced such patriotic rallying cries as "Remember Pearl Harbor," "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," "Sighted Sub, Sank Same," "Take Her Down," "Send Us More Japs," and Bataan and Corregidor.

25,000 Died

BATAAN and Corregidor. Fighting heroically against insurmountable odds, sick, hungry, almost out of ammunition and realizing the help they were pleading for would never reach them in time, 25,000 Americans on Corregidor fell before the savagery of 100,000 Japanese

The battalion's prime job was to build and maintain air strips and roads and it did its job thoroughly until December 8, 1941, when bombers and fighters of the Empire of Japan made a shambles of the field and of the land-locked American planes that never became airborne.

The Clark Field attack coincided within minutes with the attack on Pearl Harbor, thousands of miles to the east. And like the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, American casualties were disastrously high. (The difference in the date from Dec. 7 to Dec. 8 was accounted by the International Date Line.)

Recalling that first aerial attack more than a quarter of a century later, Sortland still shakes his head. "We knew conditions between the two countries were serious but not as critical as the Japs proved," he said. "We were so smug about everything that we didn't even have bomb shelters or fox holes at Clark," he smiled with a trace of sadness tugging at his mouth.

The bombing and strafing continued through the following days although by now shelters had been constructed and dug and the numbers of dead and wounded never again equaled the total of Dec. 8.

The Americans knew time was a factor — that it was only a matter of time until Japanese troops overran Clark Field. So they did the only sensible thing to do, abandoning the field and evacuating to Bataan on foot and in motor vehicles.

Rifles vs Planes

SORTLAND'S battalion continued its primary duty of road and air strip building and repairing on Bataan and using rifles and larger firearms against the never-ending Japanese aircraft. By Feb. 1, 1942, Sortland's company — Company A — had lost 60 per cent of its officers and enlisted men and it was sent three miles across the bay to Corregidor.

On Corregidor the company joined remnants of other companies, battalions and regiments, all under the command of Maj. Gen. Jonathan "Skinny" Wainwright. General Douglas MacArthur had already left Bataan

stark testimony to that fact. Prisoners who didn't move quickly enough or who didn't answer quickly enough were beaten and bayoneted to death. Others were taken from their barracks — supposedly for questioning — and were never seen again.

Eyesight Fails

SORTLAND's eyesight began failing him in time and six months before he was liberated, he was almost totally blind from the effects of the starvation diet. Nevertheless, he was forced to work and for one year he labored on the prison's burial detail. He said an average of 50 to 60 prisoners died each day.

The only news the prisoners ever received was vague rumors of deliberate lies from the Japanese about the war. Sortland recalls being told that the entire American fleet had been destroyed in the Battle of the Coral Sea and if some prisoners were skeptical, they were then told the ships had gone down in the Battle of Midway.

November 15, 1944, proved to be a special day for Sortland and 500 others because they were transferred from Cabantuan to Bilbad prison. They were on orders to be sent to Japan where they would be used as slave labor. However, the sea voyage never came about because the war had long since turned against the "Rising Sun." Their ships were at a premium and couldn't be spared for prisoner transfer.

Instead, Sortland and his comrades remained at Bilbad — more dead than alive — until Feb. 4, 1945, when units of the First Cavalry Division and other American troops overran the Japanese defenders and freed them

Japs Get Meaner

CONTRARY to what many may believe, at Bilbad when the Japanese realized they were about to lose the war, they suddenly didn't become compassionate toward their prisoners. "If anything," Sortland said, "they became meaner."

From Bilbad Sortland went to a field hospital for a week, then was flown to a station hospital in New Guinea. A week later he was aboard another American airplane and this time landed on American soil-California. But his ordeal was far from over and another seven months were to pass before he was released from medical attention and dis-

ee Gulickson, an infrequent shooter, scored when he did. Though he had only 118 points for the year, he finished among leaders in field goal and free throw shooting percentages.

Sam Sortland to Make Pilgrimage to

At a time when nearly half of the American population is made up of young people who have been born since World War II, memories of the world's greatest conflict may be waning—but not for Sam Sortland, who spent three long years in a Japanese prison camp from May 1942 until the liberation in 1945.

And it will probably be mixed feelings of nausea and nostalgia that will accompany Sam when he returns to the Philippines for a 25th anniversary reunion of the men who lived thru the hell of World War II in a Japanese prison.

Sam went into the old Army Air Corps in May, 1941, and was shipped to the Philippines October 1, 1941, two months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. As the islands fell, there was no escape for the ill-equipped Americans. When Bataan fell in April 1942, he was able to escape to nearby Corregidor, thereby avoiding the unbelievable cruelty of the unforgettable Bataan death march; but there was no place to go when Corregidor fell a month later.

Sam went into a prison in the Philippines at Cabanatuan with 25,000 other Americans. When he was moved to the Bilbid prison in Manilla two months before the end of the war, there were only 500 remaining. Most of them died from starvation and disease. Many of the men had been loaded in transport ships to be taken to Japan in those days of retreat for the "Rising Sun", but few of them reached their destination, he remembers because they were taken in unmarked ships which were sunk by Americans. His own destination was to have been a ship back to Japan, he says, but the presence of growing American forces made it impossible for the Japanese to get a ship into Manilla bay.

Three long years of starvation reduced Sam to skin and bones. He weighed 70 pounds when he was liberated, and he was virtually blind from malnutrition. Until the last couple months he was there, he recalls, "I was stone blind, but they finally started letting some of the Red Cross supplies, including huge barrels of cod liver oil, reach us".

Sam still bears the scars of his long detention—his eye sight which has returned, is not good, and he has quite severe stomach ulcers. His vision is listed at 20/200, which is about 10% of normal. Still he considers himself fortunate, when he remembers the thousands of American soldiers all around him, dieing from malaria and dysentery. Some died from diphtheria too, and other disease brought on by malnutrition and starvation.

Doctors told him later that he could be thankful for what must have been a natural immunity to malaria and dysentery.

Sam leaves April 3 for Manilla, and will return April 17 from the historic reunion. About 450 comrades will be making the trip with him. In addition to the time of remembering, they will meet the Philippine president, march a mile on Bataan in commemoration of that death march, and take part in a pilgrimage to Corregidor.

The only one from North Dakota, Sam's biggest disappointment is that a close friend from the eastern part of the state will be unable to go, because he recently underwent surgery from complications that are related to his imprisonment. Even those few who escaped with their lives carry scars which keep the memory of those days so keen.

Sam married on his return to America in 1945. He and his wife, Alyce, have three boys—Richard in Minneapolis at hair dressing school, Jim studying at Wahpeton State School of Science, and Gary, a Crosby high school sophomore.

Sam Sortland . . . at left, following his re

To Bataan Battlefield

BATAAN, Philippines (AP) — More than 1,000 Americans and Filipinos made an emotional pilgrimage Saturday to the World War II battlefield of Bataan, which surrendered to the Japanese 25 years ago Sunday.

About 500 American veterans of Bataan and Corregidor, many of them survivors of the Bataan death march, climbed 1,800-foot Mt. Samat, site of the last battle on the peninsula. There they heard President Ferdinand E. Marcos, a hero of the Bataan fighting, dedicate a shrine to the gallantry of Americans and Filipinos who died on the mountain.

On the way to Mt. Samat in a convoy of air-conditioned buses, the veterans, a little weary from Manila's oppressive heat, drove over the route of the death march, in which more than 2,000 men died.

The road is marked with signs a kilometer apart, starting at Mariveles on the southern tip of Bataan with "death march kilometer 0" and ending at San Fernando with "death march kilometer 100."

Thousands of school children, waving American flags and holding signs saying "welcome death marchers — thank you," cheered and threw flower petals to the veterans as the buses passed through their villages.

On Mt. Samat, in the still uncompleted shrine which will be topped by a 252-foot cross, a Roman Catholic Mass was said in honor of the 30,000 men killed defending Bataan.

Americans and Filipinos alike wept openly as Norman Reyes repeated his famous wartime broadcast which announced to the world that "Bataan has fallen." Reyes, a Filipino who now lives in Honolulu, also was overcome.

Sortland Goes On Pilgrimage To Jap Prison

Sam Sortland

Sam Sortland of Crosby will leave April 3 for the Philippines to attend a 25th anniversary reunion of a group of U.S. Army Air Corps men who were imprisoned by the Japanese at Cabanatuan.

He and other survivors were in this prison camp from May, 1942, until their liberation in 1945.

The anniversary dates from the fall of Bataan in April.

Sortland was one of those who escaped to Corregidor, which fell a month later.

Many, many of his fellow prisoners died of starvation and disease. In this three long years in prison his weight diminished until at the time of his liberation he weighed only 70 pounds. He was then nearly blind from malnutrition.

Apr. 1961 M. Log

Sam Sortland Family

Back row- left to right.

Janes C. Navy 6 yrs. during Vietnam war, Chief Engeneer KXMD T.V.
Ricard A. Route manager for American Linen Co.
Gary Lee, Capt. U.S. Air Force. Pilot , flys F 16 Fighter plane. Graduated from Air Force Acadamy Colo. '73.

Bottom row
Myseif and wife Alice J.