

1st Kentucky Soldier Home From Jap Prison

By JOE REISTER.

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Harrodsburg, Ky., March 16.—"I was so doggone glad to get home I was just speechless, that's all."

As might have been expected, that was the first reaction of Capt. William "Billy" Gentry, first Kentucky soldier captured by the Japanese to return to his native state, when he arrived here this morning.

But, by late this afternoon his tongue had loosened somewhat. Perhaps it was the country ham, hot biscuits, homemade preserves, fried apples and coffee served him by his mother at breakfast soon after his arrival that restored his speech. Maybe it was the "good old American cigarettes," as he called them.

Will Enter Nichols.

Warmly welcomed with "bear hugs" by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. James T. Gentry, Captain Gentry found home a "mighty, mighty nice place to be," and he plans to spend the rest of his leave in Harrodsburg "just taking it easy and shaking hands with my friends." April 8 he will enter Nichols General Hospital, Louisville, for a course of treatment. After that he expects a 60-day leave and he plans to spend it with his family, too.

Released from the Japanese

prison camp at Cabanatuan by Gen. Douglas MacArthur's forces on January 30, Captain Gentry and three others of the 82 Mercer County soldiers listed as missing after the Japs took the Bataan peninsula arrived in San Francisco March 8.

3 More to Be Home Soon.

The three others, Cpl. Field M. Reed, Staff Sgt. Charles Quinn and Cpl. Reid Shoemaker, will be home soon, the officer said. He said he knew about some others of the 82 reported missing, but was unable, for security reasons, to elaborate.

Telling of his nearly three years as a prisoner of the Japanese, Gentry recalled the infamous "March of Death" of American soldiers from Maraveles, on Bataan, to Camp O'Donnell, a distance of 125 miles. During the 11-day trek he subsisted on

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seven canteens of water and a single handful of steamed rice.

Carried By Fellow Officer.

Gentry declined to discuss those 11 days in detail "for obvious reasons," but added that "many fell by the wayside."

He himself contracted malaria on the march and suffered from the disease for three days, during which he was carried by 2d Lt. Jacques V. Merrifield, 27, Urbana, Ill.

Gentry was confined at Camp O'Donnell from April 23 to June 4, 1942. He then was transferred to Camp Cabanatuan, remained there until October 27, 1942, when he was taken to Mindanao Island and placed in Military Prison Camp No. 2.

There he was placed in charge of a 3,000-acre farm attached to the prisoners' camp. "Rice was the main crop and I was in charge of a group of farm laborers, with the entire operation under the supervision of the Japanese," he said.

He was sent back to Cabanatuan in June, 1944, and remained there until the Ranger raid that led to his rescue.

Lost Weight But Looks Fit.

Gentry, then a second lieutenant, was one of 86 Mercer County members of the now famous Company D, 192d Tank Battalion, Kentucky National Guard, when it was mustered into the United States Army on September 15, 1940. The unit was sent to the Philippines in October, 1941.

Now 26 years old and weighing 186 pounds as compared with 210 when he was mustered into the Army, he is sun-tanned and looks fit.

His first stop in Kentucky en route home was at Bowman Field, Louisville, where he arrived on an Army plane shortly after midnight last night. There he telephoned a brother-in-law, Jess Cotton, Harrodsburg, who was in Louisville to meet him.

Arrived Home At 5:30 A.M.

At 5:30 a.m., in the rosy, misty dawn of one of spring's most beautiful days, he and Cotton arrived at the Gentry home.

A family reception committee—his parents, his sisters, Mrs. James Barnett, Jr., and Mrs. Tilton Bannister; his grandmother, Mrs. R. C. Renfro; a niece, Mary Louise Barnett, 8, and a nephew, Tony Bannister, 2—was there to greet him.

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