

Transcript of Film Featuring Commander Charles House

Film produced in 1982

Transcribed by Professional Transcripts

(The dictation starts out mid sentence.)

0:00:00.1 Introduction of Commander House

Jess McElroy:with the Japanese all told. Right now he's down at Valley Center. Got a farm down there and is living the life of _____ (00:12.0) taking it real easy he says. He's not going to get excited about anything and sitting over there in the background he brought a friend of his, Bill Garlet (00:22.0) who was from Escondido and, from what I understand Bill has been doing a hell of a lot of studies on survival as a survivor. Maybe we can get him to talk when Commander House gets through. So, with that Doug, I'm going to turn it over to Commander House and I'll let him point out where he was picked up, where it all started, and the island that he was on.

0:00:59.0 Overview of the locations Commander House will speak about

Commander Charles House: I'm going to -- in talking I'll refer to Kiska which is just over the dateline here, and I'll refer to Kiska here, I'll refer to Attu, and I'll refer to Atka, and then I'll refer to Hakodate and Yokosuka, which is right down south of Yokohama here and Ofuna, and back to Yokohama and then later on Sendai. So, those are the places I'll touch as we go through. Last week -- last time I was here, they did ask me to go through just more or less my life before I got in the service and a little background, so I'll start with that.

0:02:09.6 Brief summary Commander House's life

Commander Charles House: I was born in Fruitland, Washington, in 1913 and we lived on a farm on the hillside out there and then later on we moved to Spokane and then I finished -- I went through -- to a church school, Seventh-Day Adventist church school and then later on, about the 9th grade I liked the public education, so I shifted over and went to Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane, and then I joined the Navy immediately after I got out, which was in 1933, and I stayed in the Navy then continuously until 1939, at which time I retired. Pretty soon I'll be retired longer than I was in. So, with that, I'll start out..... And to cut things short and cut everything to get in a time frame, we'll start right at Kiska.

0:03:01.9 Arriving in Kiska in May 1942 to monitor the weather

Commander Charles House: I arrived at Kiska on the 18th of May in 1942 and we were on the USS Williamson. That was an old destroyer that had been converted to a PBV tender and we pulled into Kiska and I looked up there. It was a nice green hill with

a lot of snow up in the hills beyond it and I thought, gee, that's a nice looking place and I figured that that was my home for the next three years, but things moved very fast. We moved in and there was already a weather station there. We had -- they had six men and a dog and they brought four more in and we had a hospital corpsman who was a surgical specialist, a cook and a couple of helpers, and we had three weathermen and three radiomen. It was our job to take weather reports every three hours and send back to Dutch Harbor, because as you look at the Pacific there it's a big ocean, the war was on, there was radio silence, so there were no weather reports and the weather moves from west in, usually west to east, especially the further north you get the more it moves west to east. So, the Chain was sticking out there and we controlled it so we were going to have a series of weather stations up and down the Chain there. So that's why we were there and.....

0:04:31.2 The Casco brought General Buckner to Kiska

Commander Charles House: So, we got settled in there and then a few days later the Casco came by. That was another PBY tender. They had taken a crew to Attu and they were going to put them ashore there, but it was too rough and there was no natural harbor that they could get in, so that crew was fortunate they didn't get put off. They had General Buckner aboard. He was a commanding general of Alaska. He came ashore and I toured the islands with him. I was a 1st Class Aerographer's Mate at the time, but I was in charge of the station. So I took him all over the island. He was looking for air bases and building sites and things of that sort, but in the meantime he was also kind of a gardener, a forester, and he was going to fly out trees and have the planes drop them and I was going to plant them up in the ravines and places where they wouldn't get blown out of there, and on Adak they planted a forest and they've got a pretty good forest coming in there now on Adak, which was a couple of hundred miles to the east of us.

0:05:41.9 Lieutenant Commander Russell and PBYs patrolling Kiska

Commander Charles House: The PBYs -- there was Lieutenant Commander Russell that came in. He was -- before he retired he was head of Bureau of Aeronautics and he was also Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for a few years before he retired, but he had these PBYs, he came in and he was watching out for the General's well being and he was -- I guess he knew more than we did because he was kind of skittish, and the Williamson skipper was kind of skittish. The Williamson put a signalman and a radioman up -- or quartermaster up on the peak and he told them to look out and if they saw anything they would stay with us, the people ashore and they'd get out of there. They didn't want to get caught in a bottled up harbor out there. Then Lieutenant Commander Russell was worried about the General. He didn't want to get -- be responsible for getting him captured in there, but they would patrol and they'd fly out early in the morning and come back in the evening and then we would fuel the planes for them. We had a punt and we had barrels of gas stacked up on the beaches and there and we would just -- we had a little outboard. We'd tow a barrel of gas out to the plane, set it up in right in the water and sit there and pump it in and use a chamois sponge up on top, so

we'd refuel the planes at night and then in the morning we could go to bed and they'd go out and fly for two or three days, but he wanted to get out of there.

0:07:34.6 Sighting of a Japanese plane flying over Kiska on May 24

Commander Charles House: He got the General out of there and he left and then we just started to settle down and on the 24th of May a Jap plane came over. Because there was a force around Midway and part of that force had come north and they were south of us and there was a Jap plane that came over and I looked at it and looked at the recognition and decided it was a type 97 and I coded up a message and reported to Dutch Harbor and they came back and said, "how high was it, how fast was it going, what was its course and speed?" So I sent all that back. And then they came back again and they said, "are you sure you saw an airplane?" I just thought the hell with that. I wouldn't even bother to answer that one. So, we always listened to KGO San Francisco and Tokyo Rose. We had good radios and we had different sets of coils we could put in and get about anything. So we could listen to Tokyo Rose and we were listening to KGO that night and on the strength of our plane sighting..... No, first time when we sent the plane in, the radioman wouldn't listen to us, you know. He knew that we were coming up every three hours. The rest of the time, we were just on the hook. So the radio operator says gee they want to come in. I said, well what can you do? He says, I can go to emergency 500 and put out a signal, so he went down to emergency 500 and Sitka answered him. So we gave the message, they sent it on to Dutch, and then they talked to us a few times, but that scared us and they told us to -- if the Japs come in, just go off up in the hills and then when they leave we'll resupply you.

0:09:30.0 Preparing for possible Japanese arrival on Kiska

Commander Charles House: So we had some tents. We put tents out, we put food out, we put some ammunition out, we put guns out. We put up one tent east of the camp and another one to the west of the camp and then I got the idea that maybe we'd better have some trenches around, so we dug some zig-zag trenches and why we did zig-zag was I'd seen pictures of people being strafed in straight trenches and I figured if you got a zig-zag you can move around and avoid being strafed. So we put the trenches out and on the hillside we let the bottom V drain because we had lots of rain up there. So we got busy and we put -- we got ready for it and then on the 3rd of June the radioman came in in the morning waking me up. He says, "attacked, attacked, attacked," and I said, "God where?" He says, "Dutch Harbor." Oh God, I said, "that's a thousand miles to the east of us." We don't want to worry too much about that, but we do worry because we were like a limb on a tree. If Dutch went, we were gone see, because we were dependent on them, and they attacked Dutch Harbor on the 3rd and 4th and boy for a couple of nights we stayed dressed and we were ready to go. We figured if they failed there they'd come back and move in.

0:11:01.9 Kiska was attacked on the 5th of June

Commander Charles House: The first night on the 5th of June we thought, well, they're not going to come in here, so we took off our clothes and went to bed and then about -- during the morning the guy in the bed above me jumped out and he was yelling and

hollering and I said, "Wimpy what's the matter?" He says, "God," he says, "I've got a bullet in my leg", he said. And God, I looked at the window and the panes of glass were falling out, and so I just pulled my pants on and I looked out the window and here was a whole bunch of landing craft coming up the harbor and the other weatherman turned the stove up and I grabbed all the ____ material, we threw it in there and I grabbed another jacket and a couple of blankets and we went outside and we decided we'd go evade the Japanese by going up the hill and getting away from them. Well, it was dawn and they had picked a perfect day, a smooth sea, but there were low clouds just a few hundred feet above us there, and we -- they would shoot at us. They saw us and they would shoot at us and so we were spreading out. We were spreading out along the line there and they'd see us running and they would train the machine guns on you and you could see the tracers. They'd kind of like go by you, under you, over you, and around you and you could duck them. And we were very fortunate. The tracer was a little higher than the black bullets. You could see the black bullets hitting the ground maybe 50 or 100 feet back, so they were out of range. If that thing had been in range, we'd have all been dead, see, because they were oh about a thousand feet away from us, see, but we were very fortunate there. And it wasn't long until we hit the -- we got into the cloud layer, so I took a breather there and I was alone. I looked around and I was alone and I thought, well, I'll go on up the hill. So I went on up the hill and got up near the top of the hill at the back of camp and I was scared and I had just climbed the hill in probably record time, and I thought I'd rest, but I laid down to rest and I heard a (knocking noise)..... I thought, there's somebody walking around here, and I put my ear down and I could hear and then I decided it was my heart. My heart was beating on the ground and I was picking it up. So, I relaxed a bit and it was overcast and cold, so I had these two old gray blankets and there was a lot of gray rocks, so I just curled up and I spent the day there. The clouds didn't break until afternoon. The clouds broke in the afternoon, but the harbor never really cleared. We just had breaks in the clouds. There were planes flying around and there was a lot of gunfire and there was a lot of racket going on all day, and this was June -- the 6th of June.

0:14:26.4 Searching for hidden food after being attacked

Commander Charles House: The days are long up there, like the sun shines from like 3:00 o'clock in the morning until 9:30 at night. So, I spent that long day, and as soon as it got dark I had stashed some food to the east of the camp about two miles. So I started walking over there and, see, I was getting thirsty and I'd hit a creek, I'd drink a bunch of water or I'd eat a bunch of snow, and I was hot in a hurry trying to get over there, and I threw up. It was the last food I had. I threw it out. I shouldn't have gotten so excited I guess. And I got over to where I thought the food was and I made three or four trips through there, this canyon, and I couldn't find it.

0:15:15.9 Reynard Cove and the stationed torpedo boat

Commander Charles House: It started to get light, so I moved on to the southeast and there was a little cove called Reynard Cove there and I went down to the water, got real close to the beach, and there was a creek and I was going to jump across the creek and I didn't jump right and I fell in up to about here and got all wet, so I pulled back up on the

beach there and then pretty soon the sun came out and I took my clothes off and I spread them all out to dry there. I was laying there on the bank sunning myself and a darn torpedo boat took a station right in front of me. He put anchors fore and aft and headed to sea and they were looking out to sea and I was right there in the grass behind them, you know, a couple of hundred feet away and I spent the day pinned down there, and that night I moved on up the hill. I went maybe over 12, 1500 feet up the mountain, about two-thirds of the way up the mountain and I could look over and I could see the outer harbor and Little Kiska Island, but I couldn't see the inner harbor nor -- there was a little ridge between our camp and where I was located, and I spent another six or seven days there and I would -- I started just nibbling, you know, and then after a few days I thought, God, I'm not eating much.

0:16:46.7 Hiding and surviving by eating tundra

Commander Charles House: I haven't had a bowel movement here, so I started eating. I just loaded up and just sat there and ate tundra all day. Then in the afternoon, God, I got sick and I felt like vomiting or had to take a bowel movement, one or the other. Pretty soon the bowel movement won out and I had -- I was just -- blood. It was just all grass and a bunch of blood, so right then I thought well, "God, I just had rough grass," so I thought," well, I'll just eat the bottom....." On the tundra grass, the bottom part is green and tender and also the tundra is a survival food and the roots are always good. Now the Aleuts eat the roots. They make soup out of it and eat it, but you can eat the bottom but don't eat the top. So I was eating that and I got through -- I went up there the 8th of June. I was on the hill. On the 8th of June there was an Air Force plane that came over and he spotted that the Japs were there and then on the 11th of June the PBYs came in from Atka. You see a tender had gone into Atka and then the PBYs would operate. They had about a couple hundred miles to come out there. So they came out and started making runs, but they would come right over where I was and all the ack-ack was coming up over there and all the fire was landing around me. I was kind of in a no man's land there, so I thought well I'd better get out of here and I was in plain sight of the harbor -- the outer harbor. They were mounting it and I kept a low profile during the day but that day I had to get up and take a crap that worried me because right -- they could see me, but I think there was so many Japs on the island; there was at least 1200 Jap soldiers there, so they weren't singling me out as anyone, didn't think I was -- no one came to investigate so I decided because of the ack-ack coming through there and because of being visible I'd better get out of there.

0:19:09.2 Moving from his hiding place to a cove at Conquest Point

Commander Charles House: So I went over the mountain and down the other side and there was a little cove. There was a place called Conquest Point and a little cove just before you go in. Well, the night I decided to move we had one of those hellish Aleutian storms. It was raining like hell all the way over and there was a little cove or it was a little -- there was a little cove or part of a cave on the side of this cove and I moved in there that night and then when the front passed through we got some snow showers in there. It was kind of a cold night, miserable, but I got out of there the next day and I ate some grass and there was a creek right there I could get water to drink and I decided I'd make up a little haystack to live in, so I just put a bunch of tundra down and

put a blanket down and put a bunch of more tundra and put another blanket and I crawled in that thing and it was pretty comfortable. It had to be because I stayed there another 38 or 40 days, and I made one mistake. I was -- I used green tundra and dry tundra and then when the next rainstorm came in the rain just came right down through the -- just followed the green grass down like tubes of water and I had another mess, so I had to dig that all out, dry it out, and then I gathered the dry tundra around the base of the plants and I made another bed and made another big stack and, boy, I could weather anything in there, but there wasn't -- there was -- the only activity I would see would be the PBYS coming over, the Zeros flying around. I saw no ships in the Bering Sea and there was -- I saw no Japanese and they didn't see me, but there was a hunting dog that came right up to me and there had to be a Jap close by, and he looked at me and sniffed and walked off, and I just dropped out of sight, dropped down in the grass, but I didn't see anyone. Another day a Zero came over the hill and he was firing and he went down and made some firing runs over the water and went back. First I thought he had seen me when he was shooting, but he hadn't, and I watched there..... One day there was a B-17 pilot who gave a nice show. He was up maybe 18, 20,000 feet and he had a nice _____ and he got over the island and he made a nice big circle and then he put an X in it, then he went over and made his bombing run. I thought that was pretty cute (laughter). One night there, boy, just like an earthquake the ground shook and they -- a submarine had gotten into the harbor on the other side and sunk a ship and then life went on and I was trying to project myself down the way that winter was coming and I couldn't stay there. This was July and August. It was summer. My hope was that they'd get out of there, but I saw that force coming in. It was pretty big.

0:22:36.0 Planning to surrender after 49 days of hiding

Commander Charles House: Along about the 24th of July when I was gathering my grass, I fainted. Now, I was getting pretty thin and now I look back, I did manage to stay 49 days and I had tundra grass, I had wild celery and I had angleworms and I had all kinds of fresh water down there. I had an old canvas helmet, you know, that goes over a hunting jacket, and I carried that full of water and just drank out of that during the day because I'd stay in my little pad out of sight there, but as I look back and I read about these people starving themselves to death over in Ireland, they'd last from 45 to 65 days. There's been seven or eight of them that just shut themselves off and died, but I don't know. I survived 49 days on it. So, after passing out I had a pencil and I put my name on my jacket so they knew who I was at least if they ever found me, and I decided that night that I would surrender the next day. I thought, well, how long can I last here, what is open? There wasn't much open, so I thought, well I'll surrender.

0:23:55.0 Surrendering to the Japanese

Commander Charles House: So I got a bunch of fresh tundra and at the crack of dawn the next day I started right up the hill and I was just going right over the hill to the old camp. It was about 5 miles over there. It was kind of a steep hill and I slipped and fell back down, rolled a ways, so then I had to go around the hill and over, but as I got near the top of the hill, here's a big Japanese antiaircraft gun, about a 5 or 6-inch gun. It was a millimeter type, but probably a 75 mm, somewhere in there, and it was a patchy fog

day. It would clear and then a patch of fog would go over. So when the fog would come I would walk toward the gun and when a clear spot would -- I'd just drop in the grass about 20 inches deep, and I got within about 50 feet of this gunning placement and they had it sandbagged and there was crew lolling around there. So, when a clear spot would come I thought, "well, I'll surrender", and you know you just don't know if you're going to surrender, or they're going to shoot you, or just what's going to happen. So I thought, "well, I ought to have a white flag and I thought well, gee," I thought I'll grab my underdrawers," so I reached in and I just ripped off a piece of my underdrawer, I don't know how white it was after a couple of months because I don't remember ever bothering to wash it, and I waved that and they -- a couple of people came out and they sort of picked me up, carried me back, you know, I was -- they -- each one got on each side of me and they carried me back, and they told me who to salute and all this. So we got back and there was some little Jap in charge of the gun. God, he had a wild disp -- wild temper and he barked at me a little bit, and then the B-17s were coming, so a couple of soldiers put their bayonets on and took me off to the side and we sat out there and the 17s went over and they shot at them. They didn't get anything. They went on over, made their runs and left, and after he secured the gun he come over and he says, "follow me," and the old guys put their bayonets on and, God, I didn't know what he was going to do with me, and we started walking.

0:26:21.3 Seeing the Japanese camp for the first time

Commander Charles House: Of course the further we walked the better I felt because I thought he might just take me out of the way and let me have it, but we broke the top of the ridge and I looked down to where our camp was. We had three buildings. There were about 24 buildings down there in 50 days. God, that thing had been built up. There was a harbor full of ships and there were a bunch of Zeros on floats along the bay and some of these four-engine Japanese bombers, you know, Mavis they called it. Mavis bomber. So they had quite a base there, and he took me down to the headquarters and he turned me in -- or he went in and talked to someone. There was an OD there. There was a headquarters there and they threw some straw sacks out and I sat down and, gee, they brought me out some soup and a bunch of crackers and I was eating and a whole line formed around me, 2 or 300 people, and they just sat there and looked out me and this circle would change. A guy would leave and some guy would step in, and they thought they had a monkey in a cage I guess.

0:27:37.3 Being cared for by the Japanese soldiers

Commander Charles House: Long about 5 o'clock they threw a bunch of grass sacks in our old power station, which was right back of their command headquarters and gave me a couple of blankets and said, "you stay in here tonight." The exec came out. There was a Japanese Navy captain; Kazuni (27:54) I think was his name. He was the exec. He turned out to be a pretty good friend of mine all the way through. He sort of looked out for me. During the night they'd come in and turn a flashlight in my eye about every 30 minutes to see if I was still there, wake me up, and then that was the last night they bothered me. The rest of the time, they didn't bother me and they kept me in there for three weeks. I could go out. There was a pond down below. I could go wash my clothes, wash myself, and wash my dishes, and they fed me three times a day. But I

stayed in there for three weeks and I -- there was always a crowd looking in my window when I was there. They'd come in and look in my window. A new ship would come in. The whole crew would come in and take a look at me.

0:28:46.0 Learning the status of his fellow servicemen

Commander Charles House: Well early in the game the doctor came in and he told me that he had taken the bullet out of Wimpy's leg and that he was all right and the people -- they caught two people the first morning. There was a battalion back of us and then they were running in the fog and ran right into them. They brought them down. They had to call them. The hospital corpsmen brought Wimpy in about the second day to get his leg taken care of and then by the ninth day they had nine men all in and they forgot about me. They knew I was out there and they figured that I was dead, so the doctor told me that all of them were all right and they were off to Japan and they were feeding me real good and there was a young enlisted Zero pilot. He would come in and talk to me every night, you know. He was teaching me the Japanese alphabet and Japanese, but I knew a little Japanese. I'd worked for a Jap as a young man. I worked for a Jap on a farm so I knew a few Jap cuss words and things and so he was teaching me Japanese, but one day he came in and he drew a picture and it was a couple of destroyers and he says, "your country's warship's right out there." That was in the evening and the next morning they were GQ all day and, gee, along about 11 o'clock in the morning I heard a bunch of rumbles out there and here the shells were just landing and they were just coming right down the line as the ships were moving by and they were within 15 feet of range. Boy they had that range right down and they made a running pass, and there was one Jap there who didn't like me but he was kind of a -- he was always around there somewhere. He worked as a servant over in the officer's quarters, but he was always heckling me, but he would jump in one hole and then he'd jump over in the other hole. When you get scared you like to jump, so he'd jump from hole to hole like a rabbit and I was looking out the back window and I was watching these shells fall and watching him jump and I was kind of laughing and he saw me laugh. The next time he saw me on a walk he come running up and pushed me off and the exec saw him and called him up and really dressed him out for it, you know, my old buddy.

0:31:12.1 A Japanese servant hid wine and liquor in the powerhouse building

Commander Charles House: Then the -- another fellow came in that was another pilot he'd been -- I mean another servant over there. He'd been a newspaper man in Tokyo and he got drafted and stuck up there and he hated it, and he would steal the wine and the liquor from the officer's mess and he was putting it up overhead of where I was there, so he'd come and open the window and he'd say, "no speak," and he'd crawl up and put his bottles up there, and he'd always bring me a goodie. He'd bring me some biscuits and one day had his pocket full of raw eggs, but when he crawled through the window they broke and he put his hands in and he held it out. He says, "for you," and I thanked him and didn't laugh. I'd have liked to. It was kind of funny. But he would always come in and say, no speak. Another time he came over in the evening and he said -- he says,

"House," he says, "I rove you." And he broke the whiskey out and he was going to sit there and we were going to get drunk but I thought I'd better watch that dude, so I was very careful with my drinking and he drank for two or three hours and then he left. But I didn't see him after we had a big air raid there later.

0:32:31.3 Commander House was put to work filling sandbags with the Japanese soldiers

Commander Charles House: We had PBY runs on us all along and after a couple of weeks they put me to work. I'd go to the sandbag and I was working with the Japanese coolies. We would fill these sandbags and they'd haul them up and they were putting them around the buildings up there and on the 13th of September.....

0:32:46.8 Surviving the September 13th air raid

Commander Charles House: They always told me that any time there was an air raid for me to go back into that powerhouse and stay on the bunk. That was where I supposed to be any time there was an air raid; go back in there. Well, I looked up there and that looked like a long ways away and the Japs were heading for a tunnel right there, so I followed the Japs in the tunnel and God, the ground rolled and rumbled and we got out of there and I was afraid it might cave in, see, in this old clay -- this old tunnel. But we crawled out and I looked and, God, I looked up there and the old powerhouse was gone. There was a bomb that landed right in the damn thing and they took out about ten buildings and they probably killed -- about 50 Japs got killed. See, they'd come in low, drop their bombs and strike, and this was P-38s and P-39s, and this was on about the -- this was the first run out of Adak. They had built that landing strip on Adak in record time, just a matter of a few weeks, and that was the first run, and there was -- the next day was a funeral and there was -- they brought dead in from the ships in the harbor. They had flag draped coffins and, gee, we stood at attention all day, you know. The Japs got more respect for the dead than the living, I believe. But all day long they were marching people up there and I was standing out there, standing at attention and watching, to see what was going on. It was kind of a nice day and I thought, God, if they come in today with another run like that they'd sure have a turkey shoot in there, but they didn't, and this was on the -- that big raid was on the..... Boy, I thought I had that here. Well, on the 13th of September, and then the 14th we had the funeral, and then the 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th I worked down on the beach again, and then the 19th the exec came around and he says, he says, "you go to Japan today." He says, "Go shave." I hadn't had a shave or haircut for about nine months, so I was kind of bushy. I said, "I don't have a razor," so he gave me a razor and I thought, "well should I give it back to him or keep it?" So I kept it, and in the meantime up there I always said "God helps those who help themselves and don't bite the hand that feeds you." I needed warm underwear and I'd see them out on the clothesline and I'd steal them at night, underwear, socks, T-shirts, and I got my stock of clothes up again.

0:35:53.9 Going to Japan via coal ship on September 19th

Commander Charles House: So, on the 19th we were going to Japan. He says, "you get ready to go." So I had some food in there -- I mean, not food, clothing. I had a sea

bag and they brought me back a bag of stuff. It was a bunch of the fellows' clothes. It wasn't all mine. A bunch of Navy clothes in a sea bag. So I had a sea bag and I put on an old Navy uniform and I walked down to the beach there and had been working with all of these old Japs. They were always waving goodbye to me and gave me a good sendoff, these Jap workmen I went by. I went aboard the ship. I went aboard the Lyons Maru. It was an old coal ship, four-hold coal ship. They also had the Natives from Attu. Attu was just to the west. The Japs invaded us on the 6th; they invaded them on the 7th, and they took 41, I think. There was a woman and child that died before they got to Kiska. They buried them at sea, so there were 39 on there. There were 39 and there was old -- the old chief on there was Hodikoff. So, during the day, I had the run of the ship and I had five toilets. I was chief head cleaner on there. Five toilets to clean up and I ate with the Japanese crew. The Aleuts stayed in the hole -- forward hole -- and they had their belongings and a lot of their food in there and the Japs, the only thing they gave them was a bucket of rice three times a day and they had their own salmon, and at night they would lock me down there with them. They'd close the hatch over and lock them down. So, we headed out of Kiska and headed for Japan on the 19th and they closed us in this hole at night and as we got out there a ways there was a pretty good storm coming and these old waves hit the bow. It just boomed up there. Old Chief Hodikoff said "It's the submarines out there." I said, "No, you'd be dead if that was a submarine." And then he pulled out a little flag and he said -- a little American flag -- he says, "If they sink us," he says, "I'll wave this and they can come over and pick me up," and I thought, "God, that's wishful thinking. How are they going to see you at night in a storm out here in the ocean," but, I would talk to the chief every evening and then during the day I'd go around and do my work. There was a guy who thought that I should do the skipper's laundry, so God I thought, "Well I'll have to, I'll do it but I'd get it back with him and I'd tear the corners and ruin everything; not too much, but I'd do my little bit of sabotage on him every day." We went straight west out of the Aleutians and we went in under the point of Kamchatka and went down west of the Kurils and we went in under Hokkaido Island.

0:38:48.8 The Aleuts were brought ashore at Hakodate

Commander Charles House: There's a city on the south part there in the harbor called Hakodate. They took the thirty-nine Aleuts off in Hakodate and they put them ashore and they told me they were going to work in a timber camp, but after the war I saw them and they said they worked in a clay pit where they hauled the clay out. Out of the 39 that went down there, there were 25 left to go back. About half of them died. There was one was a babe in arms there and he's now the chief of the Aleut tribe on Atka. They didn't resettle them at Adak -- Attu. They settled them back on Adak with another tribe. There wasn't enough of them for an economical unit out there, they said, but they've got their heart in Attu. They'd still like to get back there. They left them off and we went on south, but each night..... Oh, they unloaded the coal there in Hokkaido too as well and then we went on down empty to Japan, went into Yokosuka, which was a secret Naval base. It wasn't secret; it was always close to the Westerners, just south of Yokohama. We went into Yokohama and when the Aleuts were off they locked me in the chain anchor at night up there -- the chain locker at night, and during the day I'd go out and do all of my work and then I would sit around and talk with the crew and eat with the crew.

0:40:15.9 Blindfolded at Yokosuka and taken to Ofuna

Commander Charles House: We pulled in to Yokosuka and anchored and I looked the harbor over and after a while there was a Japanese chief petty officer that came over for me and he said he was going to take me away, and he said -- he says, "put on this blindfold." So I put it on and he says, "can you see" and I said, "no I can't see". He says, "Good." He says, "If you see, I shoot," he said. So he led me. We walked along the ship and I still had my bag of -- sea bag of clothes. I was carrying that and holding one hand and we got on the gangway and we walked the gangplank. We got into a motor launch, we puttered across the harbor and got out on the dock and we walked, and walked, and walked, and he led me on the streetcar. We got on the streetcar and he took my mask off. So here I am. I hadn't had a haircut for about nine months and I'm a monstrosity and I'm looking at them and they're looking at me. They were dressed in their native garb. The Japanese, as a patriotic gesture during the war, reverted to the old kimonos and the Japanese customs. They didn't like the Western clothes. They took me to Ofuna, which is -- Ofuna was the -- kind of the Hollywood of Japan, but off to the north of Ofuna there was a kind of a little volcano cone there with just one little.... You went in through a tunnel and we walked through the tunnel and went into this camp and walked in and, gee, here I saw our cook in there and I said, "Hey Mac, how are you?" He said, "Shhhh." God, I said to myself -- I thought to myself I wonder what gives here. They got to these guys. They put me in a room, closed the door and said you're in solitary confinement. Do not talk to anyone. So, that night they threw me in a lot of blankets and we had these tatamis, these Japanese mats on the floor. We had a man to a cell. There were 13 prisoners and 13 guards and this was strictly an interrogation camp. They brought us a little bowl of rice at night. I ate that and the next morning a whole bunch of -- reveille came. We got outside and we had to do a few laps around the compound and then we'd go through the Japanese physical exercise. They called it taiso. Tenko, taiso, and _____ (42:53). Every morning in Japan we had the three Ts. They kept us doing calisthenics, _____ and reveille. They'd all come together. We'd do that and then we'd just sit down and here's 12 Americans, I'm the 13th one and we're sitting there and looking at them you couldn't say a word to them.

0:43:18.0 Japanese interrogation of Commander House

Commander Charles House: Then, a day or so they'd come out and tap me and say follow me, and I went into an interrogation room and a little Jap was sitting there and he had a full samurai sword pointing at me and he said, "you are a pri -- you are not a prisoner of war." He says, "You are an enemy of Japan and we reserve the right to kill you at any time." Well, that's a sobering thought, and.... So he started and I just let him lead.... Oh, and we'd been told there, you know, name, rank and serial number and stand off. We had Commander Mayer off the Houston -- even though we didn't talk, we wrote to each other on toilet paper and we did whisper, so he said, talk because it's brutal but tell them more or tell them less, but remember what you tell them and tell them the same thing every time, but he said don't freeze up because you're going to get it. So, I just thought I'll follow this guy and he said, "where you from," and I said, "California." He said, "Los Angeles," and I said, "yes." I was stationed right here when the war started in North Island and then he said, "you're reserve," and I thought that

sounds good. I said, "yeah, I'm a reserve." Did you just get called up? Yeah, I just got called up, you know, and then he asked me when I went to Kiska and all that, and he asked me a few things and he said, that's all, and I never -- they never bothered me again, but really I didn't really have any tactical information. I hadn't been privileged to any, so they really didn't bother me, but I can give you an example of what some of those did encounter.

0:45:08.0 Beating the prisoners at the internment camp

Commander Charles House: There was an Australian Lieutenant there -- Naval Lieutenant -- and they pulled him in and they said draw the defenses of Sydney Harbor, so he drew the defenses of Sydney Harbor and then that night they made us all fall out and stand attention and they brought him out, and then the interrogators, they'd just come talk to him from Tokyo and leave. They had a Jap warrant officer in charge in camp. He said, he is naughty. He lied to us. We punish him. So then he told his two sailors to go ahead. They had green cherry limbs about this big around, about that long, one on each side. They started slugging him across the back and beating him up and down the back and shoulders and he fell down on the ground and they stomped him a while, and he passed out and they drug him back in his cell, and I had the cell next to him. That poor guy groaned all night. God, he was in pain and misery. The next morning I think the Japs figured they went a little too far and there was a doctor with him all day long -- a medical doctor in there all day with him. Then they started feeding him. Boy, he was getting trays of all nice kind of chow going in there for a whole week, and then he sort of recovered and then one evening they passed the word, we had to close our windows and our doors were locked. We'd close our windows and they took the poor guy out and they beat the hell out of him again out there, and they brought him in and he groaned all night again. But he survived it and later got out of that place. Then there was a PBV out of the South Pacific. They brought in a pilot, a mech, and a radioman off from it, and they brought them up and they told the mech to give him the dope on the gas tanks and he gave it to them and he drew them pictures and then they had the radar man draw the black boxes and then had the pilot draw the black boxes and the gas tanks and they didn't match. It was kind of bad, so they beat the hell out of them. I mean, they really let them have it, and then the next day they brought the pilot out again and they announced to us that he was an officer and he did a sloppy drawing, that officers had to do better drawings than enlisted men. So remember that if you ever get caught. You've got to do a better drawing (laughter). But, it went on like that and if -- no speaking. If they caught you whispering to somebody, they'd beat the hell out of you, like I was talking to one of the fellas from Kiska. We were just whispering and the guard saw us and, boy, he came over and he just started hitting me across the face and he had his watch here and he slugged me and it hit me right across the teeth and broke my front teeth out and I had my mouth full of crystal, and since I broke his watch he really got mad and he pummeled me for a while and I yelled and then he got my buddy and he started beating on him and we got back inside and my buddy said, "what's the matter, how come you hollered so quick?" He said, "he hit me 30 times before I'd let out a peep." Well, I said, "He didn't hit me that many times," so I -- but you were just easy. Then, from Ofuna there was always new people coming in so when the hotel was full someone would go out and you were always praying for your name and if there was a

phone call at night you could hear them talking down the line and you'd listen for -- the only way you could tell is your name, and we'd decide who was going to go get out of there. So, my name came. I went in there in October and I got out of there in late March. I went in in October and got out in March of '43. There was one poor fellow. He was a skipper on a submarine that got sunk in the Surigao (49:20) Straits. They kept him there the entire war and poor guy came back -- his wife lived here in _____ (49:29). She'd been -- she was remarried. His kids were in college and he went hunting and accidentally killed himself over in Arizona after the war dove hunting over here. That was Ofuna.

0:49:43.9 Work camp in Yokohama

Commander Charles House: Now I go into a work camp which is in Yokohama and it's right on the waterfront, but there was a shipyard across the dock from us -- Osana shipyard, and then about three miles away was Mitsubishi had a shipyard. So, Japanese mentality, we walked the three miles over there, marched us over there every morning and marched us back every night. We'd walk out to the shipyard. Of course I was a latecomer, but I went into camp to call the dispatch camp #1 Yokohama, and I walked in the camp and a guy says, "Hey, House, how are you?" God, I looked at the guy and I says, "God, I don't know you do I?" "Yeah," he says, "I'm Pete. Pete. Don't you remember me from Lakehurst?" He had been a radio operator back at Lakehurst on shore duty for three years back there. So, here was old Pete there and he had dysentery and, God, I didn't know the guy. He died two days later. So that kind of scared me.

0:50:49.0 Working at the shipyard in Yokohama

Commander Charles House: But then they said they'd send me to the shipyard and things were very structured there at the early part of the war, and I was assigned to the painting gang where we would scrape the double bottom, scrape the bottom of the ships and paint. Well, we didn't paint long. We wasted too much paint. We weren't economical. So all we did was scrape and scrape, and I scraped for about a year, but you didn't have to work too much, but in the winter the Japs would take the sunny side of the ship in the morning and in the afternoon they'd take the sunny side of the ship again. They'd always put us on the cold side or put us underneath or down in the double bottom. You'd get in the double bottoms and you'd just sit down there all day. At night we'd throw our tools in the water and they'd have new tools for us the next morning. On the ships we'd always do all the sabotage we could while working on a ship. You'd see a junction box all fixed up with little chicken tracks on cards. When no one was around we'd move the chicken tracks around on the different wires, so eventually when they fixed them up..... Later on we would sabotage by -- well, I changed jobs later on. I'll pick that up I guess when we get to it.

0:52:06.9 Contracting diphtheria while interned in Japan

Commander Charles House: But I worked there about a year and I got diphtheria and you couldn't -- to be sick in Japan you had to have a temperature of 104 degrees and be sick at night. If you were sick in the morning it didn't count. You had to be sick at night;

otherwise, you went to work. So I went to work and I thought I was pretty sick, so I told my Japanese boss I was sick and he took me up to the shipyard doctor and he looked at me and he says you have diphtheria, that's all, he says. "You've got diphtheria and that's it." So, I go back to the camp and I reported to sick call and this Jap commandant that ran the camp, he held sick call personally because I think he got so much for every man he provided for the work force, so he wanted to be up. So he got to me and he says, "What's your trouble?" He'd always say, "What's your trouble?" I said, "Diphtheria," and he jumps back about ten feet and he says, "I'm not a doctor." He says "You're excused." Then he didn't want anything to do with me and he put me over in an unoccupied room off of the end of the warehouse alone. He isolated me over there and, gee, I couldn't eat or anything. It just happened that a Red Cross man and a Japanese military doctor was inspecting the camp and this -- our commandant was bringing them through and they said, what's the matter with him, and he says, 'He's got diphtheria.'" This Jap doctor told him, he should be in the hospital. So, God, he called the medical sergeant, he came over and put a mask on me and he says, "Follow me," and we got out and walked over town and got on a streetcar and rode up to Tokyo and got on another streetcar and rode to the end of the line, got on a bus, and we got way out in the west side of Tokyo and went into a Japanese Army hospital. Gee, they had cute nurses and beds and white sheets. First bed I'd had for a couple of years. Good food. So the doctor -- every time there's a new person, all of them want to know where did our great forces capture you, you know? Where did you get captured? I told him Kiska. Well, this was just after the massacre on Attu and once I said Kiska he was mad and he quit talking, he gave me a shot, he took a smear of my throat every day and when I was negative, back to work. Boy he got me out of there quick. You could just feel this old boy tighten up and get rid of me.

0:54:55.0 Returning to camp to work after being hospitalized for diphtheria

Commander Charles House: So I go back to the camp and I'm pretty thin, so they decided that I should work in the kitchen instead of going out to work in the shipyard, and so I'd work in the kitchen and eat. In the afternoon I was taking a sunbath one day and I couldn't get up. I was getting paralyzed. I was getting post diphtheria paralysis from this poison out of this diphtheria -- all of this poison that went through my body, and gee, I got so that I couldn't walk. My hands felt like they were all tight and I could look at them. My eyes wouldn't focus. I was just -- the only thing I had was distant vision, and they were -- they started giving me vitamin injections and they had milk for me and they were giving me lots of pills. They kept me there for a week or two and I kept getting thinner and thinner and they put the death watch -- they put an orderly on with me all night for a week or two there and then I started to come out of it. I could feel feeling coming back to my arms and legs, so one night I thought I'm not going to let them know I'm well, but I'm going to do this night when it's dark with no Japs around, so I stood up and I fell down and I just got to thinking if I looked at myself if somebody had a skeleton hanging up in the closet and cut the string, there's a pile of bones down there on the deck and that's me because they weighed me at one time there and I was about 82 pounds along about this time.

0:56:41.6 Shipped to Shinagawa

Commander Charles House: Then they shipped me over to Shinagawa. They decided they weren't going to do any good for me. I was getting better and didn't tell them, but they shipped me up to Shinagawa, which is an outskirts of Tokyo, just right up the bay and it's..... (Pause) You were given pretty good food there, and as I got better I started helping out. I'd wash other patient's food and then they made me an orderly and they kept me there for the full year, but the Japs wanted to get me back to work and then they'd tell the Japs I had dysentery. They would say, "He's got dysentery now; he can't go back." But they were -- they wanted to get me out of there. I was too healthy to be running around. They wanted me out working, so the doctor told me, he says, "I can't keep you here any longer." He says, "I'm going to have to send you back."

0:57:40.0 Returning to the Yokohama shipyard

Commander Charles House: So he sent me back to Yokohama and back to the shipyard, but by this time the structure had all gone, and I figured that there was a kind of a labor market. I didn't want to go back to the paint job, so I just went out with the new people. You know, if I'd said I worked in the paint gang, I'd just go back to the paint gang. But I went out to the shipyard and said new man, just got captured, looking for assignment, and an old guy came up there and he picked me out to work in his group and we called him "Old No Speak". All he would do was point and he had the job of picking up nuts and bolts after they'd -- the bolt was placed on the ship and then they'd knock the bolts out and drop them on the deck and in the ship and put rivets in. So we'd pick them up and put them in barrels. Well, Old No Speak would come in the morning, come with me, never say a word. We'd walk around by some ship and he'd sit down. We'd sit down for two or three hours and jabber away and then we'd go around and we had little gallon buckets. We'd go pick up a gallon bucket of nuts and bolts and put them in the barrel and then we'd go sit down again. Then he'd send us to lunch and he'd come and get us and at night we'd -- in the afternoon we'd pick up another barrel of -- bucket of bolts and we'd just horse around.

0:58:57.3 Stealing items and bartering with the Japanese

Commander Charles House: He was a pretty nice guy to work for, but I thought I'd better move around a little bit so I just went over to the labor market and put myself up again and I got off with a guy who was picking up oxygen acetylene bottles and we'd get in -- he had a little shack on the dry dock. He had tea cooking there and he had the morning paper and he'd read us the morning paper every morning. About 10 o'clock we'd go out and get a cart full of oxygen bottles, you know. We had harnesses and ropes and we'd pull this cart around and we'd have to read the numbers off to him and put them on. We'd get a cart every morning and afternoon and then we'd go back to the dock there and I worked for him a few months and I heard about a real good job. This was -- they called this _____ (59:42). They were moving stuff out of the warehouses into other warehouses and out in the country. They were tearing every other warehouse down and putting this stuff out in the country and putting canvases over it. So, this was mostly British, so I just went to work with that gang and, "God, they -- you're not to work here. You don't belong here. Get out of here." Boy, just like I had leprosy. They wouldn't let me in there, but I went anyway, and I moved in with them and that was a

pretty good job. God, we'd -- sometimes we'd move strawberries, frozen strawberries, sugar. We'd get a sack of -- one day we picked up a sack of sugar and we had a deal working out. We'd get the sugar and our people from camp would bring our lunch out about 11 o'clock, unload it, and then they'd take the empty rice boxes back to camp about 1:30. So, at 1:30 we'd have a stack of sugar on a cart and we'd meet the cart and we'd put it on and they'd take it back to the camp and a couple of weeks later some guy brought me a little cake one night. That was my share out of that sack of sugar that four or five of us stole. So -- and then we could get stuff and trade to the Japs, you know, get leather belting and they'd want to make a belt out of it and we'd trade them..... Here would be a bunch of prisoners trading the Japs their gear for money -- well, not money -- cigarettes or rice was the only thing we traded for. I stayed there until we left the shipyard and the shipyard was -- I was in Yokohama -- we were bombed about -- well, it was about 120 days there. There were a couple of good ones there.

1:01:29.6 Bombing of Yokohama in February

Commander Charles House: They -- the Navy came in in February and bombed the hell out of Yokohama and the area and then the Japs -- the B-29s came over and bombed Yokohama and they put the shipyard out of commission. They quit making ships. Like the Japs they had to _____ (1:01:47) for some ships and they took an acetylene torch, they cut them up and started -- threw them back on -- the just cut them up and I said, "Honcho, I said, that's good. You're going to make three ships now instead of one." I said, "That's sure good," you know. I was kidding, and he didn't know whether to laugh or not. He says, "Yeah, we make three ships now instead of one." But they quit making ships and we were in the way and we were loading stuff to go out and we'd work on a contract. They'd tell us to load so much and we'd tell the Japs, we'll load one truck in the morning and one truck in the afternoon, and they'd push us and we wouldn't load anything. They'd just shout and push you, instead of just beating us. I don't know how come they didn't or..... But we'd get away with it. We'd say, you give us a box of soap a piece and we'll load two trucks. So he gave us all a box of soap. Well, first we loaded two trucks, see, and then no soap, so we kind of struck a little bit and we got our soap, but we only worked a few days and they'd pull us out of the shipyard. We were a liability. We went out to West Yokohama and we were tearing up a golf course out there making a turnip patch for them and in a few days out there they moved us out.

1:03:00.9 Moving to Shinagawa to work at a steel mill and experiencing a raid on April 25, 1945

Commander Charles House: They moved us out of Yokohama and moved us to Shinagawa, which is way up on the northeast coast of Japan. There was a steel mill up there. They were putting us in there to work. In Yokohama we had, let's see, we had a good raid on, oh about April 25, 1945. The B-17s first they came in at about 40,000 feet; then they dropped down to about 20, and this night they were coming right over the railroad track at 6000 feet, just right there. They'd come in just at dark and it was just one behind the other, just about three minutes apart. A search light would get one, he'd follow him through, he'd go right back, pick up another and follow him through and there was a shipyard right by us, a shipyard right down there. They would shoot at them with

ack-ack. They would shoot at them with rifles, pistols, everything else, and they shot down 11. Three of them crashed right around us that night. Then the planes, the Zeros, would come up and the plane -- the B-29, he was in the search light, the Zero gets right up behind him and he sprays bullets in the gas tank, catches him on fire, and then the fire comes out and down they come. Guys jump out with their parachutes on fire. It was a hell of a mess around there. One took a hit right on the fuselage and the wings just exploded. The wings went off and the fuselage just came down like a lead bullet. It was a pretty rough night. This raid went on until about 3 in the morning, but at 11 o'clock the Japanese ran out of gas, ran out of bullets, and they had a straight run the rest of the night. But they burned out about 54 square miles of Tokyo. It was clear weather, a strong northwest wind, and dry. We had a Japanese interpreter who had been an importer in Baltimore of sporting goods for 40 years and he was back working for the Japanese as an interpreter and he was a son of a gun. He hated us and he liked the Japs and you couldn't trust him and he spoke English like we do and you couldn't tell it was a Jap unless you looked at him. The other Japs, you'd hear a Jap open his mouth you knew it was a Jap. So he could sneak up on us. But he took us out to the shipyard and we were to get wood and went out -- he didn't want to take our cart out so we rode the streetcar. He'd been -- he was a fire warden in Tokyo and he'd spent two days up there on the job. We rode the streetcar out and we couldn't find the cart out in the yard. We rode the streetcar back and on the way back there were some P-38s that came in from -- I think they were coming off of Okinawa then. They would accompany the raid in and we were on the streetcar and we jumped off and got in a trench alongside and we were sitting in the trench and the old Jap said, "these damn dumb Japs don't know when they're licked." He'd given up on them at this point. That raid broke his back. He knew that Japan didn't have a chance, but up until that time he'd been all for it.

1:06:18.5 Riding a train to Kamaishi

Commander Charles House: Now we go up to Kamaishi, which is on the northeast side, and a steel mill up there. We got on a train in Yokohama and we got up to Tokyo about midnight, sat there for an hour or two right there on the switching lines right in Tokyo and I always felt uncomfortable because so many of the raids came over Tokyo at midnight during the night, but we finally got out of there and then went on up the central valley. There's a central valley on the island. We went up the central valley all day and that evening we took a spur line and headed east and the next morning we got over to Kamaishi on a small railroad. We went into a prison camp where there were a couple of hundred Dutch, and by this time we only had a couple of hundred left, see, out of 500 we were down to about 200 because on the first -- the second winter of the war I looked, you know, and here we were dying three a day. Three a day is 90 a month and there wasn't enough to see the winter out, so I thought of other things. I -- you know, no use to dwell on those things.

1:07:41.6 Working at the steel mill in Kamaishi

Commander Charles House: So now we're up at Kamaishi in a steel mill and these Dutchmen were a funny lot. They were sullen and just plod around and just plug away all day and we had gotten so that we worked with the Japs on a contract basis and so we started there and we got to a contract. Within a couple of weeks or two we'd get to a

contract base. Now, I was working in a place called Hakusan (1:08:14). That was the curing mill where they put steel in these great big ovens and they'd have to take the bricks out every once in a while and realign them. So, after the ovens would cool we'd have to go in and knock the bricks out and we'd do a contract. We'd do an oven a day. They'd want you to..... So, we told our boss when the Japanese soldiers come around you had a Home Guard guard and you had a Japanese boss and then there were soldiers patrolling the shipyard all the time. Well, when the soldiers would come around we'd say, we'll work like hell and make you look good, but when the soldier is gone we're going to take it easy, but we'll just do so much work every day. We could do that and get away with it. We did that for cleaning out the ovens and we also did it for when the ovens got blown up we also did it for loading steel bars. We'd load so many steel bars a day. But there we had two interesting incidents there. A B-29 came over. We'd been kind of out of range for a long time. We got so they were -- every day we saw them in Yokohama-Tokyo area.

1:09:37.9 Attacks in Kamaishi

Commander Charles House: The B-29 came over and then a few days early morning the fighter planes and the carriers just scooting all over the place. There was an ack-ack gun. We were right on the waterfront. There was a harbor there, a river coming down, the steel mill just back up the canyon from us toward the town, the steel mill in town just north of us, and this little harbor out there. There was this Japanese antiaircraft gun. The fighters took that out and they were strafing everything in there and they strafed until noon. When the strafing let up, we left our camp and they took us right out to the steel mill. We told this Jap, we said, "Take us up in the hills. This is not safe down here. Take us up....." But he wouldn't. He took us down and we were under a rolling mill that had a three-foot steel bed and it was on about seven feet of concrete and it had some stairs. We went down in there and we were sitting down in there and pretty soon an old guy says, "_____" (1:10:49) and there were three battleships out there, see, and this old Jap he just "Oohh" (making a heavy sigh sound) and they started shooting. They set up a triangle course just outside the harbor and they'd shoot across the straight run, then they'd go this way, then they'd just keep going around this little tight circle out there and they'd start at the beach and they'd just put a 16-inch shell in about every 10 square feet of that valley all the way through, and we're sitting up in about the middle of it. But there were some other ships lobbing shells in and there were planes up there directing fire and there was all kinds of activity, but there was always a long one, so every once in a while we'd get a big one. Then when they got right overhead, boy, it was just like you were the ship. Everything was rocking and rolling and it was just "psh psh" (swishing sound). The air would -- they'd hit right on top of this thing and this 16-inch shell would explode and the air would come down in and then would go out and, boy, just..... One guy said my pants were going up and down like window blinds, and it was a pretty rough afternoon. And then it quieted down about 5 o'clock and we got out.

1:12:09.9 The aftermath of the attacks around camp and additional attacks

Commander Charles House: I looked around and, boy, things were a shambles. It looked worse than Beirut over there I'm sure. I looked around and here's duds -- 16-inch

duds laying all over the place and we're walking around those things and we walked back to the camp and they kind of overshot the camp and there was a 16-inch shell that hit one end and killed the Japs' pig so they cooked him for supper and so the next morning we went out and, God, they gave us shovels and we marched up to this dud and they "huh, huh" (makes sound) just yelling, just squawking at us and one guy said he didn't understand and they hit him alongside the head with a shovel. So we were to dig a hole alongside that dud. We got the hole dug and then they said push it in and, God, we got on that thing and I just didn't know just what was going to happen and we'd buried 15 or 20 of those things around there and none of them exploded. They survived the impact and they survived this little thing, but when they went off around there sometimes if they hit soft earth they'd penetrate and make a great big hole. Sometimes if they hit a girder going into the building it was enough to set them off and they would get inside and explode in the air and you'd look up in the buildings and they looked like sieves. They were just full of holes. That place was a mess and the next day it was raining, so that was the end of that raid and then we buried for a couple of days and then we started digging out -- they brought out the maps and found where the water mains were running and where shells landed near the water mains the water mains would look like ribbons like this. They'd be open. So, we'd dig that out and then the Japs would pound them together and weld them up and we'd cover them up. I thought it was kind of dumb. I'd left them open, you know, to see if they'd leak but the Japs sealed them up and we covered them up and they started an old electric generator there. They had one crew out digging water mains and another crew stringing some wires, getting electricity around, and there was a power generator there, an old one, and they started that up and they were belching smoke. A B-29 came over to see -- take pictures to see how things were and they saw that smoke, so, God, they brought the battleships back and we went through all that again. Strafing, five hours of shelling. The next day after the shelling, another beautiful day, another day of strafing and shelling -- strafing and bombing. But toward the afternoon on the second day..... Well, the second shelling, they knocked out our camp and we had no place to stay and there was a gravel pit alongside the steel mill and they marched us over to the gravel pit and he put a couple of machine guns over here and a couple of machine guns over here, and this old commandant was pretty good at giving orders. He said, "This is your camp. You walk outside those lines, we shoot." Nobody walked outside the line. Everyone got the word.

1:15:54.9 Hiding as the attacks continued

Commander Charles House: The next morning we got up and the fighters were in off the carriers just a zipping all over the place and there was a train about halfway out of the tunnel, so we thought that was a pretty good tunnel. We'd go in under the wheels and walk in there and run back in there every time the fighter would come over. About 3 o'clock in the afternoon things would let up and they -- there was an old gymnasium at the back of the hospital and it was -- had one side burned up -- blown out. It had three sides out. So there were four or five of us in there and we had these old Japanese hokis, an old broom made out of straw. We were sweeping that thing out and, God, here come a dive bomber in there and he was just really pouring it on and he dropped a big one right on the bridge outside. I looked up and the air was just full of big boulders and pieces of concrete and they were just coming through and I got down on the floor trying to dig a hole in there and one of these guys was an American Marine. He was running

across there and he intercepted one of these things right on the head. It just pinned him right down on the deck and smashed him right in there, see. God, we -- I got out of there and started running and I just panicked and I ran like hell until I couldn't run anymore and then I'd sit down and collected myself and thought well, hell, I can go back over to the gravel pit. I went over to the gravel pit and then we went on back over there and spent the night. The Japs told us that there were about 2500 American ships out in the Pacific and they were getting offshore and we'd been shelled twice and I thought, God, they're softening us up. They're going to come in here. So, during the night somebody passed the word the Americans are coming and we scattered. We got out of there because I didn't want to get caught in any town. I wanted to get out in the woods and everybody else. So we got off to the hills and we stayed up in the hills all day. About 5 o'clock in the afternoon the Japs came after us. They were up there yelling, "Horyo, Horyo." That's, "Prisoners, come on in." So we went on back and we were still - they still had us working out digging for these steel pipes and along about the 14th of August we were digging for steel pipe and my buddy from Kiska come in and I was napping after lunch. I was taking a little nap and he says, "God," he says, "Something's happened. Something big has happened." He said, "Either the war is over or the Emperor is dead," he says. The Japs all bowed -- lined up and they bowed toward Tokyo. They'd do a Tokyo _____ (1:18:49) 90-degree bow for the Emperor. They all bowed to the Emperor and they cried and he said, "Boy," he said, "It's big." Come 1 o'clock, no word, nothing. Two o'clock, 3 o'clock, boy, rumors flying.

1:19:10.4 Commander House was sent on a train out of Kamaishi after Japan surrendered

Commander Charles House: Gee, this commandant came in pretty soon and he says "There's a train out front. It leaves in ten minutes. Be on board." That sounds good. In ten minutes we left and we headed toward the hills. We headed inland again up the hills. It was an old narrow gauge woodburning job and we stopped at a village and they were getting a little more water and wood up there and someone blew the air raid sirens in town. The sirens started wailing and the lights -- somebody just -- in that town they just pulled the switch. Everything went black. We sat there two or three hours and nothing happened. Finally they turned the lights on and about midnight we got up to a little town in the mountains and they said everybody out and we walked downtown and they walked us into an old Japanese theater and they would all sit on the floor and there are steps like this down and we just slept on the steps there that night. The next day they put us into another prison camp next door and they worked in a mine up there, but that was a funny bunch. They were all beaten down. The Japs had those guys beaten down. There was no spirit in them. They were just doing what the Japs were saying. They weren't being too independent, but our crew, we had a British Army Captain and an American Army Captain as our senior officers and they really kept things going, you know. They put us in with this group and we wanted to move around and get some chow and we wanted to get a better place to live, so he told this guy, "Take us back down to Kamaishi and put us up down there." So, they decided we'd go back down but we stayed there two or three days and in those days the fighters found us up there.

1:21:10.0 Placing POW signs on roofs of buildings so supplies could be delivered

Commander Charles House: First they broadcast over the radio that everyone was supposed to put a sign on the roof in yellow letters saying POW and it was supposed to be so big and everything, so I was supposed to help paint this sign up there and we were up hanging the sign and we painted it and the old Jap commandant measured it and it wasn't big enough, so then we had to put an extension on the roof and make it a little bigger to make him happy. Boy, he was really obeying orders to the letter. I would've been satisfied with a small sign but he was -- he knew when somebody told him to do something he'd better do it right. So we put it on and the guy dropped a little roll of stuff in there and said he was off one of the carriers and they'd been at sea a couple of months and didn't have anything and if we needed food put out this flag, if we needed clothes put out this flag. If we needed medicine put out this flag. So, hell, they talked and they said, "Hell, we'll put them all out." So they put them all out. Then the B-29s came over to deliver. The B-29s came over and they've got two 50-gallon drums riveted and welded together, tied on a parachute and it's mountainous country so they're coming in from the west and they're coming down those valleys there at low speed full bore and they dropped a red chute and we didn't know it but that meant get the hell out of there. Then they started dropping parachutes full of food and then they finally dropped the green chute and they'd leave. Well, the first one -- here's one of our guys..... A barrel of chow that fell off this parachute smacked him. He'd sat there and starved for four years and here he goes. He came out of the Philippines, came up here and starved and here he gets killed by a barrel of chow after four years of prison camp, see. A lot of Japs got killed by chow, but they made several drops. Then they decided we should go up and pick it up, so we picked up a couple of Jap coolies to carry and we went up in the hills and we'd find a drop and, gosh, here it was C-rations. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I ate a breakfast and I ate a lunch and I ate a dinner. See, I ate a breakfast, lunch, and a dinner, and breakfast, lunch, and a dinner. Then I started to eat some chocolate bars and then said, "God, I'm sick," you know. Pretty soon it all came up. So, I went over to a creek and I washed all up and went back and ate another breakfast and lunch and stopped. Then we picked up the chow and had the Jap pack it back. We carried in food for a couple of days.

1:24:05.3 Moving back to the old camp in Kamaishi

Commander Charles House: Then we got a train up there and they moved us back down to our old body camp. We got back down, we were on the waterfront in Kamaishi there and -- just our crowd. The other crowd stayed up there. They were all beaten down. The commandant was telling them what to do. This British officer told me that -- told the Jap, he says, "Give me your sword." He says, "I don't know if I'm going to kill you with it or keep it for a souvenir" (laughter), but he stayed with us, that old Jap, and we got him a nice long prison term after war. They sent us, God, they sent us affidavits on that guy for two or three years before his trial was over, of different things that he had done. But he stayed with us until the Americans arrived there. Now, we moved on back to Kamaishi. We brought all of our food back with us and we moved into that -- the Army barracks up on that point where that gun had been knocked out and there were two cars in town. There was a black Buick and a black LaSalle and one of the Army captains -- these Army captains they got those two cars and one of them put up a British flag on one and the other guy got an American flag on his and they'd drive around town. We'd

see a Jap coming down the street with his old oxen. We'd unhitch it and take it in and have our butcher cook it up. Somewhere they found a bakery and they delivered bread to us every day and we had our chow and we'd walk out in the country and talk to Japs and..... A guy and my buddy went out and we stopped at this Jap family and he had some apples ripe. We ate some apples and he asked if we liked chicken. He caught a chicken and fried it for us. We talked to him and he had a son killed in the war. We talked to the old guy a while and then went back to camp. We gave him an overcoat. We figured we'd be out of there and he was real happy for something to keep warm in the coming winter. We'd go to town and get haircuts. I went to the post office. I wrote a letter and took it up to the post office and asked him to mail it and he mailed it and I beat it home. The Navy sent a telegram that I'd be repatriated. I beat that home. It all arrived home after I did. A minesweeper came in the harbor up there at Kamaishi and swept the mines out and the next day a hospital ship came in and two destroyers came in and the Japs put a little pagoda down on the dock and the mayor put on his top hat and coat and they had all these dignitaries that were on the dock. There was some old commodore in charge of the force that came in. He got on the bullhorn and we were just across the dock. He says, "Get that crap out of the way." He says, "We're not talking to you damn Japs." He says, "Get that stuff out of the way" (laughter). He says, "Where's the prisoners?" We were over there. They wanted us all to ride ambulances back and then the photography..... There were a bunch of photographers and they wanted the sick people and they finally found a few there that -- because we'd been eating pretty good for months, see, from the 14th of August until the 15th of September when they picked us up.

1:27:29.9 Commander House headed home

Commander Charles House: They took us aboard the ship and deloused us and they'd dropped us nice new Army fatigue clothes. We had all those and they threw them overboard. When we got on the ship they gave us dungarees and got started again, but they only gave us soup on that vessel there. They wouldn't give us anything but soup. Then they put us on their destroyers and we headed back to Yokohama, then from Yokohama we got in an APA and rode into Guam. And from Guam, we stayed a couple of weeks and they ran us through a hospital and gave us a lot of tests, told us not to eat. They were all sitting there eating and told us not to, but we were eating as we please. They would take an LST and put a few soup kitchens on and put 500 prisoners on it, say Frisco and, God, that's..... And then every night there were a few that would get on a C-45. I was always lucky all the way through the war. I was very lucky. So I got to ride a C-54 back and I got back in just a few days. I got back to Frisco and I didn't have any money and I wanted to call my wife and I went to the Red Cross and they were giving out to corpsmen and patients in there money to phone home, but they wouldn't give us any. But somehow I sort of told them off and they finally gave me enough to make a phone call, so I called my wife and I said I'll be in Frisco tomorrow. Then I got a flight to Frisco, went to Oak Knoll and I called her from there and I got a flight to, well, they told me I had a flight to Rice Field (1:29:06) out of..... But this guy decided that he wanted to go to Mines Field instead of Rice Field after he got down there, so he landed in Mines Field and my wife was sitting over in Rice Field, so I just got out and hitchhiked over.

The first guy to pick me up, I told him my story and he said, "I'll take you over." So I got over there and I met my wife there after four years.

1:29:30.5 Questions from the audience for Commander House

Commander Charles House: Now, if you have any questions on anything you want, on survival, go ahead and be free to ask them, or anything, I'll answer any kind of questions. I've talked rather fast. He told me I had until 11:30. I've talked rather fast. The other day I talked two hours and I thought I'd better not talk that slow today, so any questions you have you want answered I'll try to answer them.

Male #1: How many total prisoners were with you working down in the shipyard.....

1:29:58.5 High mortality rate in the internment camps

Commander Charles House: Okay, when I went in there, there were 500 in that group there and this was British from Singapore, Australians from a captured ship, and then most of the people from the Philippines and about four of us from Kiska were in there and there were -- that first winter we lost about 100 of that bunch and then we went north and we lost about 15 to 20 every time we got shelled there. Mortality was pretty high in the shelling. There was one trench -- an air raid trench that had been shored up and covered over with earth and shells got it. There were 500 Japanese girls working in there. They were working. They had multiple school girls that would come out there in the afternoons and go to work. They were in this trench. There was 500 of them in there. They got burned and people got killed in these shells. The shell would go off close to them and they would be losing blood out their mouth and they would die and it would pop their ears and things like that. When the shells would go off close to you it was pretty rough. It'd just tear your clothes off. The mortality was pretty high in there and the people who died, want to die. Now those people that got killed though, they'd been surviving pretty long, but a lot of people died early. They just laid down and died. A guy from Indonesia would tell you that he jumped a hole last night and wasn't feeling good. The next morning he was -- he just laid down and died. He didn't go to sleep. He just laid down and died. He couldn't put up with it, and a lot of people did that. A lot of them scrounged.

Male #2: So were there mostly Americans there when you were captured?

Commander Charles House: When I was captured?

Male #2: I mean, in that camp was it mostly Americans?

Commander Charles House: Oh yeah, there was mostly Americans. I'd say that there was probably 150 British and 350 Americans in there.

Male #3: Were the deaths mostly from starvation?

1:32:11.0 Survival in a prisoner camp

Commander Charles House: Well, no, usually you were starved. You were pretty well down there probably -- I'd probably had a working weight of about 115 pounds and that seemed to be what you would stay on the amount of rice they were giving you. They kept you alive. So, if you got sick, it was awful easy to go off into something. I don't know how I survived those things. When I needed intravenous they were feeding me glucose when I couldn't eat. I don't know how come I got glucose, but somebody got me glucose, so I figured it was somebody up above. You asked me, how you -- what you think about and what you do in those periods. Gee, every day, every night I would sort of have a long prayer. I'd gone into a church school. I was pretty religious at one time. I sort of drifted away from it. I had gotten real religious in the prison camp and I'd have a long talk at night, you know. It sort of relieved my mind and I could think of my family and just run things over and have a good talk and that helped me, and then just..... Once I had gone in and I thought, well, or I knew that we were putting all of our effort into European Theatre and that had to be the one first -- they were just putting the Japs on hold. They weren't going to do anything with them and we were just sitting there being held and we just had to survive and I figured three years and I was over there just three years. I got there in October and I got out in September three years later, out of Japan. But I knew it was going to be that long. I heard people saying, well, they're going to get sick and they're going to send the Gripsholm over for them. That was a ship that brought the Japanese diplomats back and took the American diplomats out. They said they were going to send those in and pick them up, but I didn't entertain any thoughts like that. We were just going to have to tough it out and get by. So, you sort of take an idea how far down the line it's going to be, and I'd look ahead. I was always glad to see spring come and I hated to see winter come because things were tough.

1:34:20.9 Learning to breath to warm the bed in the cold

Commander Charles House: A few little other things there that -- the third year there I sort of -- you know people that get cold at night, you know you can pull under the blanket and sit there and suffocate, you know, right under the darn thing, you know, breathe that old air all night. So I just started doing this (demonstrating) and I got so I could unconsciously sleep and take in the air in my nose and let it out of my mouth and that nice warm air would go out of my blanket and I crawl in bed on a cold night now and I just put the blanket up there and sit there five minutes and the bed is warm and then go to sleep because I like a cold bedroom. So, it's a way to keep warm. It's just -- we started doing that. It took me a couple of years to figure that out, but I just tried it. I couldn't keep my head under; you'd get a headache if you sleep under there because you're burning the oxygen up.

Male #4: You talk about how you had resisted the Japs as far as you pretty much told them what kind of work you were going to do and when you were going to do it?

1:35:24.4 Negotiating with the Japanese over working

Commander Charles House: Yeah, I don't know how we got away with it.

Male #4: Yeah, that's what I was wondering. How.....

Commander Charles House: You always smiled and joked and kind of kid them along.

Male #4: Did you refuse -- did they ever try to make you do something and then you just refused to do it?

Commander Charles House: Not -- you always laugh just like I'm doing with you now. I'm laughing and I'm being real nice, see. I wouldn't just get all the way down there, but you just keep after them and it depends on who you told, like, I had one guy who was..... We usually had four people with us. There would be 50 of us in a work group. Two of them would be Home Guards and then there would be a Japanese. There would be a Home Guard and his helper and a Japanese foreman and his helper, and the Japanese foreman's helper thought that I should be his servant and he wanted me to move around and carry his teapots from here to there. That's after the shelling and we were going around digging things up and he'd want me to get my teapot. We'd leave and I'd leave his teapot and he'd make me go get it. He kept hounding me, so I just -- in Japanese I just told him that I wasn't about to be his servant. I was a 1st Class Petty Officer in the US Navy and I'd be damned if I was going to wait on him. I knew enough Japanese to tell him and I was mad and he left me alone, but he could've beat me, but he didn't. But these other people, they were reasonable, but we'd slow down, you know. We'd slow down. They'd tell us to do something and they'd say load the truck by noon. There'd be another truck and they wanted to get this stuff out before they burned it up, see, because they were fire bombing, so we'd go slow and we'd tell them, well, we'll work fast if you get us soap or we'll do one load a day, so we did two loads and they didn't -- they came through with soap and then we got back to one load in the morning and one load in the afternoon, but you could get a bargain with them. But we had other people working the same shipyard; one gang that worked in the electrical shop. They were wiring motors and things in there. They worked just like slaves. They were docile, they never got up, and their boss used to come over to the mess tent and he would -- they would eat and he was yakking at them all the time. You know, he'd get them to straighten out their clothes and straighten out their food and wipe the rice off the table, just fluttering around them and yakking continuously. We were right by him and I had a headache one day and I told him, I said, "Goddamn it I told him," I said, "You make too much noise. You talk talk all the time and," I said, "I can't hear." I want you to get away from me. Shut up. And you know I laughed. Everybody was quiet and he left, you know, but he wasn't my boss, see. Now a soldier might've just stuck me there. Yeah, you could get away -- it depends on how you went about it. You had to have a way to go around it. You had to cooperate, but you let them know what you wanted and if you'd do it their way you were so slow, and do it your way you'd do it, and if the guards came you'd look good.

1:38:36.3 Convincing the Japanese to let the prisoners bath in their pool

Commander Charles House: Like one day we told the guy crawling out of that old dirty old furnace and we'd get a cold bath back at camp. We told the guy, we said, "How about we all cleaned up in there, how about getting us a bath over there in that nice big warm swimming pool", this Japanese bath up there? So by golly one day he put us in there, you know, and we got in there in just nice clean water, warm water, and we just soaked up there and just had a good time, took us back to camp. Next day you'd

thought -- the Japs found out we were in there and they wouldn't use that water that night and they were mad at us. That was just a few days before the shelling. We didn't have to put up with them long, but they -- we didn't do the bath thing anymore. We got out. And another time he said he'd take us to camp early. He took us back to camp early. He told the guard how good we'd worked and as a reward he brought us back early and the old Jap just thanked him and he left and the old Jap told us to come to attention and then we went over and got a bunch of shovels and we dug air raid trenches until the other crowd got back. So every afternoon he'd say, "want to go back to _____ (1:39:53) now?" But you'd get a friendship with them after a while and you'd work with them. Like Admiral Russell went into war -- into Japan after war and it was his job to write up the Japanese offense in the Aleutians, and back in the Historical Society it's into three volumes. It's a big deal. He ran into this Japanese captain that was up there at Kiska, the exec, and of course I knew Russell and the Jap met him and the Jap asked him, he says, do you know -- oh, he asked the Jap if he knew House and the Jap says "Oh, yes. He says he was a nice guy. We all liked him he said "(laughter). And I thought, "God, that looks bad in their report (laughter)."

Male #5: Well, you mentioned about the only times you were really interrogated was when you first got to Japan?

1:40:49.5 Interrogating the prisoners

Commander Charles House: Yeah, they brought me on and pushed me through. They didn't interrogate much down there. They would come in and they'd grill these people but they didn't -- and there was just these beatings there.

Male #6: Was it the same for just about everybody that was in your camp? They went through there? The interrogations?

Commander Charles House: Yes, that was interrogation. Yeah. Yeah, they didn't bother. Now, at Kiska a guy came over and interrogated me and he was a German-type Japanese, you know, and he decided he would ask me a bunch of questions. He wanted to know where I was from and all of this, but -- and he was a little bit rough and he says, "Who do you -- who's going to win this war?" And I said, "I don't know," I said, "But I hope they hurry up and do it soon," and he didn't write it down. Then, when the Japanese left and the Americans went in they got this interrogation. He never forwarded it anywhere. He was just doing this for his own hobby there.

1:41:59.4 B-17s bombing the officer's quarters and mess hall in Kiska

Commander Charles House: One day he was OD and the B-17s were coming over and the day before a bomb had dropped in the officer's quarters and mess. They'd used our old mess hall for the officer's quarters and mess, and the bomb went through the roof and I was looking out and the stove came out the side of the building, so there was no chow coming. My chow came from there, and all the Japs were getting their chow. So I went out and he was OD and I said how about my chow, and he says "Keep waiting" and I'd wait an hour and I'd say, "how about my chow?" "Keep waiting." So,

after another hour I'd go out and he says, "Go on up there." There was another mess hall up..... So I went up to the mess hall and I was coming back and here come another flight of B-17s and here comes this damn bomb and I knew it was close. I'd been around enough of them and it was close, so here was a great big canvas over something. I dived for it, covered my rice, and the darn thing landed about five feet from me and gave me a big shower of mud, but in that wet mud tundra the bombs go down in and when the shrapnel explodes it goes straight up or out. You know, if that thing had been a hard surface I'd have been a dead duck. You know, just that close. But he interrogated me and that wasn't official but I got a copy of that. I had a -- I turned it into -- here I've got a copy of that interrogation here. Any other questions?

Male #7: You didn't have any problem with your family not knowing you were alive or anything like that?

1:43:32.9 His family was unaware of his status for three years

Commander Charles House: Well, it took them three years before they knew that I was alive, yeah, and then I got letters after a couple years. They were very slow about this. And as far as aid goes, during the war one winter we got three Red Cross boxes. That's all. We got a nice wool sweater, some long handle underwear and a red cross and a little food, and my wife the last year, she sent me over a little box of concentrated soup. She was allowed to send one box over; just a little square box there. Yeah, there was -- you ate off the economy. You ate off the land.

Male #8: Did you have much luck stealing food when you were in any of the camps?

1:44:25.0 Stealing food from the shipyard

Commander Charles House: Well, yes, I scrounged -- not the camp but in the shipyard. We ate swill. We called them swill bags. We'd take a pants leg and cut it off and sew it up and you'd keep that in here and if the ships -- there would be submarines, cruisers, destroyers, and they were being worked on and they'd throw the chow out in the swill bins. You know, they'd dump it out and we'd go there and scoop it in, put it back down in your belt and you'd go tell the boss you had to go to the toilet. You'd go to the toilet and eat it and the next day hope for another find or you'd go to the galleys and beg and they'd give you a little. Ask them for a little rice please and hand them the bag and they'd throw a little in there sometimes. Sometimes they had the guys -- hand me a nice rice ball like that and throw it in the bag. You know, they were just teasing you, but some they'd give them to you. There was no food in camp; just a meager ration that would keep you alive, but in the shipyard we had fair game. But other people, if you went in healthy -- now I went in weighing nothing and I had -- all the time I was just touch and go, but if you could just stay healthy and not worry too much, the people that took the ration and didn't eat swill and didn't work too hard came out all right. They didn't get sick. They came out all right. You could live on it.

Male #9: What about propaganda? Did the Japanese ever use you for propaganda or anything?

1:45:57.6 The Japanese did not use them for propaganda

Commander Charles House: No. No, they -- we weren't bothered at all about that. They -- there were some Australians at Ofuna; one was from a banking family, one was from a woolen mill family and was a sheep growing family and they had them off in another building off to the side. They got different food, they talked to each other, they had books and magazines to read. They didn't exercise. They just did as they pleased and then the Japs were out working over how they were going to run Australia when they got it, but they didn't bother us with that at all. As you go into it, you know less and less, but we always knew where the war was. Every morning the old Jap -- when I worked for this Jap that took us out on the acetylene thing he'd read us the morning paper every morning and he'd tell us where the war was and this one morning there was a whole page of pilots, about 100 of them, and little old Honcho was explaining what had happened. The Japanese had gone up and they came down "brr-rrrr-rrrrrr--rrrrr-brrrp" (makes sound of an airplane engine). "Japanese pilot though, no come back," he said. God, that was funny, but Honcho was just kind of sober. He was telling us what happened. That was the kamikazes on some of those last desperate offense raids that were going in south of Japan there because they told us..... So we knew all the time where the war was and how it was going. We were eating as good as the Japs were at the end of the war. At the first of the war they were eating better. They were holding us to just a minimum. The interpreter one day -- I was at sick call and they had the interpreter in there and he asked -- we had another guy off the submarine and he says -- the interpreter says, I wonder what the turning battle of World War II will be and then guy snapped back, "Pearl Harbor was the turning battle in this war" (laughter). Boy, I mean, that was a good snap back.

Male #10: Did the officers and the enlisted men all work about the same or.....

1:48:21.0 Enlisted men and officers had different work details

Commander Charles House: No, I was enlisted the whole time I was in there. The officers didn't work or they could volunteer. Some worked in the drafting room in the shipyard, but most of them were running divisions or they'd be section leaders in the camp for us and they'd stay in the camp.

Male #11: Charlie, it depended on what camp you were in.

Commander Charles House: Yeah.

Male #11: Because, the officers didn't work where I was in Japan, and then the Japs decided they were going to work and the officers said we will not work. No, no, we don't work according to the war and the Jap says you will work or you will be punished, so officers just said we will not be punished. Then _____ (1:49:00).

1:49:04.1 Commander House and a friend broke into a warehouse and took food, medicine, and clothing

Commander Charles House: Well, I -- another one I saw was we were in the military hospital and there was always a little ruckus at night. My buddy and I, he was an Army Sergeant with my buddy up there and he was a medical buddy and there were -- we were getting quite a bit. I was working as an orderly. We were always eating all right, but we knew that there was a warehouse over there and that warehouse had food, medicine, and clothing in it and the guards would make the rounds, so we'd watch the guard make his round, then we'd go over and we looked at the lock and we'd saw the lock and we got an old key and we filed it down and then we'd follow the guard and we'd smoke the key and we'd go put it up and we'd turn it and it'd come out where it was bright and we filed it. Then after two or three nights one day that lock dropped open. The thing fell open and we went in there and here was just big, big caskets of bean paste. There was just stacks of bread in there and there were shoes and sweaters. We got new shoes, sweaters, and underwear, and we got a bunch of sulfa drugs out of there the Red Cross had sent in. There was a drug there -- it was just a little pill and we put them in little tin boxes and I kept it in my back pocket and if I'd ever gotten caught with a bomb or a shell and got tore up I wasn't going to suffer. I was going to take that pill. It was going to put me out. I threw it away up in Kamaishi after the war, but I kept that thing the rest of the time because we had bombs exploding all around ships. We had quite a few opportunities to get wiped out, but we didn't. Does that answer your question?

Male #12: Yeah.

Commander Charles House: Okay. Okay.

Male #13: What kind of reaction did you get from the Japanese when the A bombs went off?

1:51:05.7 Reaction from the Japanese regarding the A bombs

Commander Charles House: They got a good reaction. We were at the shipyard. I mean, we were in the steel mill (laughter) and they were out there and they were -- had sticks, _____ (1:51:15) all day and they were talking at them and all this. So, they told us. The Japs told us. We went back to camp and we were talking about the atomic bomb and here one guy said you'd get a little cup full it'd blow the whole place up and I guess that one was a big cup full but later on I'd seen all of the films on it but it was interesting.

Male #14: Did they understand what it was or did they just.....

Commander Charles House: Oh yeah, no they understood. I'm sure that's what softened them. I'm sure that's what made them see the light because they took a terrific beating from the Navy, the carriers, and the B-29s. They took a terrific beating. See, Tokyo was wiped out and it was wiped out and they saw that. Every city in Japan, even way up north, they wiped that thing out. Why they came back a second time, they must've had surplus ammunition to come back a second time and shell us. I don't think there was a shovel or a broom that would've worked in that whole shipyard, but

somebody had a boiler gone and had that darn generator running and they wiped it out. I don't know if they got it the second time. I didn't stay that long.

Male #15: They didn't get very hostile then when they.....

Commander Charles House: Oh, yeah! When we came out of the trenches they were mad. "Pst, pst" (makes spitting sound) You know, they spit when they get mad. You can hear them when they're mad (laughter). They hate you for -- they hate all Americans there.

Male #15: As far as retaliation _____(1:52:49) that.....

Commander Charles House: The what?

Male #15: As far as retaliation, physical retaliation.

Commander Charles House: No. No, if they'd had the chance probably they would've taken a poke at us, but they were pretty well controlled. There weren't many people around. They left that area. They left Kamaishi. Both times after raid they left and a few doubled back and that second time you wonder if anyone ever came back to that town.

Male #16: What your -- you haven't got too much tape left -- what's your outlook on life now, Commander?

1:53:21.0 The Commander's outlook on life

Commander Charles House: Well, I've earned a good pension (laughter) and I intend to live as long as I can and enjoy it and to enjoy it I'm farming. I'm raising avocados and grapes. I've got 500 grapevines and 165 avocados and I take care of those and I've got a nice home out of the country and, God, I've got a Navy pension and I taught school. I got a schoolteacher pension and I'm on disability pension and I get Social Security. I get all kinds of pensions. I really -- I'm going to enjoy life and I'm very careful on nutrition. I watch everything that I eat. I take supplemental pills. I read all of this stuff. I eat fresh fruits and vegetables every day. I eat chicken and fish and beef once or twice a week is all, but I'm very careful about what I eat and I work physically all day and my wife wants to exercise so we walk. In the summer we walk a couple of miles every evening and in the winter we walk a couple of miles every afternoon, but I want to keep as healthy as I can get and the healthier you are when you go into a situation like that the better off you are. My health was ruined. Other people who went through there just normal dropped down from 3000 to 800 calories a day, you could survive on it and you can walk and stay pretty healthy, but I want to live as long as I can. I think, like, I love America and I wanted to get back here, and I love it because it has freedom that you can do what you want at any time and any individual has that right. Now, there are lots of people who don't exercise their right to look at things. They are not survivors. The world is full of people out there. They're not -- they don't know what's going on. They don't know medically. They don't know much about it. You live in a body for 65 years, you know how it reacts. I can tell when I've got an ulcer bleeding. I can tell when I've got things

with me living that I know the symptoms and I go right to the doctor and you want to know the political situation and vote, you want to know the financial situation, you want to know how to survive in this inflationary world, you've got to know all of those things. So, you've got to know things. I taught school 12 years after I retired. I went back to school. I didn't have a degree. I taught school -- vocational school without a degree, but I got a degree and I got a Master's equivalent, and I got all that during night school and summers. It took me seven years to do that, but I went back to school all that time and I still read an awful lot and I still enjoy life. Yeah, that's, any more questions here?

1:56:34.5 Closing remarks and thanks

Commander Charles House: Okay. I thank you and I also think about you people and I appreciate you being our first line of defense out there. I know you're it. You've got a big responsibility. You've got a big risk and I do appreciate you people out there. I just hope that you don't get captured, that you're the ones the slide through, slide away, and I think by going through the training evidently they give you an awful lot of training here that helps you do that. Now, if you get in Alaska, when I used to -- after the war I worked in intelligence and I was in a weather section and we used to look and all the weather reports out of Russia have a code which gives a position. That's international code. The Russians would never tell you what their weather reports are. They'd all come out and we'd put them on the map by the position code. You could put them within half a mile. You'd put them down and there was always a tundra patch on that map and I thought, God, there's a lot of food out there and shelter if anyone ever needs it out there in Russia, but it's no good in the wintertime. It's under the snow, so you've got that up there.

End of interview at 1:57:53.2