RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN ADDENDUM TO AN INTERVIEW WITH AUSTIN L. ANDREWS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

DICTATED BY

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in
NORTH PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

TRANSCRIPT BY

ANDREA BLATT

This is Austin Andrews at Florida.

This is to Sandra Stewart [Holyoak], director Rutgers Oral History Archives, Department of History, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. This is in regards to my interview with you … at the Crowne Plaza Hotel this past April. This is a continuation of my interview.

I am going to take you back to the work details at Umeda Bunso POW prison camp in Osaka, Japan, and we will start with the Sakarajima detail, going back to July, the first part of August, 1943. Our work detail had just come in from work on about the later part of July, the first part of August, 1943, and we were sitting on our wood platform, or whatever you want to call it, and eating our rice. I was on the bottom bunk and our work captain, Corporal Baker, was eating his meal beside me. Across the hall, sitting up on the upper bunk was a man named "Lacrow." This is a phonetic name, it's not his original name. I don't want to call his name because [of] personal reasons. All of the sudden, Lacrow said, "Listen, everybody, everybody be quiet. Don't you hear that music? This is the most beautiful music I've ever heard in my life. Be quiet, listen, listen." I turned around and I told Baker, "What the hell is the matter with this guy, is he going nuts?" We hadn't heard any music ever since we had been in prison. We had no radios and no outside communication what so ever, and so, I looked up at him and his eyes started looking a little bit glassy and he kept on about the music, how beautiful the music was, and so I didn't pay any more attention after that. The next day we went out on our work detail, which was Sakarajima we were unloading a barge full of fertilizer from the canal, up to the boxcar. The bags of fertilizer weighed about fifty, to fifty-five, to sixty pounds. I was a loader, and Baker was loading on the other end, and we would pick up a sack of fertilizer and put it on a guys shoulders. He had to walk out of the barge and we had a two-by-eight plank going from the barge up to the top of the sea wall, where the boxcar was on the track. Another two-by-eight board was going from the boxcar down to the barge, so when one left his fertilizer bag inside the car, he could walk back down to get another bag. So this fertilizer draws heat and it was already burning hot and we was all sweaty and working in g-strings and we had unloaded the barge to the point where the tide had started going back out, and the barge was starting to settle down in the canal. So with the barge settling, the gang plank, which we was walking up, also settled down and it was almost straight up, to get out of the barge and onto the land, on top of the sea wall. So we put a bag of this fertilizer on Lacrow's shoulder and he started trying to walk up this gang plank. He got up almost even with the top of the seawall and he fell. We were working in nothing but a g-string and he fell right down the side of the sea wall and it just tore him almost completely up. It almost ripped off his left breast and he fell down into the canal. I jumped off the barge and picked him up out of the canal and handed him up to Baker and one or two other guys, … they pulled him up on the barge and, by this time, he was bleeding like a, he was bleeding profusely. He looked like he was going in to a state-of-shock, which he did go into a state of shock. They took him up out of the barge and took him up, to the land, and laid him down and we asked the Japs if they could get us some help, and, that he was hurt real bad, and we needed some medical attention to stop the bleeding, and so forth. … The guard just looked at him and said, "He's in good shape, he should be able to go back to work." … We had Lacrow on his feet and we had taken him over to our work shack, where we had our gear, and we could take him inside and get him out of the heat. But, while he was standing up, this Jap soldier came up and he looked at him and he punched him a couple of times in the stomach and he said, "You go back to work, you are not that badly hurt." Well, Lacrow was already going out of his mind; he

turned around and hit this Jap right in the mouth with his fist and he knocked the Jap soldier down. The Jap soldier got up and he took his rifle and he hit him in the head and knocked him down, and a couple more Jap soldiers came over there and they held Lacrow down and then they hog-tied him with ropes, and all of his arms and legs were bound together, and he was left in this condition, I would say, probably from about four o'clock in the afternoon until we finished unloading the barge, [which] must have been around about five or five-thirty when we started to go back to camp. But, during this period of time, Lacrow was still laying on the deck tied up, and the Jap soldier was standing by him and nobody could do anything for him. So we started to line up to go back to the electric train station, which we boarded to take us back into camp. This was about, I'd say, a distance of about three to four blocks. Well, the Jap soldiers, they dragged him all the way down to the electric train station, and they wouldn't let us carry him, and when we got up to the train station the Jap soldiers told us to pick him up and throw him in a car. So, we picked him up and laid him on the floor of the car, and we took him back to camp. When we got back into the Umeda Station, we picked Lacrow up and we carried him on our shoulders all the way into camp, which the Umeda Bunso camp was only, I'd say, about seven or eight blocks from the main Umeda Station where we got off at. When we took him into camp, we told the camp commander down there that this man had been hurt pretty badly and needed some medical attention, and we laid him out on the concrete walkway there, which was going into camp. We got the medical doctor down there and he had a couple of medics with him and they looked at him and could realize that he was in very bad shape. His eyes was all turned glassy and … the doctor said he was really in a state of shock, which we figured was probably so. So, they started dressing him and cleaning up the wounds and doing the best they can. They didn't have any medical, I mean, no medical supplies either, so, they couldn't do too much for him. So, in the mean-time, Lacrow was out of his mind and he started mumbling and jumbling and what he was trying to say just didn't make sense. We told the Japs that he was out of his mind, that he was "*Baka*." *Baka* means "Crazy." So the Japs said, "All right." So they throwed him in a cell we had. We had a cell about, I guess, [that] would hold maybe two or three people. It had two B2" wood bars and just a little door to crawl into. So they shoved Lacrow into this cell and left him. After we headed over, they already got him untied and everything, and the doctors did the best they could for him, and he started rambling and he went on all day and night. He went on the rest of the day, went on all night, and he was screaming and hollering. He was saying, "The yellow man's up, the white man's down, the white man's up, the yellow man's down. Here they come, here they come, look out, look out," and he went on like this for about three or four days, day and night, he never let up, day and night, and you couldn't even sleep because of his hollering at night, and there was nothing you could do to quiet him down. … He kept this rambling up until he lost his voice and he couldn't talk anymore. But you could still see that he was still trying to talk but no sound was coming out. But during the day the Jap guards thought that he was very funny with all his hollering and rambling and they started pushing him around with a stick, and Lacrow grabbed the stick and tried to take it out of their hand and then they would try to hit him with the stick. … We tried to stop the Japs from bothering him and we knew that he was in bad shape. We told the Japs to leave him alone, that he was out of his mind, he didn't know what he was doing. During this period of time, this boy had super-human-strength. He wasn't a very big man, I would say probably around a hundred-twenty-five to a hundred-and-forty pounds, at the most, but he had super-human-strength. It would take four or five big guys to hold him down and try to force food in his mouth. He wouldn't eat, and the only way you could keep him going was to force his mouth open and force some rice down his throat,

and you almost choked him to death doing this, and he was doing everything that [he could to keep] you [from] … holding him down. So, all during the time that he was in this condition here, the Japs had put a wood bucket in there for him to go to the bathroom in there, and he wouldn't even use the bucket. At times, when he did use the bucket, he would just dump it, pick it up and dump it over his head. He had no conception of where he was at what so ever and he had absolutely no pain. He would beat his fist into the wood bars until his fist was just a bloody mess and we had to stop him and [so we] bound his hands up to keep him from harming himself. The Japs would come by there and they would give him a cigarette or try to give him a cigarette, then he would just take the cigarette, and fire and all, and just chew it up, swallow the fire and all, and he had absolutely no pain. Now, at night, he slept on the concrete floor with no blankets, no clothes, completely naked, and he lived like this here for the last, I'd say, from around twelve to eighteen months. I know he went through two winters down there on the floor, and that was the winter of '44, and, I think, the winter of '45, and he never even used a blanket, even though blankets were throwed in there to him, and all during this period of time, in the winter time when it was freezing cold, he never even got a cold. He didn't even get one sniffle, and [in] the meantime we were all full of colds and pleurisy and just about on the verge of pneumonia. But he never even got a cold during this period of time. Another thing about this man is, he had, in his condition, he had super hearing. He could pick up an air raid thirty minutes before the Jap sirens would even go off. He would start jumping in his cell and he would start hollering, "Air raid, air raid, air raid, here they come, here they come, air raid, get ready. They're almost here. They're here, they're here, they're here." About twenty or thirty minutes later the Japanese sirens would go off and you'd hear the bombers overhead. The bombs would start falling, and, of course, during this time here he would start hollering about, "the yellow man is gone, the yellow man is up, the white man is down," and all sorts of kinds of nonsense. During the bombing he just went absolutely nuts. He was in this condition, I would say, around fourteen to eighteen months, and during this period, after he lived this long, in this condition, one day he actually come back to. He come back to in his right mind, and he never knew where he had been for the past fourteen to eighteen months. One guy had his canteen and Lacrow told this guy, "You stole my canteen yesterday." Now, he was talking about something like, yesterday, that happened fourteen to eighteen months ago, and the guy said, "No, I didn't," and he said, "Yes, you did. My initials is cut into that canteen and I want it back," and he went over there and grabbed it, and he took it took it out of this guys hand. And he survived the war. But, whatever happened to him after he got back to the States, I've never been able to find out. At one time, I talked to our commander in camp who was a chief by the name of Tarnowski, and I asked him, "You ever hear anything about what happened to Lacrow?" … He said, "No, I've tried to trace a lot of these guys down, as to what happened to them and where they went, and so forth, but," he said, "Lacrow just seemed to vanish off of the screen." He was never able to find him, never able to find any information on him what so ever. So, whatever happened to him, I really don't know, and I don't know if anybody else knows. But, what I'm saying to you here, this absolutely happened, and whether you believe it or not, this man here had no pain, he had super hearing, he had super strength, he ate very little, and he survived in an environment that is almost impossible to believe, and it is amazing that he survived.

About the middle of August 1944, and this, too, was at the Sakakrajima detail we was working on. We was unloading a barge of magnesium ore, and I don't know if you know what magnesium ore is or not, but magnesium ore is an alloy which hardens steel. It's a real, real,

heavy ore. You can pick up a very little bit in your hand and it will weigh several pounds. We was in this big barge shoveling into a net, and then they would have a crane that would pick the net up, and swing it up, and carry it over to a flatcar, and empty it out, and then come back to get another one. So, there is about six of us down there, in the barge, shoveling this iron ore in there, and we was hot and tired and hungry and thirsty, and they wouldn't let us get out and get any water. … The little guard, little civilian guard, civilian honcho or whatever you want to call him, was up in the flatcar, and he kept hollering to "speed up." Now, this particular guard, we called him, "Sparow Top." We had him nick-named Sparow Top because he was always yapping and yapping and yapping and he was always hollering "*Speedo, speedo*," which means "Work harder, work harder." He picked up a little small piece of that iron ore and he throwed it down in that barge and he almost hit me with it. So I picked up the other piece, I used to pitch baseball at one time, and I throwed that at him and I almost hit him in the head. I guess I missed his head about two or three inches. It hit a corrugated metal building which was in back of, [the] side of the boxcar, and you could hear it all over the yard where it hit, and he jumped up off that flatcar and he come down there in that barge and he grabbed me by the collar and he shoved me backwards and he said, "You almost hit me," and I grabbed him by the collar and I shoved him backwards, and I told him, I said, "You don't realize that we're working hard down here and you come down here and you're shoving us around." I said, "You don't shove me around." He picked up a shovel and he drew it back and I picked up a shovel and I told him in Jap, I said "You hit me," I says, "I'll chop your damn head right off your shoulders," and I knew when I said that, that I had made a mistake, because had he made a move, there is no doubt in my mind that I would have killed him, and if I had killed him, they sure as hell would have chopped my head off. So, he threw his shovel down and he jumped out of the barge and he went up onto the beach and he called the Jap soldier, who was the head of the work detail, and he told the Jap soldier that I hit him and that I pushed him back and throwed him up against the side of the barge down there. So, the Jap soldier called me, made me get up there, and he said, "What are you doing hitting this Japanese?" I said, "Well, he come down there and he grabbed me by the collar and shoved me backwards," and I said, "I shoved him back and he got his shovel and he was going to hit me, and I told him if he hit me I was going to hit him back." So, I knew that I was in deep trouble. So, the soldier had me standing at attention and I told the soldier, "You're a *hat*, I'm a *hat*" which means, "You're a soldier and I'm a soldier," I said, "You're way up high," and I motioned my hand and put it way up over his head, and I said, "You're way up high." I said, "This Japanese civilian over here, he's a civilian," and I said, "He's way down low." I said, "He's so low he couldn't even get under your shoes down there," and I said, "We're both soldiers," and I said, "We don't have to take no crap from these civilians," and I said, "If you want to hit me, that's fine, you can go ahead and hit me." But I said, "He's a civilian," and I said, "He don't have any business hitting me, and I don't want him hitting me what so ever." So, when I told him, that he was a *hat* and he was so far above the civilian, he turned around and he said, "*Ahso*," which means "I understand." He turned around and slapped the hell out of this Japanese honcho, or whatever you want to call him, and he told him that if anybody was going to mete out any punishment, that he would do it, and that he was to leave us alone, that he was in charge of the work detail. He told me, he turned around and he beat the hell out of me, and he said, "You get back down in that barge and you get to work. I don't want to hear no more about it for the rest of the day." But I thought about that, and how close I had come to where I could have gotten executed. I came to a point in life, you reach a point in life [in] which somebody pushes you so far and they're not going to push you any further. I had reached that point and I really didn't care

if I lived or died, and I had reached a point then, of no return, and after thinking about it, I knew that I was in deep trouble after that.

We're going to take you to another detail, which is called Tomatsakuri, and the time frame is around the later part of 1944, the early part of 1945, and we weren't working at Sakarajima at that time. Work had slacked off, so they had took part of us over to different details and I had gone up to the Tomatsakuri Detail. While on this detail, we had one man on here, and I'll call him, "Shaggy." That's a nickname, I don't want to call his real name. He had stolen a bottle of beer from somewhere, he had found [it] while unloading these boxcars. He took it down by the track and there was a *banjo,* which is a crapper, and he drank the beer and instead of throwing the beer bottle in the hole down there with the rest of the crap, he threw it out the window. When he threw the beer bottle out the window some Japanese civilian seen the beer bottle come out and he came up and told the guard. He said, "These prisoners, one of these prisoners, stole some beer." He said, "I seen the beer bottle come out the window." The Japanese guard said, "Which one?" He said, "I don't know which one." But he said, "I seen the beer bottle come out and an American walked out of the banjo," so they lined us up on the dock. … They called us all up and they lined us up on the dock and they said, "Who stole the beer?" Well, we had an unwritten law at that time among us that said if you steal something for yourself and you get caught and the wagon backs up to where all of the detail is going to get punished, you step out and take your punishment they going to mete out to you. But, if your stealing for the pot, which, I call the pot where everybody could participate in it, then nobody would step out and we would all take the blame. But in this case here, he was stealing for his self. … Garlic was abundant, in those freight yards. We had access to a lot of garlic, so we all used to carry garlic in our pocket, and for something like this here, we would take out a clove of garlic and chew it and the guard would try to smell your breath and he couldn't tell which one had the beer and which one didn't. So [when] he tried to smell your breath, we just blow this garlic right in his face and he'd holler at you and he would turn his face and go on down the line down there. So, we passed the word down the line that whoever stole that beer better step out, because they were getting pretty violent at that time. The guards kept walking up and down and wanted to know who stole the beer and nobody would answer. So, the guard started slapping everybody around and he started beating everybody in the head and in the face and he wanted to know who the hell got the beer, nobody said a word. So after several beatings, and standing at attention all this time, and nobody said a word and this guy wouldn't step out, we passed the word down again, "You better step out," because we said, "We just about had [reached] the limit with these beatings in here," but he wouldn't step out. So, they march us into camp and when we got into camp in, there's just an alleyway, not much wider then two cars, even less width then that, that goes into this prison camp and the guard shack was on one side and our shack was on the other side and the dead end down at the end was the galley. So he puts us in this walk way, or whatever you want to call it, a driveway, and they set us all at attention again and the camp commander come down through there and he wanted to know who stole the beer. Nobody would answer. So anyway, he turned his guards loose and they just went and they just beat the hell out of us, and still nobody would say who stole the beer. So then they set us on our knees and they put a board between our knees, and our leg, and we had to sit back on this board. Then they put another board between your shoulder blades and they pulled your arms back where you couldn't move your arms. Well, after a while, this is a very excruciating position and it gets very painful, and what it does, the board between your legs, between your knees, you're sitting on it, cuts the blood circulation off from

your knees down, and you can't walk. Your arms also suffer from lack of blood and it is very painful. So they kept sitting us down there and this went on about, eight o'clock or eight-thirty at night, and we were still sitting in this alley and we are still getting the hell beat out of us. The Japs was still walking up and down in front of us saying, "Who stole the beer?" and nobody would answer. We kept saying, "Boy, you better step out," but he never would, and they would walk down and they would hit you in the head with a club, or stick, or fist, or anything they had. They'd kick you in the chest, they'd kick you in the face, and they, still … nobody would step out. So we sat like this and we took a beating like this, until about three o'clock in the morning. Well, after about three o'clock in the morning, nobody stepped out and the Japs finally let us loose to go. Well, they pull the board out from your legs and your arms and you just fell over, on the ground, because you couldn't even get up. So the Japs released us and the guys in the camp came in and they pulled us over into the shack and they helped straighten our legs out and massaged them so we could get some blood circulation back in, because you couldn't move. Well, when we got back on our feet, we got in that camp, we just beat the living hell out of this guy, we damn near killed him, and that's the way we lived in Umeda Bunso. We just made our own laws and there was no appeal.

But, these are just a few of the instances that happened on these work details. There was a lot going on, on these work details, that you've never heard of before. Another instance, we were working on the Umeda Freight Yard and we was unloading these boxcars, and I had to open the door of this boxcar and guys down the line had opened up doors and they were starting to unload the boxcars. Well, I got in this boxcar and there was some heavy paper sacks. They looked like paper sacks; they was really thick paper on them. They were stacked up in there and, I guess, they weighed about forty pounds a piece. So, I stuck my work hook in one end and opened the back up and some white-looking substance spilled out. I reached down and got some on my hand and I just barely tasted it, and it tasted like salt, and it looked like salt, and the only thing I noticed was it had a little burning sensation on my tongue and I didn't think too much about it at the time, I just thought [it was] salt, [salt] was a premium to us. We didn't have any salt, and if we could get salt, this was something extra. So, I passed the word down the line to everybody down there, I said, "Hey, we got a boxcar load of salt down here." So everybody came down there and we would swap off and one guy would swap off with the guy and they would fill their loot bags up with this salt and we put it, tied it on our legs to get inside camp with it. So, we got through the search that night and went into camp and this soldier, and I won't say his name, it's "Whitey," that's not his real name, I don't want to call his real name for obvious reasons. … He happened to get his rice first that night, and he took his salt, which he thought was salt, he sprinkled a little bit on his rice and in a matter of seconds, I don't think it was even a minute, that he fell over and started foaming at the mouth, and we couldn't figure what the hell was the matter with him. So, we called the doctor down there. We told the doctor, "he was all right a few minutes ago" and said, "he started to eat his rice and he just fell over." The doctor said, "What else did he eat?" We said, "We got some salt on the work detail and brought it into camp today and he said he put a little bit of this salt on his rice and then all of a sudden he fell over and he started foaming," and the doctor said, "Let's see the salt." So we showed him some salt and he put it in a cup and he put some water in it and stirred it up and he said, "Does anybody have an orange?" Well, we worked on about fifteen to twenty [different] details in Umeda and we passed the word around, "did anybody get an orange that day that they brought in to camp?" Well, when you work on these details, we would bring in food for the sick that was up in the sickbay

and couldn't get out to work. We would bring in anything we could find to help them get back on their feet. So it just so happened that this guy had brought in an orange. Well, the doctor took a syringe and he filled it up with the solution and he shot this orange and it turned this orange as black as the ace of spades, and the doctor turned around and said, "This is potassium cyanide. This is one of the most deadly poisons known." He said, "If anybody has got any more of it, you better get rid of it, and get rid of it fast," and he said, "Whatever you do, don't taste it." Well, it killed this soldier, he never came back to. He just went right out, and it killed him, instantly, and I just felt real fortunate that I had barely tasted it, because I could have been in his position. It could have killed me. But after that, we decided we better be careful what we were tasting, from then on out. So, we took out our loot bags and headed for the *benjo* outside, which is the slit trenches, latrines, and we just threw all the loot bags in there and got rid of it.

These are just a few of the things that happened in Umeda Bunso that nobody ever heard of before, and I'm just bringing this to the attention of the researchers and hope they can work this into the previous interview that I had with them. If you can't work it in, maybe you can put it on the end as an addendum or addition to the interview, because I think it's important, and I think as a researcher if you're teaching, people should know what went on in these prison camps.

In closing, I wish to thank Rutgers University and the researchers for all their time that they have devoted on this subject, and I appreciate the fact that you are bringing to light some of the Bataan and Corregidor campaign which very little has been taught in these schools. Because we know, we have talked to schools and a lot of these kids, and even [in] colleges today, they have never heard of Bataan or Corregidor. They don't know what happened out there. They don't know what we went through out there, and I hope this research will shed some light on it, because it needs a lot more research, and a lot more thought going in to it. I appreciate your time, and this is Austin Andrews, if anyone had any questions about what I have said today I'd be glad to answer and clarify anything you may have questions about. Thank you very much.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Elaine Blatt 12/6/2007
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 2/22/2008
Reviewed by Austin Andrews 5/19/2008