

Duty to Country

Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project

Interview Transcript: Charles Brown

Please Note: Due to a machine-automated transcription process, there may be errors in this transcript.

Charles Brown [00:00:05] My father was born in 1903, in June of 1903. He tried to enlist in World War One, so he lied about his age and they caught of course he didn't get in. So he ended up working at a couple of different jobs. One was a confectionery company, and then he worked with another company that he was involved in oil and gas leases. And prior to going into the, to the service when he joined the army. Yeah, my father joined the army, I believe it was around 1935, 1936, because he was married to my mother in 1937. So they met in the Philippines. He was stationed in the Philippines and that's where my mother was living. Well, I'm not sure what his qualification were for going to the Philippines, but he could speak Spanish. And I think that put him in a different position where he was able to speak at least some of the language that was there. And it made him more marketable. And, you know, in a position where he could communicate better. Actually December 7th, when was Pearl Harbor was bombed, it was December 8th in the Philippines. And that's when the Japanese started fighting in the Philippines. And my father was in a couple of battles, a couple of battles prior to getting into the Bataan Battle and then being captured and put in the Bataan Death March. He survived the Bataan Death March, luckily. Unfortunately, he saw a lot of his friends, you know, that didn't survive. And after being in the prison camp until 1944, when he was shipped to, put on the hell ship and sent, being sent to Japan.

Charles Brown [00:02:48] And while he was there in the, in the prison camp, he made this little bracelet for me that has my name on it. And then on the back, the back of it has my, has his name Daddy and the date of 1943 when he made this. My father was placed in the Arisan Maru in 1944, and that was being shipped to Japan, probably to work in a mitsubishi plant or someplace. It was not marked P.O.W.s. And it was not marked prisoners of war, and it wasn't marked with a Red Cross sign. It had a skeleton crew of Japanese soldiers that were running the ship, and it was torpedoed by the Navy. And he was officially declared dead in 1944, October, 1944. My father was first listed as a M.I.A. And that unfortunately, didn't know for a year before she actually received the letter from the War Department and the Army saying that he had been killed in action when it was torpedoed. My mother got involved with the Catholic priest in getting medicine and also getting some tobacco and getting what food they could get and giving it to the priest and the priest would take it to the prison camp and they would distribute it however they could with how much, you know, they were able to distribute. He finally was killed by the Japanese because he wouldn't say who he was working with. He wouldn't divulge my mother's name, and so he was beaten to death. Well, if the priest would have given my mother up, she would have been killed. She would have been executed, beaten to death or bayoneted, like, you know, like they did with the poor soldiers that were having trouble walking in the Bataan Death March.

Charles Brown [00:05:45] They were just bayoneted to death right there on the street. So, yeah, that would have been one of those options that they would have had, that they would have done. They definitely would have killed her at that point. My mother was very much aware of how dangerous it was, and she could only go at certain times and a lot of the times she would end up taking the medicine and stuff and giving it to the Catholic priest and he would take it. And she, at that point, you know, she already had four kids. She couldn't risk, you know, being killed and leaving four kids, you know, orphans at that point. I was two years old when the war started. But I remember a lot of things, a lot of the little things that happened, out of fear, I guess. I remember the Japanese burning the houses down because I remember watching them go back into the house if it hadn't burned to the ground and lighting the fires again. I also remember the bombing and the mortars that hit our house. We had an air raid shelter and it hit this air raid shelter. And everybody was, you know, at that point, we're running out of the house. And my mother said that she thought I died then because when she reached over to grab me to pull me out, I was as hard as a rock. She couldn't move it. And finally she was able to get me out. And then the whole family was able to get out, outside of the house at that point. During World War Two, we lived there because I was born in Manila, and we didn't leave until after the war in 1945, before we left.

Charles Brown [00:08:04] So I remember those things because it was out of fear, you know, it was out of fear. I remember that my grandmother would put these dark, I call them crepe paper around, some kind of construction paper around the lights so they couldn't see at night if you had the lights on. It would be difficult for the Japanese to be able to bomb, to do any bombing at night. So yeah, I remember that. I think most of it is out of fear. And the other thing is that I blocked out as much as I could. It was just too, too difficult. Had my father lived, I wouldn't have grown up as fast as I did. I, started working at a very young age. I had my first full time job besides delivering newspapers, you know, like most kids did. I worked in a printing office for \$0.25 an hour, and I worked 40 hours a week during the summer. And I worked all after school and the weekend. And I was in the seventh grade then. And that made it possible for me, save some money and bought my first motorcycle at 14. I can get a driver's license back there at that time, when you were 14. I think when I was growing up, I felt a big obligation to support the family because my mother received a small pension and Social Security, you know, and that would only go so far. And I took whatever money I had and I used to just give it to my mother all the time, and she would use it however she needed to use it. But it was just, it became a way of life.

Charles Brown [00:10:25] You know, you just learn at a young age that you have to do these things. My father knew that if we stayed in the Philippines after the war, things would be very, very hectic and very difficult. He told my mother if he didn't live through this war, he wanted her to take the kids and go to Kansas because he had a sister that was there, our aunt. And so she made the arrangements to have us go to Kansas. And we took the ship, the military ship when it was finally available. And we ended up in Seattle, Washington. And then it went to, I think it was Fort Lewis and Seattle. And then we were sent from Fort Lewis to Kansas, And we were going by train and my younger sister had developed pneumonia so bad that they had to take us off the train and put her in the hospital for a few days. And then when she was better, we went ahead and made the trip on to Kansas to live with our aunt. Well, speaking Spanish was not something that was too exciting when you're living in a little town like Kansas, you know, 2800 people. There were a lot of bigots. There's a lot of bigots. And people were just saying things and it was just, you were a second class citizen, or lower because you were one, born in the Philippines.

Two, your family spoke Spanish. So you were cast in a different light than other people that were there. That was, that was the greatest experience. It's something he deserved and never got the chance to see it happen for himself.

Charles Brown [00:13:14] And unfortunately, my mother never got to see it happen either. He received the Bronze Star. Also, the Purple Heart. But this is the culmination of everything that he did while he was in the service. Dad, I'm very proud of you for what you've done. I just wish you could have lived through the war, and not be punished like that.