

Primary Sources Packet: Survival

Document One

Eugene Nielsen, "A Survivor of the Palawan Massacre," 2003 (excerpt)
American Experience, PBS

"Utah native Eugene Nielsen, private first class in the 59th Coast Artillery, was one of the few who escaped. Filipino guerrillas transported the survivors to the island of Morotai, where Nielsen described his experience to an Army intelligence officer. "...They were bayoneting guys down low and making them suffer. They shot or stabbed twelve Americans and then dug a shallow grave in the sand and threw them in. Some of these men were still groaning while they were covered with sand. Then the Japs started to cover the grave with rubbish from the pile where I was hiding. They scraped some of the coconut husks off, and found me lying there. Then they uncovered me from the shoulders on down. They thought I was dead, and seemed to think I had been buried by my friends. I lay there for about fifteen minutes while they stood around talking Japanese. It was getting to be late in the afternoon. One of the guys hollered it was time to eat dinner, and every one of the Japs there went off somewhere to eat. I got up and ran down along the beach and hid in a little pocket of coral reef there."

[...]

"I left that area and started down the beach. About fifty yards ahead I ran into more Japanese. Suddenly I realized I was surrounded. They were up above me and also coming in from both sides. I was trapped. So I jumped in the sea. I swam underwater as far as I could. When I came up there were twenty Japanese firing at me, both from the cliff and from the beach. Shots were hitting all around me. One shot hit me in the armpit and grazed my ribs. Another hit me in the left thigh, then another one hit me right along the right side of my head, grazing my temple. I think it knocked me out temporarily. For a short period I was numb in the water; and I nearly drowned. Then I found a large coconut husk, bobbing around in the bay and I used it to shield my head as I swam."

[...]

"I swam most of the night. I couldn't see the other side of the bay but I knew it was about five miles. About halfway out I ran into a strong current. It seemed like I was there for a couple hours making no headway. Finally I reached the opposite shore and crawled on my hands and knees up on the rocks. I was in a mangrove swamp. I was too weak to stand up. It was about 4 A.M. I'd been swimming for nearly nine hours."