

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with William Ingram

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember Oral History project

Interview # VR2-A-L-2014-018

William “Bill” Ingram, a sailor on the *USS Houston*, until it was sunk in February 1942, then a POW working on the infamous Burma Railway, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library’s *Veterans Remember-World War II* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Jun 30, 2014 Location: Telephonic interview w/Ingram in Jacksonville, FL

Date: Jul 1, 2014 Location: Telephonic interview w/Ingram in Jacksonville, FL

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Susan Burke, ALPL volunteer

Edited by: Roberta Volkmann & Janice Culp, ALPL volunteers

Total Pages: 82 pgs Total Time: 1:41 + 1:49 / 1.68 + 1.82 = 3.5 hrs

Session 1: Service on USS Houston, and capture by Japanese in Feb, 1942

Session 2: Experiences as a POW working on the Burma Railway

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on July 24, 2014.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in
Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

William Ingram, *Veterans Remember*, VR2-A-L-2014-018

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: William “Bill” Ingram, Jr. was born on June 13, 1924, in Springfield, Illinois. His father was a coal miner, and the family struggled during the Great Depression. After Bill was expelled from school at age fourteen, he worked at a variety of jobs for a couple of years and then followed his older brother into the US Navy, enlisting on his seventeenth birthday in June 1941. He traveled to Great Lakes Naval Training Center near Chicago for his basic training and then was assigned to the *USS Houston*, a heavy cruiser, then cruising in the western Pacific. Ingram did not reach the *USS Houston* until after Pearl Harbor, when the *Houston* was on station in the waters north of Australia.

After a short time in Australia, the *Houston* steamed toward Java and, on February 27, 1942 participated in the Battle of Java Sea. In the early morning of March 1, the *Houston* was sunk. Ingram survived only because he was a strong swimmer. All alone in the water for a day, he was picked up by a Japanese patrol boat, interrogated and then thrown back in the water. The next day he was picked up by a native fishing vessel with several other *USS Houston* crewmen. They made their way to land, but the group was soon captured by the Japanese. Ingram and the others were eventually sent to Burma, by way of Singapore, where they were forced to work on building the Burma Railway, also known as the “Death Railway.” Ingram talks about this ordeal in considerable detail. Near the end of the war he came down with a serious case of malaria and does not remember being liberated. He was conscious for a short time in Calcutta, India and next woke up in New York City. He soon took the train home and surprised his mother when he arrived on her doorstep in Springfield. Ingram eventually decided to stay in the Navy, retiring in 1961 as a chief petty officer. Bill passed away on August 12, 2017.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Burma Railway; prisoner of war experiences; treatment by Japanese guards; *USS Houston*; battle of Sunda Strait, Java Sea; operation of a naval 8-inch gun; Springfield, Illinois; Dr. Henri Hekking

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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