NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

65

Interview with

Mr. Tom Blaylock

March 22, 1971

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald Marcello

Terms of Use: OPEN

Approved: Tom Blaylock

Date: March 22, 1971

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Oral History Collection

Mr. Thomas Blaylock

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas Date: March 22, 1971

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Tom Blaylock for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 22, 1971, in Dallas, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Blaylock in order to get his reminiscences and experiences while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Blaylock was in the Army Air Corps at the time. Mr. Blaylock, before we begin this interview, would you please give us a brief biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, where were you born, what is your education, so on and so forth?

Mr. Blaylock: Well, I was born in this area--Greenville, Texas, which is about fifty miles from here and moved to Dallas when I was one year old and have been here ever since or around this area rather. I'm just a high school graduate. I graduated from North Dallas in 1936.

Dr. Marcello: What year did you decide to join the service?

Mr. Blaylock: Well, I wanted to beat the draft.

Dr. Marcello: I see. Most people that I've interviewed with regard to this World War II project usually say that they either joined the service because they couldn't find a job--this was still more or less the depression period--or on the other hand they wanted to beat the draft.

Blaylock: Well, that's true. It was a depression period, but I was working, but I had this good friend that I ran around with that had a broken marriage and he was divorced. And he was the one who talked me into joining the Army with him. He said the Air Corps is taking him to California. He said everybody sworn in around this time would be sent to March Field, California. Well, that sounded very good, and I went down and signed up and went to March Field, California, the next day. (Chuckle)

Marcello: When was this?

Blaylock: That was in late May, 1941.

Marcello: Did you have any idea at that time that the country might possibly soon be getting into war?

Blaylock: Yes, I did, but I didn't seem to be worried. I thought, "I'll be in the Army Air Corps, and I'll be behind the line."

Marcello: How old were you at the time?

Blaylock: Twenty-four.

Marcello: Therefore, you had been born in 1917?

Blaylock: 1916.

Marcello: I see. Was there anything at March Field that stands out in your mind? I'm referring now to the period when you took your basic training.

Blaylock: No, just six weeks of boot camp out on sort of a plateau there where you burned up in the daytime, and you froze to death at night.

Marcello: I see. What were you being trained for? What was your specialty?

Blaylock: I was in what is known as an operations clerk. When pilots came in we typed up the reports and so forth. It was mainly office work.

Marcello: I see. In other words did you have some sort of a business education when you had been in high school, or where did you learn typing?

Blaylock: Well, in high school. And then I had worked for a typewriter company after I graduated from high school approximately a year and a half. This kept my typing alive.

Marcello: I see. Did you go directly from March Field to the Philippines?

Blaylock: No, sir. The new fellows in this outfit at March Field . . . they were building up the squadrons that they were sending overseas. They were building them up to wartime strength. And, of course, we new guys in this outfit at March Field were picked first to go join this new outfit at Hamilton Field, California, just out of San Francisco. And other than about two weeks at Hamilton Field, then we went directly to the Philippines.

Marcello: I see. Did you get any sort of special training at Hamilton Field?

Blaylock: No, we just slept in a hanger and waited for our orders (chuckle) to go overseas.

Marcello: I see. And I assume you went overseas by transport--Army Transport--is that correct?

Blaylock: Yes, it was the old _President Coolidge_. It was made into a troop transport.

Marcello: Did you stop off at the Hawaiian Islands?

Blaylock: We stopped at Honolulu for a few hours, and we got to go ashore. One thing I'll never forget. I was broke because we were in the new outfit, and they had misplaced our records, and we hadn't had a payday, so the new ones, all we could do was walk around downtown Honolulu.

Marcello: Sounds like a typical Army foul-up, does it not? (Chuckle)

Blaylock: Yes, it sure does.

Marcello: While you were on Honolulu, and I assume you weren't there too long, did you notice any unusual activity there so far as preparing for any war or for that eventuality?

Blaylock: I wasn't aware of it because like I said, I was just in downtown Honolulu. But I will say that when we left San Francisco, the planes that we were going to take with us were still stacked on the docks.

Marcello: This was in San Francisco?

Blaylock: That was in San Francisco.

Marcello: What kind of planes were these?

Blaylock: P-40s.

Marcello: Those were fighter planes.

Blaylock: In those days, they were fighter planes.

Marcello: Single-engine fighter planes?

Blaylock: Yeah.

Marcello: From the Hawaiian Islands then did you proceed on to the Philippines?

Blaylock: Yes. From Honolulu we had . . . well, not being a Navy man, I don't remember whether it was a cruiser or a destroyer, but we had one escort that went with us. They stopped at Guam, but at that time the harbor wasn't big enough for the President Coolidge, so we stayed out in the Pacific Ocean there where the Navy ships went on in for something.

Marcello: I see. Were there only two ships in this group, or were there more? Was there a whole convoy of ships?

Blaylock: No, there was, I think, the one that we picked up other than the one naval convoy. There was another troopship we picked up at Honolulu called The Meggs.

Marcello: On the trip from Guam to the Philippines, is there anything that stands out in your mind? Did anything unusual happen?

Blaylock: No, not a thing. We saw one ship, I think, at quite a distance. We could just barely see the thing. And other than that, that's all we ever saw.

Marcello: Did the ship have any, or did it take any precautions? In other words, I'm referring to such things as maybe blackouts at night . . .

Blaylock: Yeah . . .

Marcello: . . . or things like that?

Blaylock: . . . after we left Honolulu, we had blackouts at night.

Marcello: Were there any other precautions that you can think of that might have been taken along the way?

Blaylock: Not that I remember. They didn't tell us not to throw cigarette butts overboard or anything like that.

Marcello: Where did you land when you got to the Philippines?

Blaylock: Manila.

Marcello: You landed at Manila?

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: And from there you proceeded to Clark Field?

Blaylock: No, from there we went to Nichols Field.

Marcello: Nichols Field.

Blaylock: That was November 1, 1941.

Marcello: November 1, 1941. What was Nichols Field like at that time? Was it a beehive of activity?

Blaylock: No, it wasn't. It was still . . . oh, like peacetime Army you heard about before World War II. They were still observing work a half a day. That's all they were scheduled--to do work half a day and take the afternoon off because they were in the semi-tropics.

Marcello: In other words, when you arrived there in November of 1941, you really didn't see any extraordinary preparations being taken in order to guard against a possible attack.

Blaylock: Definitely not.

Marcello: It was business as usual. Is that a good way to describe it?

Blaylock: Business as usual. Right.

Marcello: What did you do when you got there?

Blaylock: Well, like I said, still being broke, all I could do was hang around the tent at Nichols Field, although we did go downtown Manila a couple of times--three or four of us. We begged, borrowed a few cents here and there, got a cab and went to downtown Manila and drank a coke just so we could say we'd been to town and came back to the field.

Marcello: Was the Philippines considered pretty good duty in those days?

Blaylock: Oh, yes. That was very good duty for the peacetime Army.

Marcello: In what regard?

Blaylock: Well, just half a day's work, and I could get a haircut for twenty cents and a coke for a nickel and cigarettes for a dime, and your buck private's twenty-one dollars the first three or four months, I think it was in those days, went a lot farther in the Philippines than it did in the States.

Marcello: I see. In other words, it was pretty cheap living among other things.

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: Pretty cheap living and pretty easy living. Had your planes arrived yet?

Blaylock: No, they hadn't.

Marcello: Did they ever arrive?

Blaylock: As far as I know, they didn't because I got to the Philippines just seventeen days before the war started. As well as I remember, or I had been told, we were the last troop transport to get there, of Air Corps troops. Maybe infantry or something like that came later, but I don't know.

Marcello: What sort of planes were there at Nichols Field?

Blaylock: The latest. The P-40. (Chuckle)

Marcello: The latest thing was the P-40. Were any of the Flying Fortresses, that is, the B-17s stationed there?

Blaylock: Oh, yeah, that's right. They were. But there weren't many because at that time Nichols Field was very small. The majority of them were on Central Luzon at Clark Field.

Marcello: I was going to ask you how Nichols Field compared with Clark Field so far as size was concerned.

Blaylock: I don't know. I never visited Clark Field. I'm not getting ahead or anything, but we moved out exactly a week later from Nichols Field to Central Luzon to a field that the 803rd Engineers were building. It was going to be a big pursuit squadron base, and at a distance we could see the planes come in at Clark Field just as little dots.

Marcello: I see. In other words, you only stayed at Nichols Field for a week.

Blaylock: One week.

Marcello: You were more or less transient, I guess you might say, while you were at Nichols Field.

Blaylock: Right.

Marcello: And your permanent station was to be at the . . . this new base that was being constructed. Did it have a particular name?

Blaylock: Yes. Del Carmen. It was at the Pampanga Sugar Mill. This was a little town. That's all it was Pampanga Sugar Mill. Excuse my ignorance in geography, but I think that was the province of Pampanga.

Marcello: Now when did you arrive at Del Carmen?

Blaylock: Oh, approximately a day or two before the end of November.

Marcello: Was it completed when you got there?

Blaylock: No, the engineers building the field were sleeping in tents. And the runway was nothing but dirt. It was a cane field that they had leveled off. And they had tank cars with molasses that was going to be used to put on the runway to keep the dust down when the planes took off. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Molasses?

Blaylock: Molasses.

Marcello: What was the reason for using that?

Blaylock: Well, it'd be a long time if they ever intended to blacktop the thing or cement it.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: And if one of those planes revved up the motor, it was just like a Texas dust storm. And incidentally, speaking of planes, when my outfit left for Central Luzon, we had P-36's, and they were prior to the P-40, (chuckle) so they were more obsolete than the P-40.

Marcello: In other words, as you look back upon your entire stay in the Philippines, that is up until the time that you were captured, would you say generally speaking that the Air Corps was ill-equipped to handle anything that the Japanese could throw at them?

Blaylock: Definitely. Going back to Marsh Field, all the planes coming from the factories on the West Coast were all camouflaged, and all had the British insignia on them, and they were all going to England.

Marcello: I see. All the equipment was obsolete in other words.

Blaylock: Definitely.

Marcello: What did you do when you got to this new field now--Del Carmen?

Blaylock: Well, it took us two or three days to set up everything and get to operating and digging bomb shelters and revetments and foxholes and setting up little machine guns. Lewis guns, I think they called them. I'm not an armament man. And some old fashioned .30 caliber. And I think we had one set of twin .50 calibers.

Marcello: In other words, this was your entire armament to ward off any sort of a Japanese air attack?

Blaylock: Right.

Marcello: Or an air attack by any enemy, for that matter.

Blaylock: And our air raid signal--of course, this was a few days before the war started--would be whoever saw the enemy planes first would fire two shots.

Marcello: (Chuckle) I see. How big was this new field?

Blaylock: It was quite large. It had the . . . two runways--north and south, east and west naturally. If the war hadn't started, they'd planned it to be quite a large field.

Marcello: Did you ever have any sort of alerts or training missions while you were at this field?

Blaylock: Not at this field, but a day or two or a night or two before we left Nichols Field there was an alert. Now, whether it was just a practice alert or really an honest-to-goodness alert, I don't know. But there we were in pitch dark, and you're not supposed to light a cigarette or anything, strike a match or anything.

Marcello: Can you remember exactly what you were doing on December 7, 1941?

Blaylock: Yes, let me put it this way. December 7, 1941, was Sunday in Honolulu, but it was Monday morning for us. And I was off duty that morning. And when I came out of my tent, guys were laughing and said, "The Japs are bombing Pearl Harbor." (Chuckle) And we were listening to the radio, and this announcer was saying, "As yet, the Japanese bombers have not bombed Clark Field." And right then, we could hear the explosions, the reports from Clark Field of the bombs exploding and see them as little dots. And it wasn't long after that, later in the day, there was three flights of twenty-seven--eighty one bombers.

Marcello: When you say three flights of twenty-seven, in other words, eighty-one bombers altogether?

Blaylock: Eighty-one bombers came right over our heads with their bomb bay doors open. And we thought they were going to drop them on us, but they went straight to Clark Field. At the Pampanga Sugar Mill there was two huge, high smoke stacks, and evidently the Japs used these for markers to line up to Clark Field. They came right over us, and they would turn and go straight to Clark Field.

Marcello: I see. Well, a while ago you mentioned that when the people heard the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, they were laughing about it.

Blaylock: Yeah.

Marcello: Laughing in disbelief?

Blaylock: Right. Disbelief and saying, "Well, they don't have any sense. We're going to whip them in thirty days."

Marcello: So what did you do after this? You said that after you heard the news you saw the planes come over. Obviously you knew they were bombing Clark Field. What did the men do on your base?

Blaylock: We scattered. We knocked down our tents, and we started sleeping on the ground that day. And our planes got off the ground and took off, and when they came back, most of them were full of holes. And we believed it then (chuckle), I guess, for the first time.

Marcello: You said most of your planes took off, and when they came back they were full of holes. I assume these were the P-36s that you told me about.

Blaylock: The P-36s, yeah.

Marcello: Which obviously were no match for the Japanese planes.

Blaylock: Definitely not.

Marcello: When did your planes go up. Did they go up in support of the Clark Field operation or what?

Blaylock: Yeah, now, I don't know exactly. One or two messages I heard said rally around the port. And that was the port area of Manila. And another report said . . . oh, I don't know the position, but they knew where to go to meet the oncoming bombers and Japanese support planes.

Marcello: About how many planes did you have at your field altogether?

Blaylock: Oh . . .

Marcello: You can only estimate this, of course.

Blaylock: Not over a dozen.

Marcello: I see. Did the Japanese ever hit your field?

Blaylock: The third day of the war.

Marcello: Can you describe the activity that took place?

Blaylock: Well, it was over toward the two smoke stacks. We thought . . . somebody said, "Well, look, there's P-36s coming in for a landing. (Chuckle) They've got their landing gear down. And about that time they opened up, and they went down one side of the runway, turned, came right back, and I don't know why, but everybody looked at their watch, and it lasted twenty-one minutes.

Marcello: These were fighters . . .

Blaylock: They were . . .

Marcello: . . . who strafed the field?

Blaylock: These were fighters who strafed the field, and they thought that these tank cars (chuckle) of molasses was gasoline (chuckle), and they gave it hell. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Did they hit those molasses cars?

Blaylock: Yes, they hit the molasses cars. And not getting too far ahead of you, but everyday they came back, and they hit those two molasses cars waiting for them to explode. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I guess you can thank your lucky stars that they were molasses cars rather than the gasoline.

Blaylock: The gasoline, yeah.

Marcello: Okay, so what took place during the attack itself? Did the field offer any sort of resistance?

Blaylock: Yes. We had, oh, three or four, maybe five little machine guns shooting at them--the ones that could get a shot. But the ones out there at the field, all we could do was just stay in this hole we were in. Of course, I had a habit of wanting to see what was going on, and the guys in this big hole, they practically tackled me when I tried to raise up to see what was going on.

Marcello: What thoughts were going through your own mind? This was obviously the first time you had been under fire.

Blaylock: Definitely. Gosh, I can't remember what exactly went through my mind. But I will tell you one thing. The first few days, when we would hear the two shots—our air raid signal that enemy planes were coming--I couldn't hardly run. It was just like you were dreaming that you were trying to run. It was that sensation until a few days.

Marcello: I see. When was the next time the Japanese hit?

Blaylock: I couldn't give you any specific date . . .

Marcello: They did come back several times?

Blaylock: . . . or time. Oh, yes. Now they did come back several times. And after that first air raid incidentally--after the pursuit planes--I guess there were Zeroes. Everybody said they were. Oh, it must have been an hour or so later. I think it was three dive bombers came over and dropped a load on us. And then I don't know whether it was the next day or maybe one or two days later, but the planes were all shot up and what three or four that would still fly, why, the mechanics would take parts off of those to put on the other planes that they could keep in the air, and at night we would change the planes around so that the Japs would think they'd been flying. And they'd come back and strafe them again. And the next night we'd just push them to another position. (Chuckle)

Marcello: In other words, they were strafing the same planes over and over again in most cases.

Blaylock: Definitely.

Marcello: I see. Well describe the activities that took place, now, let's say, up until the time you finally ended up down on Bataan.

Blaylock: We left Del Carmen Sugar Mill on Christmas night, 1941. Nothing happened during that time from December 7th until Christmas night except the usual strafing and bombing.

Marcello: Did they come at a particular time? Did you know about when to expect them?

Blaylock: Yes. But we knew more about when they were going to stop because it seemed that about five o'clock--supper time--that they were through for the day.

Marcello: Did they ever inflict any casualties?

Blaylock: The only casualty during this time was maybe one or two shrapnel wounds by bombs, but the first man killed in my outfit was our commanding officer. The third day of the war when he was up at Lingayen Gulf strafing the Jap ships he blew up an ammunition ship. And, of course, the explosion tore his plane to pieces and the pilots in the back of him said it lifted his plane a thousand feet before he gained control of it again. That was how terrific the explosion was.

Marcello: Now Lingayen Gulf, that's where one of the Japanese invasions took place, was it not?

Blaylock: Yes, uh-huh.

Marcello: . . . of the island. Okay, so you left your air field on

Christmas night. Where did you go from there?

Blaylock: Someplace . . . gosh, I can't remember. Orani, I believe they called it. We camped at a schoolhouse there. Orani is on the Manila Bay side of Bataan.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: And I think it's before you actually get into Bataan, but that's where we stayed. I couldn't exactly tell you how long, but I do know I celebrated my twenty-fifth birthday there--December 29th. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. So what happened from that point forward?

Blaylock: Well, they were evacuating, or as they would say on the news every night, "retreated to previously prepared positions."

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: And at one time, we were right behind the front lines, and the Jap artillery was coming rather close to us.

Marcello: Now were you down in the Bataan Peninsula by this time?

Blaylock: Not this time.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: We were still at Orani. And there was a little one-way bridge there that the Japs were trying to bomb, knock out, every day. And as far as I know, they never did knock it out until after we left there. In fact when we came back on the march, (chuckle) I believe it was still there.

Marcello: How long did you remain at Orani?

Blaylock: Oh, maybe two weeks, as far as I know.

Marcello: What did you do while you were there--anything?

Blaylock: Just go out to the little air field we had there--one little runway in a cane field--and I think we had about three P-40s, and they would take off on observation flights. And when they'd come back, why, we'd dash out there and cover the runway with straw.

Marcello: I see. Was there anything else that happened at Orani that you think we ought to have a part of the record?

Blaylock: Well, the schoolhouse we were at, one day they bombed the hell out of it, and I happened to be down to the creek washing. And I wasn't there, and I was one of the few lucky ones who had a cot. In one of the school rooms, several of us managed to have brought a cot with us from Del Carmen to Orani, and that was the last day I slept on a cot. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. Did they hit the schoolhouse, in other words?

Blaylock: Oh, they blasted the devil out of it.

Marcello: Did your unit sustain very many casualties here?

Blaylock: No, they didn't. But that one big raid where they practically leveled the schoolhouse, they did kill a lot of Filipino civilians in these straw huts. They called them barrios.

Marcello: I see. In other words, they apparently did know you were there despite all your efforts to cover up that field and so on.

Blaylock: Oh, yes. They knew we were there, but they never did find the field.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: But they knew we were there. It was mostly just the bridge they were trying to hit. It was just a small bridge, but we had to have it.

Marcello: Did you notice any outstanding activities on the part of the Filipino civilians at this time?

Blaylock: Well, what do you mean outstanding?

Marcello: Oh, did they help in any way? Did they seem sympathetic to the American cause, or were they neutral in this whole affair?

Blaylock: Well, they were sympathetic to the American cause, but that day that they bombed the schoolhouse and took so many casualties, the Filipino civilians were definitely against us, or I could say hostile--even hostile.

Marcello: I see. Was this mainly because you were in camp so close by, and obviously they were going to become a target of the bombs and so on?

Blaylock: Right.

Marcello: In other words, they wanted you out of there. Maybe not because they necessarily disliked Americans, but mainly because they knew as long as you were there, there was always the threat that they were going to get bombed.

Blaylock: Right.

Marcello: Is this more or less an accurate observation?

Blaylock: I think it was more or less. I didn't speak Tagalog, their native tongue, but I know a few of them said something to me while we were rushing around trying to put out fires and things that I'm sure it wasn't friendly.

Marcello: Okay, so you were at Orani for about two weeks. Where did you go from there?

Blaylock: Well, we went to a place down in the . . . oh, call it a jungle. But it was more or less like a national forest, like you'd see up in Colorado, New Mexico, or somewhere. And they called it Little Baguio. They called it a rest camp, although there's no camp to it. It was just out in the forest, and naturally we were still sleeping on the ground. And we didn't do anything but just lay around in the daytime and cut up and wonder what the hell's going to happen next. They called us together and told us their plan was to go by ship at night to Mindanao, the southernmost island in the Philippine group, and we would have reinforcements and everything like that. They would be coming up from Australia, you know. These were simply rumors to try to encourage us and all that. Get our morale built up and so forth.

Marcello: In other words, at this time you had no idea that there was a hopeless situation in the Philippines. Or did you suspect it?

Blaylock: Well, when MacArthur left we knew it was a hopeless situation, but we were trying to fool ourselves, you know, that they'd get in and that we'd get reinforcements and all this stuff. But deep down I knew it wouldn't happen.

Marcello: What did you think? Did you have any thoughts when you were doing all this moving around, or could you make any sort of sense out of all of this moving around that you had been doing now?

Blaylock: Well, yes. Let me go back to Del Carmen. One day I was in this little village there, and not knowing anything about the lay-out of the Philippines, I was looking at a newspaper in the telegraph office there, and this Filipino said, "Well, the Japs are at Lingayen and Aperi and someplace in the southern tip of Luzon there." And I said, "By the way, Joe,"--we call all Filipinos "Joe"--I said, "Where is Lingayen and where is so-in-so?" And he said, "Oh, this is down here, and this one's up here, and you're right here." (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: And I didn't realize that the Jap infantry and everything was right on the same island I was on closing in little by little.

Marcello: Now up to this time you had no contact whatsoever with Japanese infantry or soldiers, had you?

Blaylock: No, I hadn't at that time.

Marcello: You had only seen them from a distance and heard the artillery and so on and so forth.

Blaylock: That's all. I never saw a Japanese infantryman until I actually did front line fighting in March, I believe, of '42.

Marcello: I see. About how long were you at this national forest at Baguio? Baguio, incidentally, is up in the highlands, is it not?

Blaylock: Now just a minute professor. I said Little . . .

Marcello: Little Baguio.

Blaylock: . . . Baguio. It's what they called it because it was something like the real Baguio.

Marcello: I see. But in other words, you really weren't up in the highlands or the mountains.

Blaylock: No, no. Just a few days is all we were there.

Marcello: And then from there where did you move?

Blaylock: Well, we went to deep Bataan. Around the corner is a place called Agaloma.

Marcello: Agaloma?

Blaylock: Yeah. And the one road going around the peninsula of Bataan--Bataan Province--is called the International Road, and every few miles or kilometers there would be a little road cut through the jungle, and it would be kilometer so-in-so. And that's how they'd identify where you'd be. I don't remember what kilometer so-in-so that we went down to the beach to do patrol duty and keep the Japs out when they tried to land, but there was a point called Agaloma.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: And that's where I tasted my front line fighting as an infantryman.

Marcello: Okay, would you want to describe exactly what took place here at Agaloma.

Blaylock: Well, when I say it was in the jungle, man, I mean it was in the jungle.

Marcello: Okay, describe the terrain first of all. I think that would be a good place to start.

Blaylock: Well, it was very mountainous. There were tall peaks to the north of us there, but where we were, going through the jungle, this one road that went all the way to the China Sea was very thick jungle. And we went right down to the water--the China Sea--and then there was a cliff more or less. Oh, what's that city in California? Come right up to the beach and jump off?

Marcello: I'm not sure what it is, but anyhow . . .

Blaylock: And we did patrol there, and there was Filipinos. They had part of it, and we had part of it. And one night before we actually . . . we had camped a few kilometers away from the beach, and one night while we were there we were putting in gun implacements. What I mean when I say gun implacements was a machine gun. And we weren't ready yet, and one night while we were up on the hillside the Japs landed.

Marcello: They came in from the China Sea.

Blaylock: They came in from the China Sea.

Marcello: Did you actually see them land?

Blaylock: No. I didn't see them land. Because when . . . the only word . . . we didn't have enough telephone cable to go that far. And our only signal would be when you hear the firing, come on down. And we heard the firing, and a messenger finally got up to us and I heard the commanding officer, "Are you sure?" And he said, "Yes sir, the Japs are all over them damn woods." (Chuckle)

Marcello: In other words, you mentioned a while ago about a lack of telephone wire. Here would be, of course, another example of the lack of preparation on the part of the military to meet any possible attack.

Blaylock: Right.

Marcello: Anyhow, so you're up on the hill, and you get the word that the Japanese had landed. Was there any prior bombardment, or was your particular sector under any fire prior to the bombardment?

Blaylock: No, no, definitely not.

Marcello: You weren't on short rations or anything like that at this time.

Blaylock: We were on two meals a day.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: And salmon, my Lord, we had cans of salmon. I don't know where they got all that damn salmon, but I swore if I ever got home I'd never eat any salmon. (Chuckle)

Marcello: When you got the word that the Japanese landed, then what did you do?

Blaylock: Well, they went around, woke everybody up, and told us to get dressed, get our rifles. And speaking of my rifle, it was an old Springfield single bolt action. The serial number on it only had four numbers, and I think it was even used prior to World War I.

Marcello: In other words, when you say that the serial number only had four digits or four numbers, that means that it was manufactured very, very early.

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, continue.

Blaylock: So we got on our trucks and went down to the beach, and it was sort of a little cold there. When I say beach, there were cliffs around, but this one road went down to the beach. And so my squadron . . . officer-in-charge, I think, sent about ten of us out across this little creek onto the sand right there on the water. He said, "Just stay here until further orders." And we could hear firing all around us, and we didn't know what in the devil was taking place. And all of a sudden, why, I don't know whether it was one of our PT Boats or one of their landing barges or what, but bullets--tracer bullets--just started going in every direction and by the reflection in the water they looked like they were coming right at us. And all we could do was just lie there and wonder what the hell to do next. What I think it was, when it got daylight, then they said that was one of our PT Boats. It was trying to sink some of the landing barges that we couldn't see just around Agaloma Point there.

Marcello: Would you say that there was generally mass confusion among your particular unit. You really didn't know what was going on, so on and so forth.

Blaylock: No, I definitely didn't know what was going on. And later on an officer came back to us on the beach there and says, "When it gets light or starts getting light, why, pull back across the creek into the woods where they can't see you." Wherever they were!

Marcello: And is that what you did?

Blaylock: Yes, that's what we did. And later in the morning when a truck came down with some chow--if you could call it chow in those days--why, naturally I couldn't eat anything. I'd never been under that kind of fire before I'd went through plenty of strafing and bombing prior to coming to Agaloma Point, and this one young kid in my outfit said, "Those woods are full of Japs." Then I knew that, boy, they were there. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. So what happened next then?

Blaylock: Well, we finally got organized, and in a few days when the . . .

Marcello: You still hadn't had any contact with the Japanese yet, that is, face to face contact.

Blaylock: No, I hadn't . . .

Marcello: You really hadn't seen any of them yet?

Blaylock: No, I hadn't seen any of them yet. But when we got organized, why, my squadron would go up on the line, and we'd have to get right side by side with a Filipino, or they wouldn't stay. And the jungle was so thick, the officer said, "Don't lose contact with the man on your right." And about the only way you could keep from losing contact was hold his hand, and you couldn't see what you were shooting at. And you'd just shoot at the jungle and crawl a little bit, and they'd say shoot some more, and we'd keep shooting. And we were right in front of a Jap machine gun and didn't know it. And finally the officer next to me--we were standing up--the burst of machine gun fire came right between us, and we hit the ground. And when we hit the ground, why, his shoulder fell against my head, and the next burst got him in the shoulder, and so he grabbed at his shoulder with his right hand (chuckle), and one of the bullets got him right in the knuckle of his index finger on his left hand. And that was my real taste of front line fighting for the first time.

Marcello: In other words, just the fact that he had fallen against you more or less had saved you from getting killed.

Blaylock: Definitely. And I helped carry him down. We made a stretcher out of a couple of little trees and some kind of a little tarp, and they told me to help carry him down, and I was sure glad they said help carry him down and get the hell out of that madhouse up there with bullets whizzing in every direction.

Marcello: So what happened then?

Blaylock: Well, I didn't have to go back up to the line of fire until the next day. And one squadron would go up there and would stay practically all day, and we couldn't see anything. Never did see a Jap.

Marcello: You never even saw any Japs when the machine gun fired?

Blaylock: No, I didn't see a Jap. But you could see the twigs breaking if the bullets were coming your way.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: And then we'd get orders to come out, and another squadron would come up and take our place. We'd pray for dark so we could leave, and they'd pray for daylight so they could leave.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: It was an all day affair.

Marcello: About how long did this go on?

Blaylock: Oh, that must have lasted ten days.

Marcello: In other words, apparently both sides were more or less feeling one another out. Is that correct? The Japanese apparently weren't advancing too much, were they?

Blaylock: I think they called it an harassment to occupy a lot of troops from the front lines.

Marcello: In other words, you were not really meeting the brunt of the main Japanese attack here. Is that a safe assumption?

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: In other words, the main Japanese attack came down through the peninsula. Isn't that correct?

Blaylock: Right.

Marcello: Rather than actually landing. This landing along the beach, like you say, was more or less a diversionary activity.

Blaylock: Yeah, diversionary activity to tie up more troops so they couldn't go to the front lines. We were Air Corps men, and we weren't trained for infantry fighting. And they had to call in the crack Filipino Scouts. And the engineers--803rd Engineers--they weren't trained for infantry. They were there with us. And it must have taken at least, two weeks to finally push them off.

Marcello: Oh, you finally did push the Japanese off from this landing?

Blaylock: Oh, yes, we pushed them right over this cliff. And incidentally when they went over the cliff, there was a cave down there that we couldn't get to. We threw dynamite sticks and everything else trying to get them out. So finally some boys that had these little ole motor launches from the . . . I think there was three of them. They passed us on their way around the point, like a beach landing to get to these Japs. And Captain Dyess was with them. And so these few men . . . we could see what was going on, but the Japs were just around this other point, and we couldn't see them, and they jumped off the barges into the water and wiped them out. And while they were going back to Mariveles, three Japanese dive bombers found them. I got a birds-eye view of these bombers dropping their load--actually dive-bombing to sink those barges--and they missed.

Marcello: They made it back to Mariveles then.

Blaylock: Yes, they made it back to Mariveles. About how many Japanese landed altogether? Did you ever find out?

Blaylock: No. I didn't, but I know at one time the burial detail that went over there to bury them after the battle was over said one group buried over a hundred, and, incidentally, if you've ever smelled the odor of a dead person, it's the worst odor you could ever smell. We had to move our little kitchen farther away because of the odor.

Marcello: I would assume the bodies decomposed rather quickly in that tropical heat also.

Blaylock: Definitely.

Marcello: Did you ever get on any of these burial details?

Blaylock: Not until I was a prisoner.

Marcello: I see. Not at this particular time though. What would you say about the Filipinos who were in this defensive perimeter with your group? Did they give a good account of themselves?

Blaylock: Well, the ones that I was around didn't want to be there any more than I did.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: In fact, they made very . . . every excuse in the world to get up and leave or just stand up and walk away from the line of fire. They said they had to go eat, you know. In fact, there was one Filipino who had a bullet in his arm, and one Filipino was carrying his helmet, one was carrying his rifle, one was carrying his ammunition bag, and one was carrying his gas mask, and one was carrying his mess kit. (Chuckle) And just any excuse . . .

Marcello: Now were these the Filipino Scouts?

Blaylock: No, definitely not.

Marcello: This was perhaps the Constabulary?

Blaylock: The Constabulary . . . no, it was regular Filipino Army that had been drafted just about the time the war started and . . .

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: . . . they drafted them in and sent them to fight the Japs.

Marcello: In other words, they had very little training and practically no discipline at all. Is that correct?

Blaylock: Right.

Marcello: On the other hand, the Filipino Scouts were apparently fairly well-trained.

Blaylock: They were very well-trained.

Marcello: And did most of the Americans have a rather high regard for them as fighting men?

Blaylock: Definitely. They sure did.

Marcello: This was a rather polyglot outfit, was it not? In defense of this beach perimeter, you mentioned the 803rd Engineers, and the Air Corps people, the Filipino draftees, and the Filipino Scouts. Was there anybody else?

Blaylock: Well, no, so far as I know there wasn't. Incidentally, what they called our sister outfit--I was in the 34th Pursuit Squadron--and our sister outfit, was the 21st Pursuit Squadron. They gave them Bren gun carriers to operate. Do you know what those are?

Marcello: The Bren gun, yeah.

Blaylock: Well, that's what the 21st Pursuit Squadron was doing.

Marcello: Now were they in this defensive perimeter with you?

Blaylock: No, they were not in this immediate defensive perimeter.

Marcello: They were some other place in other words.

Blaylock: Yes, some other place on Bataan.

Marcello: About how long did this whole action take? What's the time span involved here--from the time of the initial Japanese landing until they were finally wiped out on this perimeter.

Blaylock: I think it was close to a month. It started in maybe late January or early February. It just lasted for approximately a month, I guess. Actually, it took the Filipino Scouts to come in there and finally just mop up . . .

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: . . . and finally end it.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: They had their infantry trained . . .

Marcello: You would give them most of the credit then for getting rid of these Japanese?

Blaylock: Yes, at the last I sure would.

Marcello: Is there anything else that you would like to mention now with regard to this initial contact with the Japanese? Incidentally, did you take any prisoners? Were there any Japanese prisoners taken at this time?

Blaylock: Not to my knowledge.

Marcello: What was your own feeling perhaps about being captured by the Japanese? Did the thought ever enter your mind?

Blaylock: Yes, it did.

Marcello: Did the group of soldiers or did the servicemen talk about it?

Blaylock: Yes. We didn't know whether they would even take prisoners.

Marcello: This seems to have been the general feeling among most Americans. They seemed to feel that perhaps the Japanese wouldn't take prisoners, that they would kill . . .

Blaylock: Well, . . .

Marcello: . . . all the Americans they possibly caught.

Blaylock: . . .at the beginning of the march, or maybe someplace where they stopped, some famous Japanese general--I wasn't in the group--but several that I talked to later said that this Jap general said that if he had his way there would be no prisoners.

Marcello: What happened now after the Japanese had been finally destroyed in this perimeter?

Blaylock: Well, the Japs knew we were there and they bombed once in a while, and they tried one more landing, but we were better organized, and we drove them off one night. And in fact we had three P-40s, I think, in a place that's called Cabcaban Field. And anyway, that night when the Japs went down there in launches, they were shelling us with evidently very small caliber shells trying to get in. And, of course, we had to wait til they got closer so we could actually shoot at them.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't have anything that could reach their landing ships or anything.

Blaylock: No. And it's a funny thing. At dusk that afternoon this Jap ship came just as close to shore as they could to draw fire. Someone identified it as a Jap minelayer or minesweeper. And we could see the Japs with their binoculars looking us over, and so we sensed that there was going to be a landing that night, and sure enough there was.

Marcello: Did they land at this little beach?

Blaylock: They tried.

Marcello: That's the only place they could land, I guess, judging from what you said.

Blaylock: Well, evidently unless they intended to scale the cliffs.

Marcello: I see. About how high were these cliffs?

Blaylock: Oh, I'd say anywhere from 50-75 feet.

Marcello: More or less straight up and down?

Blaylock: Yeah, straight up and down. And as I was saying, three P-40s came over that night and strafed these landing barges, and I guess that's probably actually what kept them from getting into shore. And the P-40s would go away to refuel or reload, and when they'd go away, why, three Jap planes would come over and shoot at us. And we couldn't hardly tell which was which except by the tracers. Our tracers were red and the Japs were sort of a powder blue, so we knew which planes were (chuckle) in the air at the time.

Marcello: Were you actually on the line at the time the Japanese made this second invasion attempt, landing attempt?

Blaylock: Well, actually there wasn't any line. We were just all lined up along the cliff there waiting for them to come in.

Marcello: I see. You had a pretty good defense of position there, in other words.

Blaylock: Yes, and some very thick trees. That was pretty good shelter from their shells. I don't know what caliber they were using, but they weren't very large, and none of those shells came very close to me that night.

Marcello: So what happened after this?

Blaylock: Well, we drove them off, and then I don't . . . well, as I remember, they didn't try any more landings. And at night we would look out over the China Sea there, and maybe you read the book They Were Expendable.

Marcello: Yes.

Blaylock: We could see the tip end of Corregidor from the point I was at on Bataan, and just before daylight, why, we could see their PTs coming in. They'd been out prowling at night. And we would scan the China Sea out there at night, and every now and then we would see gun flashes, so we would know that they had picked up something and sneaked up on it.

Marcello: You could tell that Corregidor was under bombardment and so on?

Blaylock: Yes. Actually, like I said, all I could see or we could see from where we were was the tip end of Corregidor. And I think that PT Boats had tunnels or something there that they stayed in during the day. But finally we knew it was all over, and we got word to burn and destroy everything and get in our trucks and go to Mariveles and meet the Japs. And the first sergeant said, "I don't know about you guys, but if a Jap tells me to kiss his foot, I'm going to kiss his foot." (Chuckle)

Marcello: Was there any grumbling among the men about surrendering? Now obviously, like I said, you had beaten off two Japanese landing attempts, and physically or at least so far as casualties were concerned your unit wasn't in real bad shape, was it? You hadn't sustained too many casualties, had you?

Blaylock: No, definitely. In actual bombing raids and strafing and front line fighting I think we lost about a dozen men, actually.

Marcello: In other words, your unit was in fairly good shape considering what you had gone through and so on.

Blaylock: Yes, other than dysentery and malaria.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what sort diseases had broken out among the troops.

Blaylock: Oh, we had dysentery and malaria, and prior to the fall of Bataan we had been cut to one meal a day.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: It was mostly rice.

Marcello: I see. Now about how long were you on Bataan altogether?

Blaylock: Oh, from the first part of January to April 9 of '42 when it collapsed.

Marcello: What was your own physical condition like at the time, let's say, that the defense collapsed.

Blaylock: I was weak--very weak. I had a bad case of dysentery for a while. And incidentally, I did get a bullet wound in the leg that didn't amount to much, but I did go to the hospital for a while, thank goodness. A few days after I left the hospital, they bombed it. And so I wasn't in too good a shape, but I didn't want to die. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. Had you lost any weight?

Blaylock: Oh, yeah. I lost a lot of weight.

Marcello: I'm speaking now of the time that you were captured--during the time you were on Corregidor. How much did you weigh approximately when you went into the service?

Blaylock: I was always very thin, and I think I weighed 145.

Marcello: I see. And how much do you think you weighed, let's say, at the time that you were captured?

Blaylock: 130 or less.

Marcello: I see. I see. Somewhere around 130 pounds, let's say, give or take a couple.

Blaylock: Probably closer to 125.

Marcello: I see. Was there ever any grumbling among the men about surrendering?

Blaylock: A little grumbling about surrendering. In fact, maybe a handful took off through the jungle, but I didn't know . . . everybody had that in mind, but no one knew where to go.

Marcello: I see. Did you have the option of surrendering or taking off through the jungle?

Blaylock: No. We didn't have the option. They said this is it. We got orders from the commanding general to cease resistance. This was it.

Marcello: What did you do with your weapons?

Blaylock: Just piled them in a big pile, poured gasoline on them, and burned them. What mass confusion! They said, "Don't take anything. Just destroy everything." And for some damn unknown reason I had snapshots all through my boot camp, and March Field, California, and a stolen snapshot. I mean that at an unguarded moment I took a snapshot of the old experimental ship B-19, the forerunner of the B-29.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: Which I shouldn't have taken, but I mean, hell, everybody had a chance. That was at March Field. I had pictures of that and everything. I don't know. For some damn reason I just threw everything on the damn fire, and a lot of guys didn't bother with their pictures. And the first Jap who came along and wanted my wallet, so I just gave it to him. I wasn't going to argue with him. (Chuckle)

Marcello: He just took it from you?

Blaylock: He just looked at it and grunted, and I said, "Here." (Chuckle)

Marcello: Now you had been told to surrender, and you said you had got on trucks, and you went down to Mariveles Bay. What sort of thoughts were running through your own mind so far as giving yourself up to the Japanese?

Blaylock: I don't know. I would have liked to have gone through the jungle, but I didn't know where to go. And they killed a few by . . . I don't know, they took them out off to the side and . . . I don't know, but it seemed like some of them if they found a damn razor blade on you in what few possessions you had, they'd think that you were going to use it as a weapon, and they'd take it away, or beat the hell out of you. In fact, a few guys got shot, and I was told--and of course I'd shut my eyes and look the other way or something--that they found razor blades on them. And they killed them because they thought they were going to use them as weapons.

Marcello: In other words, at the time you surrendered, you didn't have anything at all in your possession.

Blaylock: I didn't have anything.

Marcello: Not even a toothbrush or anything like that?

Blaylock: No toothbrush, no nothing.

Marcello: All you had were the clothing on your back and what you were wearing.

Blaylock: I take that back. I had a little sack of . . . I threw my razor blades away when I heard what they were doing, but I kept my safety razor, and I didn't have a toothbrush, but I had a little old tube of Burma Shave shaving cream that I . . . later in Bilibid Prison when I finally got hold of a toothbrush, I used that shaving cream as toothpaste. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. Okay, so you were on these trucks going down to Mariveles. What happened when you got there?

Blaylock: Well, we unloaded and one group . . . why we'd get into groups, and we'd have orders to do this and do that, and we were told we were going to march to the railroad. I don't remember . . . you probably have heard from other guys how long the march was. I really don't know. Although I made the damn thing, I heard it was anywhere from fifty-five miles to 150. I just don't know.

Marcello: I heard somewhere around sixty-five.

Blaylock: Believe it or not, I don't know.

Marcello: Well, anyhow what happened when you got to Mariveles? Now the Japs were there to greet you, of course.

Blaylock: Yeah, the Japs were there to greet us.

Marcello: What happened when, you know, when the trucks pulled into Mariveles?

Blaylock: They drove them off to the side, and we unloaded, and the Japs went through your stuff if you had any stuff. We didn't have anything to eat; at least my group didn't. Maybe some of the other groups did. We didn't know whether they were going to shoot you or what.

Marcello: Did the Japanese rough you up very much?

Blaylock: At that time, no, not me. But I saw one Jap that when anybody had glasses on, he went over and he took their glasses off and looked through them. And if he couldn't see, or they didn't fit him evidently, why, he threw them to the ground and stomped them until he finally found a pair that he could see through.

Marcello: Then he confiscated them, huh?

Blaylock: Yes, he confiscated them, but the ones that didn't suit him, why, he stomped them and broke the lenses in them.

Marcello: Did you ever witness any atrocities here, that is, I'm speaking now of Mariveles? Did you ever see the Japs, you know, physically torture, beat, or punish any Americans?

Blaylock: Well, not the part you read about--where they stuck bamboo under their fingernails and things like that--but I saw them beat the hell out of them with the butts of their rifles. And the Jap officers would hit them with their sabers and cut a few, laid a few wounds in their heads with their sabers or samarai swords or whatever you call them. And why? I don't know. One night on the march we were at a place where we were going to camp for the night, and they made us get up and start marching. They said they'd found a pistol in one of the officer's barracks bags. And that was their excuse for not letting us rest that night.

Marcello: About how long did you stay at Mariveles?

Blaylock: Oh, a couple of days.

Marcello: Did they have you do anything while you were there?

Blaylock: Oh, there were a few who went out moving the trucks around and hauling Japanese stuff around and this, that, and the other. But I didn't.

Marcello: Did they have you in any sort of a compound or barbed-wire enclosure at this time or anything like that?

Blaylock: Not at that time, no.

Marcello: I assume they did keep you under pretty close guard, however?

Blaylock: Yes. Very close guard.

Marcello: What did you personally do--just sit around and wait for your next orders?

Blaylock: Yes, sit around and wait for the next orders and wonder if there would be another order.

Marcello: Okay, so you were at Mariveles then for about three days. Where did you go from there?

Blaylock: Well, we started marching, and I don't remember the places we stopped.

Marcello: Now, is this where the Bataan Death March started?

Blaylock: This is where the Bataan Death March started.

Marcello: At Mariveles. So the Bataan Death March actually started then at Mariveles. About how many men were there when you started from Mariveles?

Blaylock: Well, I would roughly guess approximately, oh, maybe 10,000, I would say.

Marcello: This was 10,000 Americans.

Blaylock: Americans, yes.

Marcello: I see. And now they were marching you, and this was all on foot, isn't that correct?

Blaylock: All on foot, yes.

Marcello: You went from Mariveles to . . . was it Fort or Camp O'Donnell or was . . .

Blaylock: It was O'Donnell.

Marcello: O'Donnell.

Blaylock: However, like I said before, I don't remember the name of the place, but it was the end of the railroad line. And we marched there and then they put us in boxcars and sent us to O'Donnell.

Marcello: Okay, let's start then from the beginning of the march at Mariveles. What was it like? Describe it in your own words.

Blaylock: Well, it was just a living nightmare. You had no water, no food. If you dropped to the ground, and you weren't up on your feet by the time the Japs got there, they shot you or stuck a bayonet in you. I called them "The Clean-up Squad." Every so many yards behind the Americans there would be two, three, maybe four Japs in the line. And anybody on the ground by the time that they got there, they were dead.

Marcello: Did you actually witness them killing American soldiers?

Blaylock: Yes, definitely. Yes, definitely. In fact, I even . . . see, their trucks were coming in the opposite direction going down to invade Corregidor and set up their artillery to shell Corregidor since they didn't have us on their neck anymore. And if there was a dead body in the way, the truck just ran over it. And the Japs would reach out, and those of us that still had our steel helmets on--the old World War I helmets--why, they tried to bash our head in. But I did see . . . I don't remember how many killings I did witness. I didn't actually witness a Jap chopping a head off, but I did see the results once.

Marcello: This actually occurred on occasion?

Blaylock: Yes, it did.

Marcello: Why do you think that they were so cruel to these prisoners? Do you think perhaps it was because of the stubborn resistance which the defenders put up on Bataan, or just exactly why? What are your own opinions?

Blaylock: Well, maybe it was the stubborn resistance, I guess, course, I didn't know at the time, but things I have read later said it upset General Homma's timetable. One account that I read of the Battle of Bataan, the Japs used their old and wounded soldiers. And Japs that I have talked to after Bataan fell were the ones that had taken place in the battle of Singapore and Hong Kong. So you can't believe everything you read, but I actually talked to Japs that had fought at Hong Kong and Singapore.

Marcello: Did you see any of your friends being killed, or did you see any of them dropping out of line and so on?

Blaylock: No, I never looked back.

Marcello: What efforts were made to help any of those that, perhaps, did fall?

Blaylock: I helped one or two on the march in five or six days, however long that we marched at one time or other. And I was helped some. But if an American was down, and you were trying to pick him up, help him up, you might get shot too.

Marcello: I see. Apparently one of the things that the Japanese did on this march was that they made sure that they showed off the prisoners to the local population during this march. Is that correct?

Blaylock: Yes, that is right.

Marcello: What was the purpose of doing this?

Blaylock: Just to show that they were the superior race, I guess. There's nothing that delighted a short Jap more than reaching up and slapping a tall, skinny American that was about a foot or two taller than him in front of a Filipino. It's just humiliating.

Marcello: I see. This was a form of humiliation.

Blaylock: That's my opinion.

Marcello: As much as anything. And also, I think it was the way of the Japanese showing the Filipinos that "Look, this is what we did to the white man. He certainly isn't as invincible as you perhaps were led to believe. This is something that an Asiatic and an Oriental had been able to do to a white man relatively easy."

Blaylock: Right.

Marcello: You know, when you get right down to it, there wasn't a whole lot of resistance that was put up in the Philippines.

Blaylock: There sure wasn't.

Marcello: And, like I say, this was perhaps a way that they could show the Filipinos exactly what the yellow race could do to the white race.

Blaylock: Yes, they called it the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."

Marcello: Right.

Blaylock: And they were to chase all the white people out of the Orient. Getting ahead of the story, there at Cabanatuan prison camp they had this big iron rooster on the gate down by the road. And when the Filipinos would pass, if they were in their little carts drawn by the water buffalo, they'd have to get out and bow to this iron rooster. It symbolized "The new awakening of the Philippines"--this rooster crowing. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: But that's getting ahead.

Marcello: I see. Well, what else do you recall from the march itself?

Blaylock: Well, we had no water, very few of the guys had canteens, and along each little barrio--you know, that's a little small settlement--there would be this pipe. It's like an "L" upside down. That's where the village got their water. Well, you were so damn thirsty you didn't care, so you'd just make a break for it. And the Japs would fire into you. And one or two . . . I know one time two guys dropped, but you so damn thirsty that you just were going to take a chance getting a drink.

Marcello: This actually happened. They would not allow you to drink water.

Blaylock: They would not allow us to drink water or get water at these fountains at these little barrios.

Marcello: Did the Filipinos ever make any effort to help the Americans along the way?

Blaylock: Yes, they did. They would throw in a rice ball or something like that or some kind of a cooked vegetable or something. Of course, you were liable to get dysentery from it. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. But, of course, I guess you were pretty hungry too.

Blaylock: Yes, definitely.

Marcello: How about yourself? What was your own physical condition like? Or what were your wants at this time?

Blaylock: I was just craving food. No matter when you stopped--not only just at the time during the march, but even while we were fighting on Bataan before the Bataan Peninsula fell--like I said, we were cut down to one meal, and then on the march and in prison camp--I don't care what the subject was--it always ended up talking about food. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Well, this seems to be the general consensus among all the prisoners. Were there any individual Japanese that stand out in your mind at this time?

Blaylock: Not on the march, no.

Marcello: I see. Did you march at night?

Blaylock: Not very much. A couple of times we did. Like I mentioned before, they forced us to march one night because they said they discovered a pistol in a barracks bag of one of the Army officers.

Marcello: I see. About how long did they march you per day? What time did a typical day's march start?

Blaylock: Sunup to sundown.

Marcello: Sunup to sundown. Then what did you do? Just fall off by the side of the road or . . .

Blaylock: Fall off beside . . . there was usually an area that . . . predesignated area where we were going to stop. And, boy, we just piled down. You used the latrine when and where you could. And the next morning when we got up, there would always be a few still there that had died during the night.

Marcello: In most cases, what did they die from--lack of food, water, dysentery, malaria?

Blaylock: Well, sheer exhaustion, I guess, from dysentery and malaria. I know dysentery certainly saps your strength.

Marcello: I see. I've also read accounts where on one particular occasion, while the prisoners were marching, some Japanese trucks were coming the other way and actually plowed right into the marching prisoners. Did you ever witness this?

Blaylock: I did not witness that, but I had several men tell me later that they had witnessed that, but like I said before, if a body was on the road they didn't bother to go around. I saw several bodies just smashed flat like a cat or a dog on a freeway.

Marcello: Is there anything else on the march that you would like to talk about, or that you think I haven't covered that there ought to be a part of the record? Did you see any particular acts of heroism on the march that stand out in your mind?

Blaylock: Well, no, not other than men helping each other. When one man was down and they knew that he was going to have a bayonet in him or get shot, why, they tried to pull him up until a Jap got there. They'd just have to drop him and run or be shot himself.

Marcello: How long did the march take altogether?

Blaylock: Oh, six days and nights is what I think it was.

Marcello: I guess they were probably the six longest days and nights of your life, huh?

Blaylock: (Chuckle) Oh, definitely. They sure were. But for about a day and a half when we got to the end of the railroad there and were getting in the boxcars, well, some of the guys suffocated. They just jammed us in . . . you couldn't say like cattle--less than cattle. And half or more had dysentery and no way to go to a latrine or anything. And there you were suffocating and breathing this horrible odor and things into your lungs and throwing up.

Marcello: In other words, you marched for six days and six . . . or you were on the road for six days . . .

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: Then at the end of six days, they piled you into these boxcars or cattle cars or whatever you wish to call them, and apparently there was no room to sit down or lay down or do anything like that.

Blaylock: No, you couldn't sit down. If you fell down, why, you'd have feet on you, and you were shut up tight. And, of course, I didn't look in every boxcar when we unloaded, but there was some dead ones in the car that I was in.

Marcello: What kind of thoughts were running through your mind at this particular time--just how to stay alive?

Blaylock: Just how to stay alive. For some reason I said, "Just get me back to the states." (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. I see.

Blaylock: And I'll die the first day.

Marcello: How long did this train ride take?

Blaylock: Well, as I remember, about a day and a half, I believe.

Marcello: About a day and a half. And you went to O'Donnell. Is that correct?

Blaylock: Yes, we went to Camp O'Donnell. One burial detail that was on, I think there was seventy-six Americans that we buried that day. Just throw them in a big hole and cover them up, and that was it.

Marcello: How long were you at O'Donnell altogether?

Blaylock: From approximately the middle of April 'til the first part of August. Then I was sent to Bilibid Prison. And from there we were to go out on work details. And I stayed there . . . I was so damn skinny and weak that the Navy doctor there in charge, why, he just wouldn't let the American there in charge of putting the men on details--send them out building bridges, roads, airports, airfields, and so forth--he just always would keep me off. He said, "Hell, you won't make it." Up until the first part of August, 1942, when I was finally shipped to Cabanatuan Prison Camp Number One. That's up in Central Luzon.

Marcello: I see. But how long were you at O'Donnell altogether now?

Blaylock: About four and a half months.

Marcello: About four and a half months. What was O'Donnell like?

Blaylock: Well, just a regular hell-hole. It rained a couple of times, and you just sloshed around in the mud; and the guys were dying like flies; and when you ate your rice, if you were right handed, you had to keep the flies off with your left hand--just a continuous fan all the time to keep the flies away. And maggots everywhere. I mean, latrines were just an open hole anywhere.

Marcello: What were the barracks like?

Blaylock: Just bamboo barracks with a bamboo slat. You slept on the slat.

Marcello: What was a typical day like at O'Donnell?

Blaylock: Oh . . .

Marcello: What did you do in other words?

Blaylock: Well, go out on work details--moving rocks, repairing roads, or something. I didn't go out too often there, but I just as soon would have like to as to sit around there and slowly die. I know when they sent you to what was known as the hospital area, they just sent you there to die. There was nothing they could do for you.

Marcello: I see. Obviously there were no real medical facilities at the hospital area--maybe army or American doctors, but no medicine and so on. Is this correct?

Blaylock: That's correct. And they said, "All you need is a few steak and eggs." (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: And they were trying to cure dysentery or stop dysentery by drinking charcoal water. Just anything. And they were boiling weeds, and they had nothing to work with--just experimenting, more or less, you might say. Maybe charcoal worked. I don't know. When I got to Bilibid Prison, they were doing the same thing. Gave me charcoal water.

Marcello: You mentioned a while ago the burial details. Would you care to describe exactly what they were like?

Blaylock: Well, like I said, the first burial detail I went on there was seventy-six Americans that we had to bury.

Marcello: These had died in one day?

Blaylock: In one day. And we had these bamboo litters, and there was four men to a litter. And we'd have to pick the corpse up and put him on the litter and put the litter on our shoulder and march to the burial ground, and all we could do was just dump him in a hole. And at that time they weren't keeping a record of what order they were burying them in. And 90 per cent of the guys didn't have dogtags anymore anyway. When I'd go on a burial detail, I'd get me a few strands or a blade of something like Johnson grass and wrap it around his wrist so I wouldn't have to touch the corpse. And then when we got to the burial ground, why, you'd just turn the litter over. Course, the ones up front got to drop their corpse right close to the edge and then when your turn came way on down the line, why, you'd have to have some strength--all four of you--to toss him into the center somewhere so they wouldn't just be in a pile. And of course, the graves weren't deep enough, and when the wind was from that direction, why, the stench was terrible.

Marcello: I assume this was one of the most distasteful details you could get in at O'Donnell.

Blaylock: I hated it.

Marcello: Is that correct?

Blaylock: I hated it.

Marcello: About how many times would you estimate that you had to go on this detail?

Blaylock: Oh, half a dozen.

Marcello: About half a dozen times.

Blaylock: Yeah, uh-huh.

Marcello: Would you say that approximately the same number of Americans were buried each time?

Blaylock: Oh, approximately. Even after that there were more, and I guess the lowest one I was on at the time I was at O'Donnell was just fifty something.

Marcello: That was the lowest?

Blaylock: That was the lowest.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: For one day.

Marcello: And there were no records at all kept of who was buried where and so on.

Blaylock: As far as I know there wasn't. And even when I first got to Cabanatuan in Central Luzon, I'm pretty sure there wasn't any records kept at first.

Marcello: These were just mass graves, in other words--just a big hole.

Blaylock: Just a mass grave--a big hole.

Marcello: Did the prisoners have to dig the holes?

Blaylock: Yes, the prisoners had to dig the holes and cover them up. And during the rainy season, why, it was just a hole full of water, and you just shoveled mud over the bodies.

Marcello: About how many corpses did they put in a grave?

Blaylock: Uh . . .

Marcello: Here again, of course, you'd be estimating or guessing.

Blaylock: Well, I . . .

Marcello: At O'Donnell now, I meant to say.

Blaylock: At O'Donnell I believe that I may stand corrected, but I think I heard that some guys were on the burial detail when there were over a hundred. And I think one time the figures given to me was 115 in one grave.

Marcello: A hundred and fifteen in one grave? So, like you say, they were more or less mass graves. At O'Donnell now, are there any individual Japanese who stand out in your mind--either for the atrocities they committed, or else for the compassion that they showed?

Blaylock: Neither way.

Marcello: Neither way. You never witnessed any atrocities there, nor did you see any acts of compassion on the part of the Japanese.

Blaylock: No, no, I didn't. Like I said, I didn't go outside the camp very often, and if I thought something was going to take place, I turned my head and went back in my shack--the bamboo barracks. Certainly nothing stands out of the Japs doing any Americans any favors.

Marcello: I see. Were there ever any escape attempts at O'Donnell. I'm speaking now strictly of the time that you were at O'Donnell.

Blaylock: Yes, there were some escape attempted at the time.

Marcello: What was the Japanese reaction when there was an escape or an escape attempt?

Blaylock: Well, I don't mean there was a mass escape, but there were one or two individuals, and they were shot.

Marcello: If they caught them they were shot.

Blaylock: If they caught them they were shot. And, of course, before they were shot they would stand them up and make the Americans that attempted to escape tell us that it wasn't worth it and all that stuff, you know. And, of course, I wouldn't know where to go, so I wasn't about to escape.

Marcello: Well, this seems to be the general impression of many of the prisoners that I have talked to. Even if they could have escaped there was really no place to go. The jungle was very hostile, in other words, given the condition which most prisoners found themselves and so on. Did you ever see any acts of collaboration at O'Donnell, that is, Americans who collaborated with the Japanese in order to get favors of any sort.

Blaylock: No, I didn't. In fact, I didn't even hear of any myself. Maybe from some of the other ex-prisoners you have talked to, maybe you did, but I didn't.

Marcello: Now apparently O'Donnell was a pretty big camp, was it not?

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: There were about 10,000 prisoners there like you say--most of the survivors of the Bataan Death March were there?

Blaylock: Right.

Marcello: About how many people were killed on the march, incidentally?

Blaylock: They estimate or it had been estimated by the government that at least 2,000 Americans died on the death march.

Marcello: Two thousand of the approximately 10,000 that were on the march?

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: That would be about 20 per cent casualties, in other words.

Blaylock: Yeah.

Marcello: About 20 per cent--one fifth.

Blaylock: Now, when you say killed . . .

Marcello: Or died.

Blaylock: That died.

Marcello: Right. I'm speaking of casualties.

Blaylock: I mean that is just what I read. It was estimated that over 2,000 died on the march, one way or the other.

Marcello: I see. Is there anything else that happened at O'Donnell that stands out in your mind?

Blaylock: Just the filth. Stand in line for water, no way to bathe, and . . .

Marcello: What did a meal consist of?

Blaylock: Rice and soup. Of course, the soup was made from vines of some type. I'll tell you more about that when we get to Cabanatuan. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Okay. Did you have to cook your own food here?

Blaylock: We had our own American cooks who had the kitchens.

Marcello: I see. I assume that the cooking was closely supervised by the Japanese, however.

Blaylock: Yes, I think Camp O'Donnell was originally a Filipino Army camp. I know Cabanatuan was.

Marcello: Uh-huh.

Blaylock: They had these big iron cauldrons--I think they called them-- and they just poured the rice and water in there and built a fire under it, and when the rice was done they dished it out.

Marcello: I assume you didn't get very much rice.

Blaylock: No.

Marcello: What do they call it--a ball of rice or something? Is that what you got?

Blaylock: No, no, it was more than that. A fair-sized plate, but, hell, how much food energy can you get out of rice? (Chuckle)

Marcello: That's correct. Where did you go from O'Donnell? I think you mentioned that you went from there to Cabanatuan.

Blaylock: No.

Marcello: To Bilibid.

Blaylock: To Bilibid Prison in Manila.

Marcello: Okay, this is in Manila.

Blaylock: Yes sir, and I stayed there 'til the first few days in August. And I didn't do anything at Bilibid but just lay around and sleep on the hard cement floor. That was an old prison. And details would come in, and details would leave. But, like I said before, the Navy doctor always would take my name off the list to go out on a detail. And so I just waited around and course I certainly wasn't getting fat. We just had rice twice a day, and a couple or three times they sent in a truckload of sort of an off-brand radish that they made soup out of. And that was it.

Marcello: Why did they send you to Bilibid?

Blaylock: When we were first captured, that seemed to be the central location of where you would go out on details in the Manila area.

Marcello: I see. About how many people did they send to Bilibid when you went there? Was there a large group?

Blaylock: No, I'd say two or three hundred, somewhere in that vicinity.

Marcello: I see. Did you make the trip by train?

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: Was it generally an uneventful trip?

Blaylock: Uneventful. We weren't crowded as much as we were. They had one boxcar door open, and a guard sitting in the door, so we got air and we could sit down. It was uneventful.

Marcello: Was O'Donnell simply a temporary stop for all the prisoners? Were they sent to O'Donnell and eventually sent out to various projects throughout the islands? Was this generally the idea?

Blaylock: Yes, that was the general idea. But Cabanatuan Camp I and II became the central area. I don't know how long POWs stayed at O'Donnell, but it wasn't too long.

Marcello: I see. So from O'Donnell you went to the Bilibid Prison.

Blaylock: In Manila.

Marcello: And you stayed there for how long?

Blaylock: About four and a half months from the middle of . . . I take that back about the last part of April. I didn't stay at O'Donnell long. I may have my dates mixed. But I went on to Bilibid, and I stayed there 'til . . . I do remember definitely staying at Bilibid to about the first week in August, 1942, when they shipped me out to Cabanatuan from there. They thought I was healthy enough to go.

Marcello: I see. In other words, maybe one of the reasons they sent you to Bilibid was because of your rather debilitated physical condition. Is this a safe assumption?

Blaylock: No, I think they didn't give a damn. They just had to send so many men to Bilibid . . .

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: . . .and they just said you, you, you, you. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. But now the medical facilities were a little bit better at Bilibid, were they not?

Blaylock: They were better, although like I said, they didn't have any medicine. They were just experimenting with charcoal water. When the details in the Manila area would come back to Bilibid Prison, they'd usually have one or two corpses to bury. And the Navy personnel were in charge, and they made them a nice grave and cross there in Bilibid, but finally they ran out of space for them. I don't know what they did with them after that.

Marcello: What was Bilibid Prison itself like? What was the physical features of the prison?

Blaylock: Well, there was a high stone or cement wall around this one big prison building. It may have had bars, but . . .and some small rooms and large rooms. And we just slept anywhere on the cement. They did bring in a truckload of mattresses from somewhere one time, and another guy and I were lucky and got one twin bed mattress between us. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Would you say that the food was a little bit better here than it was at O'Donnell, however?

Blaylock: Yes, and there wasn't so much filth, you might say. They did have a decent latrine that was flushed with water every so often. O'Donnell was just an open hole.

Marcello: I assume that O'Donnell was the worst place you were at in your whole stay in . . .

Blaylock: As a prisoner. Yes, as a prisoner. As far as facilities and filth and no way to take a bath and hardly any way to wash and things like that, it was the worst. But luckily I didn't stay there long.

Marcello: Right. Right. And from there then you went to Bilibid. Now, you moved out of Bilibid in late 1942. Is that correct?

Blaylock: Uh-huh.

Marcello: And from there you went to Cabanatuan. Did you travel by train again?

Blaylock: Yes, we traveled by train, and it wasn't anything too bad. They still used boxcars. We were able to sit down, and one of the doors was open with a guard in it. That trip took all day from Bilibid to . . . I can't remember the name of the town that we got off at. But later on I would like to mention now that I had been sent from Cabanatuan back to Bilibid to go out on a detail building an air field that was just about to join Nichols Field. And some of us had dysentery, and the American doctor talked the Japanese camp commander into sending us back to Cabanatuan. So we went from this place called Las Piñas back to Bilibid. And the next day we went back to Cabanatuan by train. Then the Filipinos along the track--when the train came to a stop at each little town--were selling stuff. And I asked a Filipino woman, I said, "Hell, we don't have any money." And she said, "Oh, the Japs won't let us give you anything." And I patted this Jap on the shoulder--a great big guy with a beard. I don't know what he was. The biggest Jap I ever saw--and I asked him, "How about letting these Filipinos give us some food." And he said, "Okay." And they just gave us everything--fried chicken, bananas, and sugar.

Marcello: That was a pretty good treat, I guess, huh?

Blaylock: It was. (Chuckle)

Marcello: What was Cabanatuan like? Describe it from the physical standpoint. What did the camp look like?

Blaylock: Well, it didn't look much better than O'Donnell, but it was situated at a higher elevation. And during the rainy season--the first rainy season I was there--it was pitiful. The latrines were just open pits, and the maggots and the flies everywhere, and the food was not much more than rice. But little by little we started a farm. Of course, the Japs supervised everything. And we got details to get gravel, you know, from out on the farm and bring in to make walks so we wouldn't have to slosh through the mud during rainy season. But when I first got to Cabanatuan they were still dying like they were at O'Donnell. And there, the first burial detail I went on, there were seventy some odd. I believe there were seventy-two on that one, and then they gradually dropped. And the first Christmas, 1942, we got some Red Cross boxes through International Red Cross and medicine. And then the death rate dropped considerably. In fact, little by little . . .and I remember one day no one died.

Marcello: Is that right? About how big was Cabanatuan? Was it as big as O'Donnell?

Blaylock: Well, no, as long as I was there--approximately two years give or take three or four months--it never had as many as O'Donnell.

Marcello: Were the barracks about the same as those at O'Donnell?

Blaylock: A little better.

Marcello: I see. Did they more or less keep the rain and water out?

Blaylock: Yes, uh-huh, they kept the rain and the water out, but we didn't have any way to keep mosquitoes out.

Marcello: I see. And as a result, those who didn't have malaria contracted it, and those who had malaria kept it, I suppose.

Blaylock: Yes, quite a few of us had it. Yes, definitely.

Marcello: Did you contract malaria at this time?

Blaylock: I had malaria before I got there.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: I had malaria on Bataan.

Marcello: What exactly did malaria do to you?

Blaylock: Well . . .

Marcello: What was an attack like to you personally?

Blaylock: First, you freeze to death just like you're having chills when you have the flu or something. Then you just shake and shake and shake. And then you get a high fever; then you're freezing to death; then your fever breaks and you sweat up a storm. And in fact, for a while there one of the doctors could predict just about when you'd have your next attack.

Marcello: About how long did each one of these spells last?

Blaylock: Well, about an hour or so or a couple of hours.

Marcello: About how long an interval was there between spells?

Blaylock: The worse part when I was going through it was, I think, about five or six days, maybe a week, before I had another attack. But the longest part is after you chill when your fever would come up. I mean you'd feel like, you'd think, the fever would never break.

Marcello: And there was no cure that they had. There was very little quinine available, for example.

Blaylock: Very little until we got the Red Cross shipment for Christmas in '42.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: After that, why, hardly I had Malaria . . . well, as I remember I think my Malaria attacks were very few and far apart.

Marcello: In other words, most of the people who were dying here were dying mainly because of a lack of medical attention. Had they had medical attention, a good percentage of them may have lived. Is this correct?

Blaylock: Right. Let me bring up one point, and this is strictly an opinion. The guys that died first were the big heavy fat guys that had enormous appetites. And like I said, at the beginning of this I think I weighed 145 pounds and I was six feet tall. And I was considered a very light eater, and that may have saved my life.

Marcello: I've heard this from other prisoners. They had said the same thing along these particular lines. How were the Japanese faring. Now, you know, you were saying that the American troops and so on obviously had Malaria. Were the Japanese troops faring much better in this regard that you were able to observe?

Blaylock: As far as I could observe, I didn't see any Japs sick or anything at Cabanatuan. They had the same kind of barracks we had. But they had their blankets to sleep on, and they had mosquito nets. And incidentally, before I left Cabanatuan they did give us mosquito nets, but there was nothing to keep the mosquitoes from coming up from the bottom through the bamboo. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. I see. What was a typical day like at Cabanatuan?

Blaylock: Well, . . .

Marcello: For you personally.

Blaylock: When I first got there, there was very few details--just walk around and if you had strength or . . . most of the time I'd lay around and think of what I was going to eat if I ever got out of that place. And things like that. And when you contracted dysentery, before Christmas '42, why, they sent you over to the hospital area. But that was to die. There was nothing they could do for you. And everybody they sent to what they called the hospital area, they'd beg them not to send them, but you weren't any good over there on the work side, so they sent you over. And when you got to the hospital, then if you had a severe case of dysentery, they sent you down to what they call the dysentery area. I was in Dysentery Barracks # 6.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: And I was sent down there to die. (Chuckle) And all you had to do was just lay down and you could die. So I'd get up and I'd walk around that bamboo shack til I thought I was going to drop, and when I rested, I'd get up and walk some more. Even during the night they'd find me out there walking around. (Chuckle)

Marcello: In other words, you were in such bad condition that they had put you in one of these dysentery shacks thinking that you were going to die anyway. Is that correct?

Blaylock: Yeah, and they had what we called the "Zero Ward." When you just couldn't get up anymore, they drug you over to the "Zero Ward," and they laid you on the floor. The medics would scour it, and every day they would drag these guys out who had excretion all over them, and they'd throw water on them and throw water on the floor and sweep it out with a Filipino broom and drag them back in. That was it. In a day or two, they'd have some more to bury. That was called the "Zero Ward."

Marcello: What did you do to supplement your diet? I've heard prisoners talk about eating rats or snakes or insects and this sort of thing. Was much of this done at Cabanatuan that you were able to observe?

Blaylock: Yes, even after we got our first Red Cross box, if there was a stray dog come in the camp, somebody would kill it. You would hear a yelp and so forth. But I tasted broth, just a spoonful of broth, from soup made from a dog one time, and one spoonful of broth that some guy had made from a snake. Other than that, I didn't try to find . . . I'd just starve to death. I couldn't bring myself to do that.

Marcello: Did you ever witness any Japanese atrocities at Cabanatuan?

Blaylock: Three American officers tried to escape and got caught. I witnessed them beating them to death little by little, and they tied them to the barbed-wire fence and let them stay all day in the sun with no hat on or anything. And they'd beat them, oh, several times a day until finally all three of them were dead. I guess that took a day, through the night, and then the next day before they finally pronounced that all three of them were dead.

Marcello: What would they beat them with?

Blaylock: The butts of their rifles.

Marcello: Were there any other atrocities that you witnessed?

Blaylock: Well, I witnessed a Mexican kid executed. He had been crawling through the fence and trading with the Japs.

Marcello: With the Japs or with Filipinos.

Blaylock: With the Japs--a Jap guard. A Japanese officer came by one night and caught him. And, of course, the Japanese officer started shouting that the Mexican kid had been trying to escape, and in a day or two--maybe the next day, as well as I remember--why, they marched him off from camp and stood him up against a tree with his hands tied behind him and shot him. I actually witnessed that, and I did witness the three officers getting beat to death, and one fellow I knew from Oklahoma--Mack something--I don't know why in the hell he escaped. He didn't have the use of his left arm, and he didn't know where to go; but he did escape, and he came back. We had a farm at that time around the prison camp there, and he didn't know where to go, and he'd hide out, and at night he'd eat these vegetables and finally got so weak that they found him. And the Japs had to carry him on a litter to execute him. And I didn't see them execute him, but I heard the rifles, and then the Japanese officers gave him what they call the coup de grace . . .

Marcello: Uh-huh.

Blaylock: . . . and they brought him back into camp, and then they buried him.

Marcello: Did you ever witness any unusual tortures other than what you've just mentioned?

Blaylock: No, I didn't. I had heard of several, but myself I never did actually witness any other than slapping and kicking and kicking in your sacred zones or whatever you want to call it and things like that.

Marcello: Did you ever have any of these things done to you?

Blaylock: Hell, I got slapped several times for any little thing. Especially after I got to Japan in '44--the last year of the war I spent in Japan--Hell, I got slapped around almost every day when I was in Japan. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: Maybe just one slap, but they'd always find something, and to an American that's an insult.

Marcello: I assume there at Cabanatuan you were more or less too weak to have been guilty of any infractions. Is this a rather safe assumption?

Blaylock: Yes, at first.

Marcello: When did you finally regain your health? I mean, when did you start to rally, let's put it that way?

Blaylock: In '43. After we got the sulfa drugs for dysentery and quinine for malaria.

Marcello: These were in the Red Cross packages.

Blaylock: These were in the Red Cross packages. Well, they had other medicines also. And they got instruments to operate, I think, a few. They took out an appendix now and then. Something like that.

Marcello: I guess you were praying that nothing of this sort would ever happen to you, that is, that you would get appendicitis or something like that.

Blaylock: Yeah, or a toothache or something like that. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. Did you ever witness any collaborators or any signs of collaboration at Cabanatuan? Here again, I'm referring to Americans who perhaps may have given information or what have you to the Japanese for certain favors.

Blaylock: No, I didn't witness any. However, at Nichols Field, the detail building the Nichols Field airfield at Manila, there was one fellow that did. He was married, or so I understand, to a Japanese woman in the Philippines. And he was a Navy officer--petty officer, I believe. And I didn't know him, but when I got to Japan, he was in there . . . there was only 250 Americans and 250 Englishmen already there, and he was in the camp, and I had heard stories about him. And I didn't get home until November '45, and it wasn't but a few days after I got home that his picture was on the front page that he had been tried and court-martialed. I couldn't remember his name.

Marcello: Did any of the names of Japanese guards ever stand out in your mind?

Blaylock: Well, not their names. We had nicknames for . . .

Marcello: All right. This is what I was referring to. What were some of the nicknames that you remember for Japanese guards?

Blaylock: Well, "Donald Duck" because when he'd blabber out he sounded like Donald Duck. And "Air Raid." He was rather high-up, an overseer of the farm. And when we'd see him coming, why, somebody would say "Air Raid." And there was "Silent Jim." When he'd see you steal a piece of okra or a cucumber or something, he'd turn his head. (Chuckle) Believe it or not! We also had "Old Charlie" because the way he walked reminded you of Charlie Chaplin. There was one great big fellow. I forgot what we called him. He was a pretty good Joe. He had a sense of humor, though, which was unusual for a Jap guard.

Marcello: They didn't have a sense of humor?

Blaylock: Definitely not. But that's about all the names at Cabanatuan I can remember.

Marcello: "Donald Duck" must be a rather famous one because I've heard him mentioned before. And it seems to me it was by one of the prisoners who was at Cabanatuan.

Blaylock: Yes, he was world famous.

Marcello: He must have been well-known.

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: Apparently so.

Blaylock: "Donald Duck" and "Air Raid" were the two main ones. Of course, in Japan we had "The Germ" and "Goldie" because he had gold teeth. And, oh, one Jap. He wasn't too bad. He bawled you out in Japanese, but he never did strike you. He had a nickname, but I can't recall it.

Marcello: I see. Is there anything else from Cabanatuan that possibly stands out in your mind? Something that I perhaps haven't asked you in the course of the questions.

Blaylock: Some fellow from Iowa--I can't think of his name, Johnny somebody--believe it or not, got up a little orchestra, and the Japs allowed them to play once a week. And I guess in a little over two years I stayed at Cabanatuan, we had about three movies or maybe four. One of them was Japanese, one of them I remember was a Bing Crosby movie that I had seen in the states. And another one was a musical comedy that I had also seen. The Boys From Syracruse. They showed us that. And one of them was . . . I can't remember, but it had Murphy in it--the senator from California, what's his name?

Marcello: Senator George Murphy.

Blaylock: Yeah, George Murphy was in it. (Chuckle) And then there was a Japanese movie which hardly any of us stayed until the end of it. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: Now this was all out in the open; there wasn't any theater by any means or anything like that, but they did allow us to build a little stage.

Marcello: By this time, had the prisoners more or less organized themselves at Cabanatuan? In other words, was there a certain amount of discipline which was maintained among the prisoners? Did they still respect their officers?

Blaylock: They finally learned to respect the officers, I think, again. But they didn't for a long time. There was respect. As far as anyone trying to escape, maybe some of the other prisoners that you've interviewed mentioned that they put you in an escape squadron of ten. And supposedly if one from your escape squad escaped, well, they're supposed to keep ? the other nine. And that actually happened at one of the details. I think it was the Nichols Field detail where in my outfit there was two brothers--Betts were their names--from California. And one of the brothers happened to be in an escape squad where one fellow escaped. They shot the other nine, and the older brother had to witness his only brother being executed. I didn't see it, but I did talk to older Betts boy when I got back to California at San Francisco.

Marcello: What jobs did they put you on after you were physically on your feet again?

Blaylock: They had wood details--go out and chop wood in the forest or jungle for all the stoves--and various details inside camp. And we had a big farm. Of course, the Japs hauled most of the stuff away to the town there. I guess the Jap commander kept the money, but we raised . . . oh, mostly we had a big bunch of sweet potatoes called camotes, and we got the vines, the tips, the leaves, for our soup. And later on we did get a sweet potato or two, but I've never liked sweet potatoes since I was a prisoner. (Chuckle) But they made soup out of that, and they had some kind of off-beat stuff. It was something like a spinach, but it was a leaf. After we got it started in a year or so, it really looked like a good farm, but on every detail you had to be barefooted. And during the dry season, we had buckets and we had to go out and water with these buckets. There wasn't any rain. And close by, we were building an airfield. And that wasn't such a bad detail. You were gone all day, but we had three meals a day, so it wasn't so bad. We were getting halfway healthy.

Marcello: I'm curious as to why they made you go barefooted in the garden.

Blaylock: I really don't know. We'll never know. But I know I didn't have a pair of shoes for two years. I went barefooted and had a pair of wooden sandals finally. And I know, as I mentioned before, when I went out on details from Manila to this Las Piñas detail, when I came back through Bilibid I marched from Bilibid Prison to the railroad station through Manila barefooted and all these people looking on. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. You did have shoes, however, on the march?

Blaylock: Yes, we had . . .

Marcello: On the Bataan Death March itself.

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: You did have shoes at this time?

Blaylock: Yes, but there was one group, the Japs made them take off their shoes and march back into Bataan for some reason. Why, I don't know. All those stones or little pebbles and things on the road there, they were certainly in misery. And what they did, I don't know. But they were going in the opposite direction from us, and they were all barefooted.

Marcello: How long were you at Cabanatuan altogether?

Blaylock: From August '42 until July 2, '44.

Marcello: In other words, you were there almost two years. Is that correct?

Blaylock: Yes, almost two years.

Marcello: I see. And as time went on, you say you did witness the prisoners health becoming, perhaps, just a little bit better.

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: A little bit stronger or at least remaining steady.

Blaylock: Yes, yes. Because we got more Red Cross stuff in.

Marcello: About how often did you get a Red Cross package?

Blaylock: Well, in three and a half years as a prisoner I received five.

Marcello: I see. What did a typical package consist of?

Blaylock: A carton of cigarettes, a pound can of powdered milk, a can of spam or some similar to spam, a couple of chocolate bars, and a couple of little bitty cans of bacon and eggs like the troops used out on the front. Well, that's about all I can remember. And a package or two of chewing gum.

Marcello: Any toilet supplies?

Blaylock: No, as well as I remember, I don't think we ever did get any American soap. But we did get some razors, razor blades, shaving cream, toothbrush, and toothpaste. And I swapped cigarettes off for toothpaste. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see. Did the Japanese ever scrutinize these packages, or do you think they had been through them before they passed them out or . . .

Blaylock: Yes, especially in Japan. The year I spent there, we got a Red Cross box in Christmas '44, and we got another shipment in, but the Japanese camp commander wouldn't let us have them because he said if the Americans invade Japan that may be our only food. But finally in early summer '45 the . . . we had a British camp commander and he talked the Japanese camp commander into letting us have the perishables. I forgot to mention that these were either a pound box of raisins or a pound box of prunes. And he talked the Jap into letting us have either prunes or raisins or the chocolate bars.

Marcello: If there's nothing else that could be said about Cabanatuan, where did you go from there?

Blaylock: I went back to Bilibid Prison.

Marcello: By railroad again.

Blaylock: By railroad.

Marcello: Was it a fairly uneventful trip back?

Blaylock: Yes, uneventful. It just took one day, and as well as I remember, nothing happened. And we stayed at Bilibid Prison several days. We were going to Japan to work in the coal mines.

Marcello: Did you know this?

Blaylock: No, we didn't know that. All we knew was that we were going to Japan. And they issued us a Japanese army uniform, and a couple of G-strings, and of course, most of us had shoes by then through the American Red Cross. And we marched to the docks and boarded this old coal burner. The plaque on the desk said, it was made in Canada before World War I. And there was 1,000 men on the ship.

Marcello: Was it a very big ship?

Blaylock: It was a very small ship. I was in the forward hold, and at night when they closed the hatch and everything, and everybody was in there, everybody could not lay down and stretch out. You either had to double up or put your feet over somebody. That trip was a very eventful one. (Chuckle)

Marcello: It was a very eventful trip.

Blaylock: Would you care for me to elaborate? (Chuckle)

Marcello: I surely do. I definitely want you to elaborate.

Blaylock: July 2, we boarded the ship, and the next day in Manila Bay we started out with a Japanese convoy. And we got out past Corregidor in the China Sea, and we blew a boiler. So we made it back to the docks by morning, and we laid in that hold of that ship for exactly two weeks.

Marcello: You never got out of that hold for two weeks?

Blaylock: Just on deck to use the latrine which was an open box hung over the side of the ship. And that is all. In fact, the deck was too hot anyway to stand on if you were barefooted.

Marcello: You were barefooted at this time?

Blaylock: I was barefooted at that time.

Marcello: That's right. You said they had made you walk barefooted from Bilibid down to the docks. Is that correct?

Blaylock: Well, no sir. I marched barefooted from Bilibid to the train station when I was going back to Cabanatuan.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: But I don't remember what had happened to my shoes, but I was barefooted. Well, anyway, when another Japanese convoy made up, why, we started out with it.

Marcello: In the meantime, what was the attrition rate while you were down there in that hold for those two weeks? Did very many prisoners die?

Blaylock: No. The trip took sixty-two days to go to Japan.

Marcello: Sixty-two days to go from the Philippines to Japan.

Blaylock: From July 2 to September 2, and there's thirty-one days in

July and August, (chuckle) so it was sixty-two days. We got out in the Sea . . . the China Sea again two weeks later with the Japanese convoy and blew a boiler up around northern Luzon somewhere.

Marcello: This was the second boiler.

Blaylock: This is the second boiler, or maybe it was the same boiler giving them trouble. Well, a Jap convoy doesn't wait, so we were left out in the China Sea floating around by ourselves, and we finally made it to the southern tip of Formosa. And we stayed there ten days or two weeks to get the boiler fixed and waiting for another Japanese convoy.

Marcello: Meanwhile, you were still down in the hold.

Blaylock: Down in the hold. We could come up and stand in line there to smoke if you had anything to smoke, which was a tobacco leaf that you had to tear up the best way you could and use a page out of your Bible or something. (Chuckle) The chaplain said it was all right to use it to roll a cigarette if you read what you were smoking. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: So we stayed at the southern tip of Formosa for approximately two weeks waiting for another Japanese convoy to make up. So we started out with this Japanese convoy, and we got out in the China Sea, and the boiler blew again, so we made it to the northern tip of Formosa where we stayed approximately two more weeks. And in the meantime, in the hold below us every day we had to take these big boards up, fold the tarpaulin up, and stand around the best way we could while they loaded salt in that bottom hold of that ship. And that took a couple of weeks. But believe it or not, the captain of the ship, the Jap whatever his title was, allowed them to bring some sort of sugar-like candy to give to us. Of course, you had to have money. And we had, hell, we had more Japanese occupation money than the Japs had.

Marcello: In other words, they paid you so much a day, did they not, in the prison camp for the work that you did?

Blaylock: Yes, they paid us ten cents a day or ten sen with occupation money. The Chinese down in the walled city of Manila were printing the occupation money faster than the Japs. And at one time in Cabanatuan they smuggled in 50,000 pesos. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Is this correct?

Blaylock: And the Japs finally got wise. We had more money than they had. (Chuckle) But, anyway, we finally got the salt loaded, and we started out with another convoy and ended up all by ourselves out in the China Sea. And at one time, we were close to the China coast. Incidentally, the . . . some of the crew on this ship were Chinese, and they told us that that was the China coast over there that we could see. And part of the time before we got to the Inland Sea we were all alone again because the convoy went off and left us. And so we made it into some port before we entered the Inland Sea of Japan, and got it fixed and still had to wait for another convoy, but this time it managed to last until we got to Moji, Japan, where we were going. We didn't know where we were going when we got on board this ship, and the Chinese crewman told us we were going to Japan to work in the coal mines.

Marcello: Did you ever have any submarine scares or any air raid scares on this trip to Japan?

Blaylock: One time there were a few depth bombs dropped. Is that what you call them--depth bombs that the destroyer kicks over the side.

Marcello: Yeah, right, uh-huh.

Blaylock: One day they dropped a few of those and scared the hell out of us. And the Japs said, "Americans batai." That means die. (Chuckle)

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: But that was the only time anything like that happened. And incidentally, like I said, I got to Japan on September 2, '44, and that prison ship was sunk in October, '44. It was unmarked, and of course, we were unmarked too.

Marcello: Did very many men die on this trip over to Japan.

Blaylock: Just one.

Marcello: I guess you were pretty lucky in that respect then.

Blaylock: Yes, the way we were crowded. We had two meals a day--a tin cup full of rice with pork cooked in it, and every day some pork would spoil, and we'd see the Japs throwing it overboard. Of course, our American officer in charge tried to get them to put more pork in our rice. Because it was all spoiling they were throwing it overboard. But they weren't interested.

Marcello: So you landed at Moji, Japan. What happened from there?

Blaylock: Well, we went to a place called Omine Machi, a coal mining town or village. Incidentally, let me say on the Inland Sea at one port we pulled into I saw an active volcano. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Is that correct?

Blaylock: So it was educational. (Chuckle) But we went to this place called Omine Machi, and there I stayed until the last year of the war working in the coal mines and liked to froze to death that winter.

Marcello: What sort of winter gear did the Japanese issue the prisoners?

Blaylock: Well, I had an overcoat, a British overcoat, and we all were issued an overcoat and a pair of long johns, but they were just cotton. We also had a green coat and pants that were tight-fitting around the ankles. Of course, they were made for Japanese, and they were up around my calf or knees. We couldn't wear these to the coal mines. It was for when we came home and cleaned up or back to camp and cleaned up. That was our Sunday suit in other words.

Marcello: I see. What sort of blankets or sleeping wear did they issue the prisoners?

Blaylock: We had a straw mattress. There was four men to a room in the barracks in Japan. We had a straw mattress, a comfort, one blanket, and no pillow. Luckily, the other three men in my room were on the opposite shift. There was only two shifts--all day and all night. And while they were gone I had plenty of cover. And one night when we were all together we'd double up to keep warm--sleep back to back and use each others' cover. So there wasn't any problem for me to keep warm at night. It was just in the daytime. And incidentally, a work week was anywhere from ten to twelve days, and they'd change shifts. It wasn't five or six days and observe Sunday. Our Sunday was our day off. It might be anywhere from Monday to Sunday. And in the wintertime, that winter I spent in Japan, we would leave camp before daylight, and we wouldn't get back until dark.

Marcello: What was the barracks like?

Blaylock: They had straw mats on the floor. They weren't well insulated. They had cracks and things. Oh, I don't know how cold it got in Japan. Some guys read the thermometer and said it was below zero. And I know everything was froze up. You couldn't take your rubber shoes upstairs. You had to leave them down on the veranda. And when you got ready to go to work, put our shoes on, and they were frozen. If you washed your clothes, there was no way to dry them, so you just put on these old clothes with the coal dust in them day after day. And we got less to eat in Japan than we did in the Philippines, I think.

Marcello: Is that correct? You think this was because, well, this was by late '44 as you said, and obviously the air raids and the submarines and the American blockade and so on was taking its toll. And probably the Japanese didn't have that much themselves. Is this correct?

Blaylock: Yes, that's correct. The ration we were issued was . . . each plate was weighed. If you worked down in the coal mine, you got a bigger ration than the men that worked topside. And there just wasn't any vegetables hardly at all to make a soup out of, but they always managed to have a few leaves of something. And I guess it was about January or February of '45 when they didn't have any rice, and we got five buns made out of soybean flour a day. And that was it. You got three of them when you went out to work, and you could eat them any way you wanted to--save one for lunch or just eat them all then. When you came back in you got your other two buns. And that was it for several days . . .

Marcello: What did they taste like?

Blaylock: I don't remember. It tasted good to me, you were so hungry.

Marcello: What was work like in the mines?

Blaylock: Well, the different shafts were made for Japanese. And every tunnel aisle I went off into, why, I had to stoop all the time. And you just dug coal and dug coal and loaded the cars. And we'd put timbers in the bottom of the cars to take up a lot of space. And each work unit, they had tags to put on each car or coal car they loaded to see if you were meeting your quota.

Marcello: I was going to say, I assumed that you had a quota.

Blaylock: Yes, we had a quota.

Marcello: What happened if you didn't meet the quota, or did you just keep working until you did meet it?

Blaylock: We kept working until we got so many coal cars loaded that day. Of course, sometimes, now we'd do what we call timbering. We would have to put up timbers so the top of the coal mine wouldn't cave in. And sometimes we'd timber for two or three days before we'd start digging coal again.

Marcello: Were you using hand tools . . .

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: . . . or did you have some sort of pneumatic machinery or something?

Blaylock: Well, they had pneumatic machinery to dig through the rock. And sometimes the Japs would have a pneumatic tool to dig the coal, and then we'd pick it up in little baskets with a scraper. It's sort of a U-shaped basket open at one end and scrape it into the basket and pick it up and dump it in the car and put it back down and scrape some more. Instead of issuing shovels . . . of course, I saw several shovels, but (chuckle) instead of loading it the American way, why, we had to use these scrapers and little U-shaped baskets.

Marcello: Were you still being supervised by the Army here, or were you now under civilian control?

Blaylock: We were supervised by the mining company--civilian control.

They even had their own guards inside camp, but at the same time there was just a small detail of four or five, maybe a half a dozen, regular Japanese Army inside camp there at this place where the Jap guard stayed.

Marcello: How did the civilians treat the prisoners?

Blaylock: They were rougher than the Japanese Army.

Marcello: Is that right? Why do you think this was so?

Blaylock: Never was able to figure that one out unless they . . .

Marcello: Do you think, perhaps, they had lost relatives in air raids? I assume by this time you were able to witness some of the air raids or at least saw the bombers coming over.

Blaylock: When we first got to Japan, the part we were at was very mountainous, not real tall mountains, but small mountain ranges. And there was an airfield of some type on the other side of the mountain range there, and several times during the night, they would have an air raid. The Americans would be bombing this airfield, and yet I never heard it, but several guys did. And I actually didn't see any bombers, actually see them myself, until early summer of '45 because I was working down in the coal mine during the day. And we had several air raids at night. If you were on the night shift, of course, you were down in the coal mine. But if you were in the barracks, why, they made us go in this bomb shelter that we dug ourselves naturally, and that normally had about six or eight inches in it (chuckle), and you just stood there practically all night until the all clear signal was given. In fact, about the middle of July it finally got to where we couldn't tell whether . . . they finally started ignoring the air raid signal. It was just going all day long, and we couldn't tell whether it was the all clear or the danger signal.

Marcello: The planes never did hit the mining camp then?

Blaylock: No, not where I was. But one day when I was working topside, I saw my first B-29s. I couldn't count them; there were just so many, and they met no obligation at all. And they went across the mountain range and bombed whatever they were bombing--the docks maybe. Incidentally, I was in the Province of Hiroshima. And I don't know what they were bombing but . . .

Marcello: When you say were in the Province of Hiroshima, is that where the coal mine was located?

Blaylock: Yes.

Marcello: I see.

Blaylock: And we'll get to this later when they dropped the atomic bomb. But actually toward late July we actually saw a dog fight over our camp. We were standing in formation waiting to go to the mines, and I couldn't tell which was which. But there was a dog fight going on, and this Jap just dared us to look up. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Is that right? Nobody did?

Blaylock: No, but we knew what was going on, and we'd kind of take a quick peek to see for yourself. You'd get a slap in the face.

Marcello: You mentioned at this camp that you were probably slapped around as much as you were any place or probably more than any place. What did you do to get slapped around?

Blaylock: You didn't have to do anything. One day I left my bento box--that's your lunchbox--this little old wooden box you put your rice in to take to the mines. You had a little piece of wood, and we call it a chit with your number on it. And when you drew your lamp to go down into the mine, you left your chit and I left my bento box there. And I didn't think anything about it, and this Jap came into this room where we waited until we caught the cable car to down into the mine hollering, "374!" That was my number, and I spoke up, and he handed me this bento box, and they just beat the hell out of me (chuckle) because I left it up where you drew your lantern to go (chuckle) down in the mine. And also in camp in our barracks, you had the same thing with your number on it. And when we stayed in camp, why, your number stayed on the nail there, but when you left you took it down and put it on another nail so that if the Japs just came through the barracks, they could see who was in camp or out of camp.

Marcello: Did they ever pull any sneak raids on the barracks to . . .

Blaylock: Oh, hell, yes . . .

Marcello: . . . look for illegal materials.

Blaylock: . . . hell, yes. (Chuckle) If you were on the day shift trying to get some sleep you were out of luck. (Chuckle)

Marcello: What were they looking for in particular?

Blaylock: Well, I don't know.

Marcello: Or did they make up something new everyday?

Blaylock: They were just looking for knives. You'd be surprised what an American can smuggle into camp. Some of the guys, during the hard winter there, they made them little charcoal burners out of cans they had smuggled into camp. And, of course, when those Japs came through, why, he'd smell the charcoal that you had stolen--had your little fire up in your room there--and that'd be too bad.

Marcello: I assume they were desperately afraid of fire since the barracks were all wood and what-have-you.

Blaylock: Yes, they were. Of course, when you're trying to keep warm and there's no heat or anything, why, you almost do anything.

Marcello: And I think one of the things that people don't realize is that Japan is very cold in the wintertime.

Blaylock: It definitely is. We had snow and more snow. Every morning, if you were on the night shift, when you came in you'd have your rice for breakfast, and then you'd have a few minutes to fool around. And then you'd have to go out on the parade ground and stand in formation before you could go to bed. And I know, no matter how deep the snow was or how thick the snow was falling or how strong the wind was blowing the snow, you had to go out there. (Chuckle) And they made us strip from the waist up, take off our coat, and do exercises out there in the snow (chuckle) and cold weather. Bare chested in other words.

Marcello: Just a couple more questions come to mind while you were at this prison camp. Was there ever any sign of collaboration while you were working in the coal mines? Did you ever see anybody try and obtain any favors from the Japanese by telling of the activities in the barracks and things like that?

Blaylock: No, I never did. The only thing you could do was to try to gain a favor by working hard to get the Japs to give you something. I know . . .

Marcello: Or just to keep him off your back, I guess.

Blaylock: Yeah. They had these Koreans working in the mine with us. They were drafted for labor just like you drafted for the Army. And I know I had an old web belt--I think they call it--that this Korean wanted, and I was one of the first ones to start swopping. I swopped him this belt for a little old sack of salt, which you never know how much you miss salt until you don't have any. But that was the only favors I'd say they were trying to get--just to get something extra for themself. But there wasn't anything to turn in, to squeal about anything, unless you knew someone who had a homemade knife or something.

Marcello: Is there anything else from your stay in these coal mines that perhaps stands out in your mind?

Blaylock: Well, just the hard work, and the coal dust was awfully bad.

They kept our heads shaved, and the coal dust would get in the pores of your skin. And I know it took me for months and months after the war was over to finally get it all out of my skin.

Marcello: You were constantly dirty, I assume.

Blaylock: Yes, constantly. We had one bathtub about . . . oh, maybe it was as large as 8 x 8 feet, and we did have hot water once a day. When you came in out of the coal mine, why, if you were on the day shift, why, you had clean water. Of course, all these miners were jumping in at the same time, and you'd do your darndest to get there first (chuckle) and jump out right quick. Then they changed the water for the night shift. And it was warm; it was warm water. They issued us their soap which didn't make very good soap suds or lather very well, I should say. And like I said, we liked to froze to death. And while we were on these buns, why, boils broke out on most everybody, or ulcers, whatever you want to call them.

Marcello: What sort of medical facilities were available at the coal mine?

Blaylock: Well, back in camp we had our doctors. But we had Japanese doctors come in every so many days, and you couldn't fool him. Dysentery was our worst enemy in Japan. And he'd want to look at a specimen, and, of course, if you couldn't get a good specimen, why, you'd go out to the fountain and mix water with it to try to fool him. (Chuckle) But he didn't fool very easily. Now I can't think of anything else about Japan except working hard in the coal mines from daylight until after dark and all night long.

Marcello: Did you ever or did the Americans ever have any scores to settle with the guards? Let me put it to you this way: were you waiting for the end of the war so you could possibly get even with a couple of guards . . .

Blaylock: Definitely.

Marcello: . . . let's say, for some of the things that they had been doing in camp.

Blaylock: Definitely. The coal mining company when the war was over, why, they made the worst ones kind of apologize. Of course, that didn't heal any wounds. But I know one we called "The Germ." He spoke perfect English and . . .

Marcello: Why did you call him "The Germ?"

Blaylock: Well, he just got under your skin. He could speak perfect English because he spent quite a few years in Honolulu, but he wouldn't speak English. I didn't know he spoke English, and I cussed him out, and he beat the hell out of me. (Chuckle) And then he cussed me out. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Was morale ever a factor? Let me put it to you this way: when was your morale at its lowest? When you had dysentery in Cabanatuan # 1?

Blaylock: Yes, at O'Donnell and ____________________ . . .

Marcello: Well, of course, during the march I assume your morale was very low.

Blaylock: Yes, and my short stay at O'Donnell . . .and Bilibid wasn't too bad. But during my first few months at Cabanatuan my morale was very low. And then morale was high when we started getting Red Cross supplies--medicine and food. But, boy, during the winter of '44 and '45 my morale and everybody else's morale was <u>very</u> low.

Marcello: Did you ever think you would be rescued? Did you ever think that you'd finally get out of this thing?

Blaylock: I had a few doubts. Toward the end of the war when the Japanese camp commander kept this Red Cross food and finally let us have the perishables, he told us if the Americans invaded Japan that all prisoners would be killed because they would use every available man, woman, and child to fight the invaders. And they even had . . . in July '45 there toward the end of the war, they had these women and old men and kids practicing throwing at straw dummies with spears--some bamboo spears and wooden spears.

Marcello: You actually did see this?

Blaylock: I actually saw that.

Marcello: In other words . . .

Blaylock: And I actually . . .

Marcello: . . . they were planning to fight man?

Blaylock: Yes, and I actually heard the camp commander say, "All prisoners will be put to death." So that wasn't a very good (chuckle) . . .

Marcello: That wasn't very good for morale in other words?

Blaylock: No, it certainly wasn't.

Marcello: When did you think that the war had taken a turn for the better? In other words, when did you perhaps have a clue that the United States or the Allies were winning?

Blaylock: Well, we . . .

Marcello: Obviously, you weren't getting much news from the outside.

Blaylock: We would steal a Japanese newspaper, and we had three Mexican boys that spoke Japanese and acted as interpreters. And if you would steal a Jap newspaper . . . maybe sometimes the Japs down in the mine would bring some rice wrapped in a newspaper and toss it aside, and somebody would get it and wrap it up. I think I brought three back into camp, maybe four. We had these little old cloth leggings we wrapped around our ankles to keep the coal dust out, and I stuffed it down in there. And the British camp commander, he . . . if you brought a newspaper in, why, he'd give you two or three cigarettes.

Marcello: Well, how did you interpret the news that you were finding in the Japanese newspaper? Did you read it and then whatever the Japanese newspaper said did you put a different meaning to it? Obviously, you couldn't believe what was in the Japanese newspaper?

Blaylock: Well, you could. They contradicted themselves. For instance, when we were in the Philippines they gave us these newspapers printed in English that they used when they occupied countries.

And one column would say that their Allies, the Germans had completely taken Stalingrad. And then in the next paragraph it'd say due to the lessening danger, the Russians had re-established air traffic between Moscow and Stalingrad. And in big headlines it said, "Earthquake Rocks New York City." And it said the seismograph machine at Fordham University recorded a tremor 3,000 miles southeast of New York City clean out in the Atlantic Ocean somewhere. (Chuckle) And we read in the paper one time that the Americans had accidentally bombed Oklahoma City and my home town of Dallas by mistake on a practice run. But we knew by the newspaper--of course, not right on time. I mean, we saw them a few days late--but we even knew when they invaded Okinawa by reading the newspaper. Of course, half of us didn't know what Okinawa was. (Chuckle)

Marcello: You mentioned a while ago some contacts with British soldiers. Were there quite a few foreign contingents in this coal mine?

Blaylock: No, just in my camp in Japan. These 250 British had been captured in Java, and they had been shipped right to Japan. They had been there a couple years before us, but that was the only one--just Americans and British in that one camp.

Marcello: Did you ever have very much contact with these British soldiers?

Blaylock: Oh, yeah. We'd visit them in their barracks if we wanted to.

Marcello: What was your opinion of the British soldiers?

Blaylock: Well, some I liked, and some I didn't. And the British officers--we had five British officers--and all five of them thought they were God.

Marcello: I was just wondering because of all the ex-prisoners-of-war that I've interviewed, almost to a man they had a very low opinion of the British.

Blaylock: They just had the attitude that they're better than anyone else in the world.

Marcello: Well, this was one of the things that they mentioned. Then also they mentioned the fact that the British apparently weren't nearly so clean as the American standards might have been.

Blaylock: Well . . .

Marcello: Did you notice any difference in their barracks, let's say, as compared to yours so far as cleanliness is concerned?

Blaylock: No, no, because I don't believe I ever visited inside one of the barracks that the British were in but a couple of times. But some of those British when they got to Japan, hell, they came to Japan full of field packs. They were allowed to bring all their clothes and everything. They didn't put up any resistance at all. I heard one of the British officers--he was from the Royal Artillery--the antiaircraft battery--and he said the Japanese bombers came over, but he said he was afraid to fire because they'd spot his position and come back and bomb him. (Chuckle) So I wonder if that's the kind of wars they fought in the South Pacific at the beginning of World War II.

Marcello: I guess that's probably the reason that the Japanese overran those British possessions so quickly. Anyhow, I think we're probably about up to the point now where we're on the eve of your liberation. Can you describe the events as they took place leading up to your liberation?

Blaylock: Well . . .

Marcello: When did you first receive the news. Well, let me put it to you this way: you mentioned earlier that this coal mine was in the Province of Hiroshima.

Blaylock: Uh-huh.

Marcello: And obviously you must have heard something about the Atomic Bomb that . . .

Blaylock: Well, the day, the very time that they dropped the atomic bomb we were in formation on the parade ground fixing to go work to what they call "topside." We were building a new power plant--doing the excavating and everything for the site of it. And we didn't go to work until mid-morning, and we worked until dark. And we were standing in formation, and we heard this rumble and rumble and rumble. Oh, it just kept rumbling and rumbling, and we thought it would never end. It was like thunder. And we were looking around and looking at each other and trying to figure out what was happening because we hadn't heard any planes. And a short while later, before we broke formation or before we left camp, this one plane--B-29--flew over our camp. And I don't know whether that was the one that dropped the atomic bomb or the one that was following up to take pictures. And a few days later a Jap told us that they had dropped one bomb on Hiroshima, and people were still dying. And, oh, incidentally, that day we didn't see the sun the rest of the day because the wind was coming our way, and there was just smoke and haze for, oh, maybe several days. And I remember several guys saying, "I don't know what's happening, but I'm sure going to remember this date to find out what happened." (Chuckle)--including myself. So several days later, one morning . . . whenever the Japanese camp commander walked through the gate why all the guards jumped up and hollered "Attention!" And that morning before daylight I heard the guards jump up and holler attention. And I thought, well, why is the camp commander coming in here this time of the night. And so everybody started getting up and wondering why they hadn't awakened us to go to work. And pretty soon word got around that the war was over. And then later in that morning the Japanese camp commander called the Americans and British officers and told them the war was over. Well, then they made an official announcement to us.

Marcello: Then what happened?

Blaylock: We couldn't leave. The Jap still had the guns. (Chuckle) We got a radio in camp, and the fleet was broadcasting to stay where we were.

Marcello: Did all discipline more or less break down in the camp?

Blaylock: Oh, no. It got better. (Chuckle)

Marcello: It got better? When did you have your first contact with Americans, that is, with the liberators?

Blaylock: Oh, we didn't until the middle of September. Like I said, we got a radio in the camp, and they broadcasted to us to stay where we were. And they dropped us clothes and food and medicine by parachute. Incidentally, those planes came from Guam. They dropped us notes and things. And finally we got orders to move, and the Japs had this special train for us. And we boarded the train one afternoon and went wo Wakayama, Japan, where we met the American Navy. And they disinfected us, and saw if there was any immediate emergency cases or anything. But that was our first contact. We spent all afternoon, all night, all the next day, and on until about 11:30 the next night on this train. And of course, we had this C-rations or D-rations, whatever they were, to eat that they had dropped us by parachute before we left camp. But we stayed there a full month after the war was over waiting for orders. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Why do you think they waited so long before you were finally removed from this prison camp?

Blaylock: Well, they had to make arrangements. You know there were prison camps scattered from not only the main island, but they were located from one end to the other at all the industrial centers and seaports. So that was the best they could do. And they kept us supplied with food and cigarettes and medicine and things. But so many of the camps were just breaking up and taking off on their own and didn't know where to go.

Marcello: But discipline was more or less maintained in your camp.

Blaylock: Yes, it was.

Marcello: What were your own feelings when you'd finally received the news that the war was over?

Blaylock: Well, I couldn't believe it. (Chuckle) We got on board a hospital ship and went to Okinawa to change ships. And now maybe you don't remember, but about that time this great typhoon struck Okinawa, and at one time we had to make a big circle on this hospital ship. And at one time, we were closer to the Philippines than we were Okinawa, but we had to . . . to go to Okinawa to change ships. When we got to Okinawa we didn't even go ashore. We just got on motor launches or landing craft or whatever they were and went to this other ship and went back to the Philippines where we went through a bunch of tests and were issued clothes. There was report after report and form after form to fill out. And we got paid some so we could go to town, but there wasn't much left of Manila.

Marcello: As a result of the war damage and what-have-you?

Blaylock: It was just rubble. The first time I went to Manila when I got back to the Philippines I kept walking and walking and walking, and there was nothing but rubble and devastation and destruction. And I said, "Well, I'll be at the center of town before long. There'll be some buildings there." (Chuckle) And I finally crossed the river and I knew that I was in downtown Manila.

Marcello: And there was nothing there either.

Blaylock: Very, very little. Manila was such a beautiful city, but they just had to bomb buildings to buildings to get the Japs out, so I heard, when they invaded.

Marcello: As you look back on your entire stay or tenure or whatever you wish to call it as a prisoner-of-war, what stands out perhaps more than anything else in your mind?

Blaylock: Oh, the winter in Japan, the march. It's kind of hard to say.

Marcello: What thing was most constantly on your mind--food?

Blaylock: Food.

Marcello: Any particular kind of food?

Blaylock: Sweets. Everybody talked about sweets, desserts, candy.

Marcello: Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that you think we need to have as a part of the record?

Blaylock: Well, I can't think of anything right now. Nothing comes to my mind.