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Interview with  
James L. Kent  
May 11, 1972

Place of Interview: Duncanville, Texas  
Interviewer: Dr. Ron E. Marcello  
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Oral History Collection

Mr. James L. Kent

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Duncanville, Texas

Date: May 11, 1972

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. James L. Kent for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 11, 1972, in Duncanville, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Kent in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Kent was in the Marine Corps and was captured on Corregidor very early in the war. Mr. Kent, to begin this interview would you very briefly give me a biography of yourself. In other words, would you tell me where you were born, when you were born, your education, things of that nature.

Mr. Kent: Well, I was born in Toney, Texas, in 1918, and my education was low. I just finished the seventh grade.

Marcello: When did you enter the service? Do you recall?

Kent: Well, my brother-in-law and I were sitting on the front porch and there was a Marine who came by dressed in blue, and I was young, and I asked him what outfit

that guy was in. He told me he was in the Marine Corps and that it took a man to get in that outfit, and I said, "Well, I can get in it." And so he said, "No, you're not old enough, and you're not man enough to get in it."

Marcello: How old were you at this time?

Kent: Well, I was about seventeen. So the next morning I got up and I went down and I joined. So then I brought the papers out for my dad to sign, and he wouldn't sign them. So I went over to my brother-in-law's and sister's, and I asked them if they would sign them. So they signed them. Then I left on a Wednesday on a train from Dallas and went to San Diego, and I was in boot camp for about a week. I wrote home and asked my dad if he could get me out of that outfit because they was about to kill me. I got a letter back from him-- oh, it was in two or three days--and he told me, "Well, son, you thought you was man enough to get in that outfit. Now see if you're man enough to stay." And so that did it. I stuck with it (chuckle).

Marcello: How long were you at San Diego all together?

Kent: I was in San Diego for about a year or a year and a half.

Marcello: In other words, you stayed there for awhile after you got out of boot camp.

Kent: Well, yes, until the 1st Defense pulled out.

Marcello: You talk of the 1st Defense. Was that a Marine division or a Marine unit?

Kent: That was a Marine unit that went to Pearl Harbor just before . . . well, it was about three months, I guess, before the war started.

Marcello: Did you want to go overseas?

Kent: Not at that time.

Marcello: How come you didn't want to go overseas at that time?

Kent: Well, I was in love with a little old girl--I thought I was--in San Diego, so I jumped ship.

Marcello: In other words, you were supposed to be on your way to Pearl Harbor, and before the ship left, you simply took off.

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: Is that what we could call being AWOL today?

Kent: That was A. W. O. L. (Chuckle)

Marcello: What happened?

Kent: Well, after I was gone ninety-nine days, I volunteered to come back, and I came back to Dallas to see my dad before I turned myself in. And so he asked me if I would turn myself in, that they'd been out. I told him, "Yes," that I would.

Marcello: In other words, the Marines had been out to see your parents?

Kent: Yes. And so I went down to the recruiting station. I turned myself in and so the old commanding officer down there asked me if I was willing to go back on my own. I told him, "Yes, I don't want to be smart, but if I didn't intend to go back, I never would have come back and turned myself in." And he says, "I'll make it light on you. We have a bunch of recruits going back. If you'll see that they get back to San Diego, well, I'll write you a letter of recommendation." And evidently he did because I got a summary court-martial out of it, which I could have got a general. I got 100 days in the brig, which I done 116 days, and a \$100 fine.

Marcello: How come you did more than 100 days?

Kent: Well, I was in there sixteen days before my trial came up.

Marcello: I see. What's life in the brig like?

Kent: Rough.

Marcello: In what way?

Kent: Well, in them days we had what they called a road gang, and you worked. I mean, if you got out of that brig you didn't want to get back in it.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do in the brig?

Kent: Well, at the first, every time you came out of those doors, that old brig warden would boot you in the seat

of your pants, and I mean he wouldn't miss you. We went out on the road, and we loaded gravel trucks with shovels, and we built roads and we built fire breaks. There wasn't any break times. You worked from the time you was out there until you came in. You didn't have any smoking privilege but ten minutes when the smoking lamp was lit, and when it was out you just didn't smoke regardless of how bad you wanted one.

Marcello: What sort of food did you get?

Kent: Well, we had good food. In fact, I guess the brig fed the best of any part of the camp.

Marcello: I guess they had to since they were working you so hard.

Kent: They had to. Yes, I think so, too.

Marcello: I gather then that after 116 days in the brig you were ready to go overseas.

Kent: I put in for Asiatic duty. I joined another group, and the old first sergeant took a liking to me, and so he told me that there was an Asiatic list out and he said he'd put me in for it and that he'd put my name on it if I wanted to go. I said, "I definitely want to go." And so he signed up, and then I think it was about a week and we was on the Asiatic list. We didn't know where we was going. We got on board a train, and we went all the way through California, I

think, and then up to San Francisco. Then we got on barges, and they took us out on barges up until we got on board the Henderson. That thing had so many depth charges on it that it was barely standing up itself, and it was interesting. I got out. I never did get sea sick. I called myself an old salty by then, and I'd made up my mind that I was going to serve my country and I did.

Marcello: In other words, that brig kind of matured you a little, perhaps, also.

Kent: It sure did. It sure did.

Marcello: At this time did you have any notion at all that the country would be getting into war?

Kent: Yes, I did. When I put in, the top sergeant told me, "Kent, I don't know where we're going, but we'll probably go up through Shanghai, China, and we might get off there, or we might come back to Corregidor, Philippines, and we might get off there. There's no telling where we'll get off, but I know it'll be in the Pacific." And I told him the hotter it was the better I'd like it, and I really didn't mean that after I found out. (Chuckle)

Marcello: What was the attraction of Asiatic duty? I gather that it was a pretty good life being assigned some duty in Asia.



Kent: It was a good life up until the war broke out. Of course, we had a big time after the war broke out. I mean at the first because we didn't figure the Japs would last two months. We thought we could whip them in two months, and then we'd all come back home.

Marcello: Well, where did you go when you went overseas?

Kent: Well, we went all up through China and back down through . . . I forget this place . . . but we ended up in the Philippines in Manila Bay.

Marcello: In other words, you never did stay in China.

Kent: No. We were on that ship for about thirty days or longer.

Marcello: Why did you go over to China? Did you drop off a group of Marines there?

Kent: No. See, we was loaded with depth charges, and we come back through Formosa and back around--I don't know really. It was the first time I'd ever been on a ship in my life, and I really don't know where all we went, but I know we was on that ship for over a month. When we did come back and circled back around through the Philippines, we ended up in Manila Bay. We got off in Manila Bay. We were put on barges and brought to Cavite Navy Yard, and that's where I was stationed and the Japs wiped it out.

Marcello: When approximately did you arrive at Cavite Navy Yard?

Kent: Well, that I couldn't tell you. I don't remember.

Marcello: It wasn't too long, however, before the war started.

Kent: Two months.

Marcello: About two months?

Kent: It was two months.

Marcello: In other words, it may have been October or November of 1941.

Kent: Yes. I was there because I had got one letter, and I think I'd written my sister and them a couple letters before the war broke out.

Marcello: What was duty like at Cavite?

Kent: It was good.

Marcello: In what ways?

Kent: Well, you had room boys. You paid them so much, and they kept your rifle clean, and they shined your shoes and made your bunk. You had it easy.

Marcello: In other words, you were just a Marine private, too.

Kent: No. I was Pfc then.

Marcello: You were a Pfc by this time. Really making big money. (Chuckle)

Kent: Yes, I was making big money.

Marcello: How much were you making a month?

Kent: Well, when I went in there, and up until I made my Pfc back I was making \$21 a month.

Marcello: But that went a long way in the Philippines.

Kent: It sure did. Of course, I'd write my sister and tell her to send me a little extra. You needed it out there.

Marcello: What sort of military activity did you undergo while you were at Cavite?

Kent: Well, you mean like training?

Marcello: Right. What did you do after you got to Cavite so far as the Marine Corps was concerned.

Kent: Well, now I was the machine gunner, I cooked for awhile and did guard duty, just different things. Of course, in the Marine Corps you were always training on something.

Marcello: Was the training rather routine? In other words, were there any extraordinary activities being undertaken in order to prepare for an attack, let's say?

Kent: The only thing that I can't understand about that, and I guess I'll never understand it . . . we reported people . . . I didn't know a Jap from a Chinaman or anything else at that time. You'd go out and you'd ride around in those rickshaws, and, of course, you'd have a little old Filipino gal with you. They looked pretty white then. And so you'd see a bunch of boats coming into shore, and they was bringing stuff in. We reported it, and never anything was done about it. It wasn't checked on or anything else.

Marcello: Why did you report these boats or these ships?

Kent: We didn't know what it was, and at that time the war was coming closer and closer, and everybody knew we was going to be in war.

Marcello: And there were a lot of Japanese in the Philippines, were there not?

Kent: The Japanese had their guns and everything buried there. All they had to do was come in and get them.

Marcello: You found this out much later, of course.

Kent: That's what I found out later, and after it was all over, we realized . . . and my buddy and I caught a . . . oh, what do you call them?

Marcello: A fifth-columnist?

Kent: Well, he was a Communist or whatever he was, so we got into a fight with him. They locked us up in the brig, but they found out later that he was a Communist or spy, and they locked him up. Of course, they kept us overnight to keep us out of trouble.

Marcello: Was this man Japanese?

Kent: No, he wasn't Japanese and I don't know what he was, but what started it, see, we told him if the Japs or Germans or anybody got on us, we'd whip them in thirty days. So he got to popping off, and later on after we'd got ourselves locked up and reported him, well,

they found out that he was a spy, and they got him, and I couldn't tell anymore than that because I don't know.

Marcello: Generally speaking, then, as you look back on it, it was more or less business as usual at Cavite. Did you really see a whole lot of preparations being made for an attack?

Kent: No, I didn't see any.

Marcello: Were they ever digging any trenches or placing any anti-aircraft weapons or anything of that nature?

Kent: They sure wasn't. No, there wasn't anything going on. We just lived from day to day.

Marcello: Were there ever any special alerts?

Kent: Well, yes, we had one special alert while I was over there. And then when the real alert come in, we didn't know whether to believe it or not.

Marcello: Apparently you did not take that first alert very seriously.

Kent: No. We all laughed about it. So did we on the second one--the real one--but we didn't laugh about it after it was over.

Marcello: Do you remember what you were doing when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Kent: Yes. I don't know if I should tell you. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Well, go right ahead and tell me if you wish.

Kent: I was shacking up with a little old Filipino gal. We were having a big time drinking that "Ginebra" gin. I don't know how to spell it, but I know it will drive you crazy. It'll make you do things that you don't want to do after it's over.

Marcello: (Chuckle) So what did you do when you heard about the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Kent: Oh, well, heck, we was all happy. We all figured, "They can't see and we'll have them whipped in two months."

Marcello: You said, "They can't see." Did you think of every Japanese as having glasses?

Kent: Yes. That's just what I thought.

Marcello: Glasses and buckteeth.

Kent: Well, after they come over the first day . . . they bombed Pearl Harbor and wiped it out.

Marcello: Well, as soon as you got word of Pearl Harbor, did you high-tail it back to the base?

Kent: Oh, well, sure, we come back to the base. We had to because . . .

Marcello: I see.

Kent: After we got word that the Japs was on their way there-- now I don't know this to be the fact, but I know some of the pilots told me and told a bunch of us--MarArthur had grounded all planes. And that was a fact, and I'd

almost swear to it as if I'd heard him. But the ones that disobeyed orders and took off to the air was the only planes which was, I think, two or three P-38's and some P-40's.

Marcello: What happened when you got back to Cavite? You know you got back to Cavite and you heard the news about the attack and your first impulses, of course, were that, "Well, we're going to wipe up the Japanese in real short order." What happened from that point then? What did you do?

Kent: You mean after they wiped out Cavite Navy Yard?

Marcello: No. After you heard the news of the attack, what sort of preparations or what sort of an assignment did you have?

Kent: Well, old Colonel Adams got us all together, and then when the planes did get there, well, boy, they flattened Cavite Navy Yard. There wasn't anything standing but the Marine Corps barracks and "Dreamland."

Marcello: Where were you when they hit Cavite Navy Yard?

Kent: We were laying out on . . . oh, I forget what they call it now, but it was a big . . . well, it was along the bay there, you know. They had trained us so well that we knew to stay on the ground.

Marcello: I assume that it was just a matter of hours before they hit Cavite Navy Yard.

Kent: It was. It was and they wiped it completely out.

Marcello: What was that first attack like?

Kent: It was rough. I'd never been through anything before in all of my life like that, and everything was just red. I mean it was just like a red sunset. Cavite was a Filipino village, and the Marine Corps barracks set right there on the beach. And, of course, those Filipinos didn't know any better. They jumped up and started running, and that shrapnel was cutting them down and crushing them and was killing the babies. It killed . . . oh, there was Filipinos lying everywhere. You'd just have to step over them.

Marcello: I gather that the American defenses were rather futile. I gather, for example, that the anti-aircraft guns couldn't reach the bombers, things of that nature.

Kent: They couldn't reach them. We only had three-inch anti-aircraft.

Marcello: Apparently, most of the equipment was obsolete.

Kent: Yes, it was. Right there at Cavite Navy Yard, I don't think we had but about four anti-aircraft guns.

Marcello: What were your own emotions when you saw those planes coming over? Were you scared?

Kent: Well, not until they started dropping those bombs, I wasn't. We was cursing them and everything else and



calling them slant-eyed people and all that stuff, and then we noticed some of our P-40's which, as I said, was all grounded, but a few went up and tried to break up the formation. And then those Zero fighters come down strafing us, and I've had those bullets to go right between . . . I'd be stretched out and they'd go right between me. There wasn't a Marine killed. There wasn't a Marine killed--lucky. Someone was with us besides them Japanese. After it was all over . . . see, they hit everything. They wiped out everything in Cavite. They flattened it except the Marine Corps barracks, the ammunition depot--that's the only two things--and "Dreamland," a dance hall that they didn't touch.

Marcello: "Dreamland" was the name of a dance hall in Cavite.

Kent: Yes. That was the Marine Corps' favorite. Well, they had girls down there, see. If you paid ten centavos, you danced with them. You gave them a ticket, and they had to dance with you, and so that was all right.

Marcello: But "Dreamland" still remained.

Kent: It still remained. Now whether it did after the Americans come back in there, I don't know.

Marcello: What happened next? The attack was over. Apparently it didn't last long, but nevertheless the base was a shambles as you said. What did the Marines do next?

Kent: Well, we started moving up to Bataan.

Marcello: In other words, very shortly after that first attack, you moved out of there and into the Bataan Peninsula.

Kent: Well, now, all except the one anti-aircraft battery. I'll tell you what happened there. Well, old Colonel Adams wanted to know . . . see, we had one big Navy bus. It was a new bus--steering wheel on the right-hand side and had a silver top and blue bottom, you know, like they're painted. He wanted to know if anybody knew how to drive it. He said they had to get it out of the way. I told him, "Sir, I can drive that bus." And so he said, "Well, get in it and get it under cover." Well, I didn't know one gear from another one. I never had drove a car with the steering wheel on the right-hand side, and I was just lucky enough that I got in it and backed it right up against a hut and got it under some of those bamboo trees and stuff and got it under cover. And so he told me that was my home until we got all the troops up to Bataan. And so, of course, this anti-aircraft battery was still there. Well, I'd take a load of troops up to Bataan, come back through Manila and pick up a bunch of girls, and all these boys over on these anti-aircraft guns had huts, you know. They had an automobile battery,

and they had an automobile horn hooked to every one of those huts. When they had an air raid, this guy on guard would touch this battery off, and they'd blow all the horns in the hut. Well, all of them would man their guns, so we kept it going on pretty good.

Marcello: Did you ever have any close calls? Were you ever strafed or anything like that by Japanese planes while you were hauling these troops . . .

Kent: No . . .

Marcello: . . . or girls back and forth?

Kent: Well, I've had a lot of close calls that way, but they actually didn't come close to me.

Marcello: Yes.

Kent: But anyway, I took the last troop of the anti-aircraft group through Manila when Japs was coming in one side and we was going out the other. Of course, we was ambushed between Manila and Bataan, but I mean it wasn't a big ambush. I think really it was guerrillas. And anyway we didn't even slow down. We just kept going and I . . .

Marcello: Did you hear shots or what?

Kent: Oh, they riddled that bus up, but there was no one hurt on it, and so I run that bus over. When we got

up there, Bataan was falling, and MacArthur had ordered all the Marines over on Corregidor to make a beach defense over there.

Marcello: In other words, you really didn't spend very much time on Bataan.

Kent: No.

Marcello: By the time you made that second run, things were already getting pretty bad on Bataan, and you were being sent over to Corregidor.

Kent: You see, I made several runs up through there.

Marcello: Right.

Kent: And, of course, I was going through air raids there on Bataan and then when I'd get back, well, I'd hit them again over there, but I was lucky. The only time I had a close call was when we were on Corregidor before we was captured. I was buried three times in a machine gun nest, and that was on account of a little 2nd lieutenant. I was over three machine guns, and he wanted our machine guns on a cliff. And I told him, "If we ever get bombed or close to it, we're going to get covered up." And sure enough we did. The first bombs come over, dropped a load behind us, and, it caved them in on us. Of course, it didn't cave all of them in, and the others would dig them out. I'm telling you that's something else--being buried in a

machine gun nest.

Marcello: I'll bet it is.

Kent: And you can't breathe. You can't see or nothing else.

Marcello: Very frightening, I would assume.

Kent: Yes, it is. And so then this Colonel Adams come by and I told him about it, and he told us to move them on back further. So we moved the machine gun nest back.

Marcello: Let's go back to Corregidor for just a minute. Now, you'd been ferrying troops back and forth between Manila and Bataan for some time. Were you beginning to change your mind about whipping the Japs in short order? Or did you still think it would be a relatively short fight?

Kent: Well, I never changed my mind about them until I got aboard Corregidor. I was young. I didn't care what happened. I was ready to fight and just didn't care.

Marcello: Well, what were your feelings or what was your reaction when you heard that you were going to Corregidor?

Kent: Well, we couldn't understand it because MacArthur said he wanted all the Marines over there to make a beach defense. I hate to talk about MacArthur because he's dead now, but anyway, they said it was fortified. There was nothing that could touch it. We got over there

and there wasn't nothing over there. We had to dig trenches in solid rock and . . .

Marcello: Were you down at the beach?

Kent: We were right up over the beach, but we had Marines all the way around the beach.

Marcello: On what section of Corregidor were you stationed?

Kent: Well, I don't know if you know or not where the Marines . . .

Marcello: Is it Topside, Middleside, Bottomside?

Kent: Well, I was right in the middle of it.

Marcello: Were you near Malinta Tunnel?

Kent: Right pretty close to the mouth of Malinta Tunnel. We were right up on the cliff, right out from the docks, and out on the point. Do you remember the point?

Marcello: Right.

Kent: All right. There was an old ship sunk right out there on the point.

Marcello: And this is where your machine gun nests were originally set up?

Kent: No. We was set up to where we could cover all the docks from Malinta Tunnel plum back to the . . . well, I guess it was the power plant. Right to the back of us was the Filipinos' battery, you know, artillery.

Marcello: Yes.

Kent: I don't know when them Japs started making the invasion on Corregidor. If we had just had just a little bit of help, they wouldn't have got on that rock.

Marcello: Well, I gather that most of the people on Corregidor were expecting help to come. Wasn't this true?

Kent: All the time. That was what was keeping us going. We all thought, "Well, the Japanese can't see well enough to even hit this rock." And this news commentator up in 'Frisco keeps saying on the radio, "We dare you to bomb Corregidor." Well, hell, they wasn't missing Corregidor! I don't think a bomb dropped in that bay. It was all hitting Corregidor. They had over 100 artillery batteries over on Bataan, and they was pounding us day and night.

Marcello: While you were on Corregidor, were you staying at the beaches?

Kent: We were staying in our machine gun nests.

Marcello: Were you ever in the barracks at all?

Kent: We didn't have no barracks!

Marcello: The reason I brought that up is because Halbrook told me that . . .

Kent: He might have slept in the tunnel.

Marcello: Well, he mentioned the barracks that was supposed to be bomb-proof, but apparently the first bombs that hit the barracks . . .

Kent: No . . .

Marcello: Went right through it . . .

Kent: . . . went on through it. That was right up above us.

Marcello: . . . before it exploded.

Kent: That was right.

Marcello: I didn't know if you were ever in the barracks or not.

Kent: When the Japanese took us over, we was in those barracks, and we was looking down on old Tojo. And they like to beat the hell out of us because we wasn't supposed to look down on him. We could look up at him, but don't ever look down on a Jap.

Marcello: Well, I gather that after you got to Corregidor, you were subjected to constant bombardment either by airplanes or by artillery over on Bataan. What does it feel like or what does it do to a person to be under that constant bombardment all the time?

Kent: I'd rather be under a bombardment than a shelling anytime!

Marcello: Why?

Kent: Well, a bomb will hit and it'll go up, and if you're on the ground, well, it won't hit you. I mean the shrapnel won't hit you. It's going up. But a shell is just like a garden rake. It'll hit and explode and just rake for 100 feet, just like a garden rake. And you better be way under the ground.

Marcello: And you never knew when it was coming either.

Kent: And you never did know. You never did know when. You could hear it, but you didn't know where it was going



to hit. Now you can watch an airplane and you can tell about where the bomb is going to hit because you can see them release the bombs, and if they're right up over you, you don't have anything to worry about.

Marcello: Because the bombs are going to pass over you.

Kent: Yes, they're going to pass over you. But don't let them tell you that a bomb won't hit in an old crater because they will. They'll hit in the old craters because I had a real good buddy that was in an old crater, and it wiped him out.

Marcello: What sort of rations did you have on Corregidor?

Kent: Well, what all we could steal out of Malinta Tunnel and just old regular C-rations. We had a chow line.

Marcello: Were you ever on short rations?

Kent: Well, yes. Well, heck, we didn't know whether to go through chow line or not. We just didn't know what was going to take place.

Marcello: In other words, I understand that the chow truck was taking all sorts of chances when it was trying to get through.

Kent: Every time he come right by us--the road that we was covering--and he had to take chances every time he come by there because he'd try to time the shells and beat them through, and he was just playing a game of

checkers. That's what it was. That's all it amounted to--a game of checkers. He was trying to pick his time, and when they'd fire so many shots, he'd try to go. Well, that's all war is anyway--a game of checkers.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you stole food out of Malinta Tunnel. You obviously then did get into the tunnel. What was it like? Describe it as best as you can remember it.

Kent: The Malinta Tunnel?

Marcello: Right.

Kent: Well, the Malinta Tunnel had several laterals in it. It had a hospital. General MacArthur's headquarters was in there. They had laterals in there and when the Japs took over that were sealed off, and they broke the seals, and we'd burned a machine gun barrel up, and they told us there wasn't any more barrels. And the Japanese come in, and they got brand-new, water-cooled machine guns out of these laterals. And food, we couldn't have ate enough food to dispose of all of it.

Marcello: Why do you think they were hoarding these things?

Kent: I don't know unless they just didn't know how long the war was going to last. They didn't know how long we could hold out, and, of course, as you say, we was

all expecting help any day, but the only ships we could see coming in was Jap ships. And they had us completely surrounded.

Marcello: What was the morale like?

Kent: It was good. The morale was good.

Marcello: I'm sure that there were all sorts of rumors floating around.

Kent: Now, I don't know about the rumors, but what made the people so mad, I guess, is the people back here on the steel strikes. We was over there fighting our hearts out, and then this news commentator would tell about strikes, you know, steel strikes. And that broke the morale, I guess, more than anything because they kept telling us that there would be help: "Help's on the way." Well, we kept expecting that, but we couldn't figure out why these people back here--us over there taking a chance of getting killed--and they over here sitting on their butts and wouldn't work to try to help their country out. There was people over there dying, and there was a lot of them dying every day. I guess that lowered the morale of the servicemen more than anything.

Marcello: Describe the day that the Japanese finally landed on Corregidor and the events leading up to your capture.

Let's start with dawn, let's say. Let's start from the beginning. What took place?

Kent: At dawn? Well, me and my old buddy come down through there, and we had swapped our American .45's to the Constabulary over there for those .38 revolvers, and we got us two apiece, and we strapped them on just like old Wild Bill Hickok. Well, we was going down there the next morning, and we didn't know the rock had been surrounded or anything!

Marcello: Oh, you didn't know anything about it, and you hadn't met any Japanese up to this time?

Kent: No. All we was doing was just shooting and just having a big time, you know.

Marcello: You did know the Japanese had landed though?

Kent: Oh, yes. Yes, we knew there was Japanese on there, but we didn't much care. So we was headed back to Malinta Tunnel. We was going to get us some peaches and some of them canned fruits, you know. And so there was a column of four coming up through there. We had those guns strapped on, and we didn't even know the island surrendered. So we busted on down through there and we was Marines. Hell, we'd break the ranks, so we just cut down through there, and the first thing you know, boy, they started beating on us and kicking us and

sticking us with bayonets, and they motioned for us to go back towards Malinta Tunnel.

Marcello: Did you go towards those Japanese shooting?

Kent: That was the Japanese who was doing this to us.

Marcello: Well, you said that you and your buddy saw this column coming towards you, and they were Japanese . . .

Kent: They were Japanese, yes.

Marcello: All right. And you said you started going towards them.

Kent: Yes, we did. We busted the rank. We went through them. We thought they were Filipinos.

Marcello: You ran through them? But you didn't do any shooting. Were you shooting or anything like that?

Kent: No!

Marcello: All right.

Kent: We hadn't even touched our guns! We were just going back to our machine gun nest.

Marcello: I see.

Kent: And, boy, all of the sudden . . . you know, we had on helmets, and they started hitting us on the head with helmets and kicking us with rifles and punching us with bayonets. They could have killed us right there. And they motioned for us to go back towards Malinta Tunnel. Well, we went on, and, of course, we unstrapped

our guns and let them fall on the ground because we realized then who they were, and so we went on in Malinta Tunnel. Well, they had everybody in there.

Marcello: What did you think when you found out that the island had surrendered? What were your thoughts?

Kent: Oh, I knew we was in for it then. Actually, I didn't know what to think. I was scared and I wasn't scared. I know I was scared because I don't think anybody can say that they wasn't scared. I was and I thought I was pretty rough in them days. Anyway, we went on in there, and they made us all get on our knees. That's a big, big tunnel going through there. Well, trucks could go through it, and it was full. They would get up there and they would tell how they was going to beat our country down to the knees and what they're going to do for us and all of that stuff, and, in fact, we stayed in there a long time just listening to stuff like that.

Marcello: Did they rough you up any in this tunnel?

Kent: No, not in the tunnel.

Marcello: Did they loot you? Did they take rings, watches, wallets?

Kent: Not in that tunnel, no. They took us over, see, to . . .

Marcello: The 92nd Garage area.

Kent: Right over on the Point.

Marcello: That's where the 92nd Garage area is?

Kent: Well, I don't know if it was or not, but I know that is where we . . .

Marcello: It was just an open field . . .

Kent: . . . just an open field. And I mean that sun was getting hot out there! So we stayed there for . . . I don't know how many days we stayed there.

Marcello: In the meantime, did you witness any Japanese atrocities while you were out in this field?

Kent: Well, as we was coming out of Malinta Tunnel, they had some Americans piled up out there, and they had some Japanese in there, too, that was wounded. They poured gas on them and was burning them, and you could hear their screaming and . . . smelling them . . . smelling brains burning. That's the worst smell you can smell, and we could smell that . . . well, heck, I can still smell it. At times I get to thinking about it so strong that I can think that I can still smell it.

Marcello: What sort of details did they make you perform while you were on Corregidor? Did you have to go on any details?

Kent: No, we didn't have any details there. Now some of the boys might have, but I never did.

Marcello: Did they provide you with any food or water?

Kent: Well, that's one thing I don't remember--if they provided us or if it was food that we had in our sea bags and stuff, pouches.

Marcello: What sort of possessions did you have by this time?

Kent: Well, I didn't have much of anything because when we got wiped out there at Cavite, well, heck, they wiped us all out there.

Marcello: Did you have your mess kit?

Kent: Yes, we had a mess kit.

Marcello: A canteen?

Kent: A canteen . . .

Marcello: How about shaving utensils or anything of that nature?

Kent: . . . yes, we had those, but when they took us to Bilibid Prison--they took us from Corregidor to Bilibid Prison--and they took everything we had away from us. I mean they stripped us. There was some of the guys that hid stuff--just like my Marine Corps emblem. They couldn't get that because I'd always hide it or something until it was over with, and the next time they'd have a shake-down, it would be hid again. But we went to that Bilibid Prison and all we was getting--I think it was twice a day--is just one little old cup of rice and that was all.

Marcello: Well, you just stayed on Corregidor for a little while, just for a couple of days, as I recall. Then they sent



you over to Bilibid. How did you get from Corregidor to Bilibid?

Kent: Well . . .

Marcello: Did they have barges?

Kent: Well, as I remember they did put us on barges.

Marcello: And were you among that group that was dropped off quite a distance from shore and had to swim into shore? Now some of them, I know, they simply dropped off the ship or forced off the ship, and they had to swim into shore from a certain distance out.

Kent: No, I wasn't one of them.

Marcello: You get right into the dock?

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: Well, describe what happened after they landed you at the dock. Of course, then you had to march down Dewey Boulevard to Bilibid Prison.

Kent: Yes. Well, some of the Filipinos was cheering us, and some of them was running us down, and I don't know. By that time I was about half scared to death.

Marcello: Were there some Filipinos who showed hostility?

Kent: Yes, there sure were.

Marcello: But most of the Filipinos were rather sympathetic, were they not?

Kent: I don't know how you'd put it, but there was a lot of Filipinos who lost their lives sticking up for us. They

never did give up on the Americans. That's one thing that I can say about them. There was a lot of them that never did, and a lot of the women over there was forced into doing what they did, and so was the American nurses that was captured on Corregidor.

Marcello: Did the Japanese try to humiliate you in any way as they marched you from the docks to Bilibid Prison?

Kent: Yes, all the way.

Marcello: What were some of the ways in which they tried to humiliate you?

Kent: Well, they would just--I don't know--just walk up and kick you or push you or something like that. You could whip a whole bunch of them at one time, but, of course, they had the advantage. They had all the advantage, but there was a lot of Filipinos who lost their heads, and I've seen them carry them on sticks. The Japanese would carry them on sticks parading them. But they just didn't give up on the American people.

Marcello: What happened when you got to Bilibid Prison?

Kent: Well, they put us in there, and, of course, the ones that had a deck of cards or anything, well, we'd all try to play games or something to get our minds off it. Of course, we still didn't know what was going to happen to us--if they was going to take us to Japan, if they was going to line us up and shoot us.

Marcello: Did you ever hear of the rumor that the Japanese did not take prisoners?

Kent: No.

Marcello: I was wondering if this thought ever ran through your mind.

Kent: I know we didn't take prisoners.

Marcello: Is that right?

Kent: Yes, I know we didn't take prisoners because we had thirty-five Japs, and they turned them over to the Constabulary, and they told us that they ran, so they had to shoot them. Of course, that wasn't us now . . .

Marcello: But that happened on Corregidor?

Kent: That happened in Bataan.

Marcello: I see.

Kent: No. There wasn't any prisoners on Corregidor.

Marcello: I thought maybe they may have transported some Japanese prisoners from Bataan to Corregidor.

Kent: No, they just didn't take any.

Marcello: What did Bilibid Prison look like as best you can describe it?

Kent: Well, I don't know. We went in these walls. Of course, it was all barred.

Marcello: It was an old jail.

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: It was an old Spanish prison, in fact.

Kent: Well, it had big rooms in it, and, of course, we were sleeping on the floor. If you had a blanket, that was good. If you didn't, you slept on the hard cement.

Marcello: Did you have a blanket?

Kent: Yes, I had a blanket, but, you know, there was a lot of us . . . if one didn't have a blanket, well, someone else would share theirs. The guys really stuck together.

Marcello: At this point they did.

Kent: Well, yes, at this point. Then they got to where it was dog-eat-dog.

Marcello: Now here again you weren't in Bilibid Prison very long.

Kent: No. I think we was there two or three days.

Marcello: Did the Japanese harass you in any way?

Kent: Not in there. They didn't bother us. I guess they was waiting orders, see.

Marcello: In other words, Bilibid Prison was kind of like a transit station. It was a place where they kept you for a couple of days before they sent you on to some other place.

Kent: That's right. See, when I went to Cabanatuan--well, when they sent the bunch up to Cabanatuan--I was up there, I guess, two years. I was in that number one camp, and I watched them shoot six guys that tried to escape.

Marcello: Well, we'll talk about that in a minute. I gather then that from Bilibid you went to Cabanatuan. Was this a train trip?

Kent: Yes, it was a train trip, too.

Marcello: Can you describe what it was like?

Kent: They put us in boxcars, and so we got up so far to our camp that we was going to, and then we had to hike the rest of the way.

Marcello: What were conditions like in those boxcars?

Kent: It was hot. Every time you'd make a move there'd be a Jap there to punch you with a bayonet, and you moved out pretty good because at that time they would just as soon kill you as not.

Marcello: Were you crowded on those boxcars?

Kent: Oh, yes. They piled us in there. We were just jammed up against one another.

Marcello: What was your physical condition like at this time?

Kent: Well, at this time, it was pretty good.

Marcello: How much did you weigh?

Kent: I weighed 175 pounds.

Marcello: Did you lose anybody on this train ride?

Kent: Well, I don't know if we did or not. I imagine so.

Marcello: You didn't notice anybody having died in your particular car?

Kent: No.

Marcello: While you were in there, did anybody have dysentery or anything of that nature?

Kent: Well, not on the boxcar that I was in, but that dysentery hit in that camp number two.

Marcello: At Cabanatuan II?

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: How long was this train ride? It was just a matter of hours, wasn't it? It didn't take too long, did it?

Kent: It didn't take too long, no.

Marcello: So you went by train and then they . . .

Kent: . . . they marched us . . .

Marcello: . . . they marched you to Cabanatuan I.

Kent: Number one. And so we went to Number One, and they immediately shook us down, you know. And they put us in a ten man firing squad. If anyone escaped within ten numbers of your name, you got shot.

Marcello: In other words, if one man escaped, the other nine people in your squad got shot.

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: What did Cabanatuan look like from a physical standpoint? Can you describe the camp as best you can?

Kent: It was just some old bamboo huts. We slept on bamboo. It had those bamboo roofs on them, and they were double-

decked, you know. That's about all it was to it. It was just an old open field.

Marcello: Was there a fence around the camp?

Kent: No, not at that particular camp, there wasn't. That's where these six men . . . I don't know what was the matter with them. They had just got out and started walking down the road, and they had got a pretty good distance from the camp, and they brought them back. They made us get out there and watch them put them before the firing squad. Of course, that was the first time I had ever seen anything like that. All but one dropped, and this one old boy tried to come out of that grave. Of course, they all fired again and then . . .

Marcello: Did they make these guys dig their own grave?

Kent: No. It was already dug. I guess the Japs must have dug it because we didn't know what was going on. Anyway, after they had shot them, well, this Jap officer shot each one of them behind the head with a pistol. That broke up any thought about escaping. They took us out on working details, but there wasn't any more trying to escape. There wasn't any place to escape to in the first place.

Marcello: I would assume that having witnessed this firing squad in action sobered everybody up in a hurry.

Kent: It did. It really did.

Marcello: I would assume that there were very few thoughts of escaping after that.

Kent: Well, there was a lot of them. Even me, I thought about escaping, but if you'd just had some place to have gone, but there wasn't no place.

Marcello: In other words, the jungle was hostile. You couldn't trust the Filipinos. You didn't know which ones were loyal and which ones were not loyal.

Kent: That's right.

Marcello: They would turn you in. There was a bounty on every prisoner that escaped, isn't that correct?

Kent: That's right. One reason that I didn't want to escape . . . of course, the guerrillas, the Filipino guerrillas was hitting that camp all the time.

Marcello: Is that right?

Kent: Yes, they were. We'd go out on a working detail cutting wood and stuff, and the Japs was scared to death, afraid the guerrillas was going to attack. But I would have hated to escape and then have nine other men get shot even if I'd got away. I'd have had that on my conscience.

Marcello: Did you ever witness any of those guerrillas attacks on the camp?



Kent: Yes. Well, they hit two or three different trucks there and shot them up pretty bad. One of the Japs on one of them lost his ax or lost an ax on one of the attacks, and so the Japanese officers got on him so heavy that this Jap soldier took that ax and killed himself with it--just hitting himself in the forehead. He killed himself and the Jap officers was bailing out the windows and everything else, getting away from him.

Marcello: Did you witness this?

Kent: Yes, we was standing right across the road watching it.

Marcello: What did you think when you saw this?

Kent: We just said, "There's another damned dead Jap."

Marcello: Well, I gather also that the Americans guarded the camp as well as the Japanese to make sure that . . . I know in some of these camps, the Americans actually stood guard duty themselves to make sure that somebody didn't escape. Did this happen with your group?

Kent: No, not in the group that I was in, but I think all the fellows that was in my group were around me. I think they all felt just about the same way I did. They didn't watch one another, but I think they all had a feeling that they didn't want to get someone else hurt just to try to better themselves. And that happened, well, all the way down to number two.

Marcello: I would assume that during the first couple of weeks or months at Cabanatuan the mortality rate was rather high.

Kent: Well, I don't know. Our morale was high because we expected the war to end any day.

Marcello: Did quite a few people die during those first couple of months at Cabanatuan?

Kent: Oh, yes.

Marcello: This, I would assume, was when the most of the prisoners died--during these first couple of weeks or months.

Kent: Yes. When that dysentery hit those camps, well, they were dying 100 and so a day. I mean a day!

Marcello: What caused that dysentery?

Kent: Well, just flies and the food we was having to eat, and, well, it was just filthiness. That's what it was.

Marcello: Did you ever have to go on any of the burial details?

Kent: Yes, I went on several of them.

Marcello: Would you care to describe what one of them was like?

Kent: Well, they'd take them down and they'd pull their clothes off of them, and they'd take a bulldozer and they'd dig out a big trench, and you'd go down and take them on a stretcher and dump them in there. They'd come back with the bulldozer and cover them up. The next day, they'd take another group down there, and it would be the same way.

Marcello: I gather at times somebody had to go down in the pit and more or less stack all these prisoners and so on.

Kent: I never did.

Marcello: I understand that was one of the most distasteful jobs of the whole burial detail.

Kent: Yes. Well, the way they dumped them in there, I don't know. It was sickening. I don't know how to describe it. It was just something that I hope I never have to go through again.

Marcello: I gather also that there were times when, after a rain, you could go down where they buried these prisoners and see an arm or leg or something sticking out where they hadn't covered sufficiently.

Kent: I never did go down there. In fact, I never did make but two or three of the trips down there to take people. We'd just go down there, and the ones that was on the carrier would lay them down as easy as we could without getting the hell knocked out of us. And, of course, they was wanting you to throw them down and get out of there.

Marcello: Did the Japanese harass you very much during these first couple of weeks?

Kent: Well, they had guards stationed all around the camp, and once in awhile they would come through. One there

pushed me in . . . see, they had four fifty-gallon drums for what they called soup pots. All in the world it was was just . . . well, it was just tree leaves and everything that they could make a broth out of to go over rice. Well, that's what it was. Them pots was boiling all the time. And so there was two of them that was going to push me in one of them, and they did push me in. My leg, this leg right here, is burned up to there and all third degree all the way down to my ankle here.

Marcello: They did this just for no reason at all?

Kent: Just meanness. Just to torture you. I hung on and when I come out . . . well, of course, these Japs went on, and the American boys took me over, and a Navy corpsman took care of my leg. I almost lost it. He said gangrene was setting up in it, and he'd take a bamboo--all he had--he'd take a bamboo splinter and he'd scrape my leg two or three times a day, keeping this pus and stuff up out of it. Some of the guys would go out on working details, and they'd steal duck eggs, and they'd come back and they'd cook them for me, trying to build me up a little.

Marcello: How long were you in the hospital altogether?

Kent: There wasn't no hospital.

Marcello: Was there a dispensary or something at this camp?

Kent: You just didn't have to go out on a working detail.

Marcello: But they did have a special area where all the sick and disabled prisoners were. Isn't that correct?

Kent: No.

Marcello: Oh, they didn't.

Kent: No. If they did, I didn't know it.

Marcello: Yes.

Kent: Occasionally they would put on a special show. Sometime they'd let us have a show. The guys would put on a show, sing and what have you. That was a big camp, and the guys would put me on a stretcher or carry me down there where it wouldn't hurt me leg and lay me down to where I could hear it. No, as far as a hospital, there wasn't no hospital.

Marcello: How long did it take you to recuperate from these burns?

Kent: Oh, heck, I was months getting over it.

Marcello: You were literally off duty for months.

Kent: I didn't have to work until my leg got all right. Right now in cold weather it bothers me, and that's been a long time ago.

Marcello: When did this happen? Did this happen very shortly after you arrived at Cabanatuan?

Kent: It happened just about two months after we arrived there.

Marcello: What were some of the favorite kinds of harassment that the Japanese used? Was it mainly just punching and shoving and hitting with gun butts and things of that nature?

Kent: Yes. One Jap was nice to you, but if you got two or three of them together, they'd just push you around or hit you just to show you that they was boss. I guess that's what it was.

Marcello: I gather that the Japanese enlisted man was in many cases treated just as badly by his superiors.

Kent: That's right. That's right. Well, there was a Jap officer that told a group of us out on a working detail one time that if he had had the Japanese officers and the American soldiers, there wouldn't be no country could conquer them. But he said the Jap soldier was yellow, that they had to beat them all the time, and give them dope to get them to go into battle. And that was true. We watched it. I mean that's the truth. The Japanese do have brave officers, and, of course, they've got some doggoned brave soldiers, too. There's some of the Japanese Marines that are pretty tough.

Marcello: Do you remember any of the individual Japanese who might stand out in your mind?

Kent: Yes, an old interpreter.

Marcello: Do you remember what his name was?

Kent: (Chuckle) No, but he was called back to Japan just before the war started.

Marcello: Why does he stand out in your mind?

Kent: Well, the Jap officers would get up to make a speech on what they was going to beat our country down to, and when this old Jap officer would get through, he'd always say, "He say!" And, of course, every time he'd say that, "He say!" well, it was funny to us, so we all laughed. And so we had to stand out there at attention for so long, and he'd come by and ask if we didn't wish we had some hot biscuits and honey. He said, "I used to eat hot biscuits and honey and eggs and bacon." He was just making us pay for what we'd done to him. I guess he stood out more.

Marcello: Did you ever remember a Japanese guard called "Donald Duck?"

Kent: No. Where was this at?

Marcello: He was at Cabanatuan. How about "Mortimer Snerd?"

Kent: No, I didn't know any of the names of those in Cabanatuan.

Marcello: I guess you wouldn't have since you were on the sick list most of the time.

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: What sort of food did they give you at Cabanatuan?

Kent: Just rice, that's all, and this tree leaf broth. That's all you could call it. It was just tree leaves.

Marcello: How many times a day did you get fed?

Kent: Twice.

Marcello: In the morning and in the evening?

Kent: Yes. It was a very small bowl at that.

Marcello: What did you do after you got off sick list? You said you were on sick list for several months.

Kent: I went out on wood details, chopping wood. I worked on an airport strip they were building there in Cabanatuan. And we was having to tear down those hills, you know, that those cobra snakes stay in?

Marcello: Yes.

Kent: We was lucky. We had one guy on this detail that liked to catch snakes, and when we run across one of those cobras, well, we'd have to catch it. Somebody had to catch it. Well, this guy would always be there to catch it, and they'd pull the fangs out of it. Then them Japanese would tease you with it, see. Of course, the poor old snake's mouth would be so sore, it wouldn't think about biting you, but they would scare the fool out of you. They would just torture those



things until they killed them. That's how uncivilized they are. They were nothing but a bunch of savages.

Marcello: What were these wood-cutting details like?

Kent: Well, you would just go up and chop timber down, and then they would haul it in.

Marcello: Did they work you pretty well on those details?

Kent: Yes, we worked pretty hard. I guess they made a lot of charcoal out of that wood. They'd haul it off somewhere, and I imagine that's what they was doing with it.

Marcello: How did you go about supplementing your diet while you were at this camp? Did you eat snakes, dogs, cats, things of that nature?

Kent: Shoot! There didn't a dog come through that camp that got out. Yes, I've eaten dogs, and I've eaten grasshoppers. I've eaten worms that you dig out of the ground. I've eaten about anything, and I think that that's all that brought me back because a lot of these boys that didn't, didn't come back. A lot of them that wouldn't eat stuff like that. You had to. You get so hungry and you'll eat anything.

Marcello: When did you get your first Red Cross package? Was it in late 1942, maybe at Christmas of '42, perhaps?

Kent: No, I think it was . . . it might have been '42, but it might have been '43. I just don't remember, but I

remember the first one we got.

Marcello: What was it like when you got that package?

Kent: Oh, it was just like heaven. We ate and smoked and everything else!

Marcello: I gather that those Red Cross packages were real life savers. Had it not been for those Red Cross packages, a good many more prisoners would have died.

Kent: Yes. They probably would have, but there was a lot of them that we didn't get.

Marcello: I gather that the Japanese did keep a lot of this for themselves.

Kent: See, them Japanese didn't have too much to eat themselves, and you know they just wasn't going to give the Americans food that their people didn't have. I'm sure that there was a lot of those Red Cross packages that we didn't get.

Marcello: Did you detect that the Japanese were getting the same amount of food as you did, or were they getting more food than what you were? In other words, were they feeding you the same thing that the Japanese soldier was fed?

Kent: The only thing is that they were getting meat with their rice. You know, they'd cut their meat in these little chunks, and they'd cook it in that soy sauce.

They was getting meat with their rice, but they wasn't getting too much more rice than what we were getting. The only thing is that they were getting some meat.

Marcello: Did you ever have to work on the farm at Cabanatuan?

Kent: No.

Marcello: I understand that was pretty tough work, though.

Kent: That's what they tell me. While I was there, well, that's when my leg was burnt, and the only details that I went out on there were wood details and on the air strip.

Marcello: While you were on the sick list, did the Japanese more or less leave you alone?

Kent: Yes, they did. They didn't bother me. They left it up to the American corpsman to take care of it.

Marcello: Was there a place at Cabanatuan when you were there called the "Zero Ward?" Do you remember that?

Kent: The what?

Marcello: The "Zero Ward."

Kent: No.

Marcello: Apparently this was the place where all of the seriously sick prisoners were kept, and it was usually the last step before the grave, really.

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: I didn't know if you were ever familiar with this or not.

Kent: No, I wasn't.

Marcello: Did you ever see any evidence of any collaboration at Cabanatuan? In other words, did you ever see anybody who tried to do things to win the favor of the Japanese in order to get special favors?

Kent: Yes, I've seen a lot of that.

Marcello: Can you give me some examples of it without mentioning names?

Kent: Well, I wouldn't know their names anyway. It just . . . the ones that would, well, just go around and try to teach the Japs how to speak English and all. And, of course, the Japs would try to give them extra stuff, but I don't know, it was just sickening to see them do that.

Marcello: What sort of sanitary facilities and bathing facilities did you have at Cabanatuan?

Kent: (Chuckle) We didn't have any. We didn't have anything there.

Marcello: Was water rationed?

Kent: No, it wasn't rationed, but we just had what we wanted to drink, and that was it. All that you could do was just sponge off. Well, they just didn't have them. Now in Japan we did. We had a bath every ten days.

Marcello: What were the latrines like at Cabanatuan?

Kent: Well, they were just open latrines. Just squat the rail.

Marcello: And I assume they were breeding places for flies and maggots and things of this nature.

Kent: Flies and maggots and everything else, and that's what caused mostly the dysentery, I think.

Marcello: Did you ever get dysentery at Cabanatuan?

Kent: I never did. I never did.

Marcello: How about malaria?

Kent: No, I didn't get the malaria. Of course, I had . . . yes, I did get malaria, too. I sure did.

Marcello: Did you suffer quite a bit with it?

Kent: Well, no. I'd get cold one minute and burning up the next, but it went away, and I haven't had any more trouble with it. I'm one of the lucky ones, I guess.

Marcello: Did you ever have any contact with civilians while you were at Cabanatuan?

Kent: No. The only civilians we had contact with was the Filipinos who would slip notes in, telling where the American people were.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever pay you for any of the work that you did at Cabanatuan? Were you paid so much a day?

Kent: Well, after we got back, yes. I was paid three different checks. I think I drew \$1,100 one time, \$1,800 one time, and I forget what the other one was.

Marcello: I'm referring to work that you did in the prison camp. Did the Japanese pay the prisoners so much a day?

Kent: Oh, no! No.

Marcello: There was no pay at all?

Kent: There was no pay. The only pay there was . . . see, they gave you . . . you worked ten days and you're off one, and that's in order to wash your clothes, but they had something for you to do that tenth day.

Marcello: Did you ever remember the Formosan guards that they had at Cabanatuan? I've understood that a lot of times the Japanese used Formosan guards, and that these people would work for the Japanese.

Kent: They did. They worked.

Marcello: Can you describe some of the things that the Formosan guards did or how they were more cruel than the Japanese?

Kent: Well, they're small. They're small people. They were no meaner. I think they had to be because they was so scared of the Japanese.

Marcello: In other words, they were trying to impress the Japanese.

Kent: Yes. And that's what I think caused them . . . now I'll tell what they were. Them Formosans were a bunch of queers.

Marcello: The Formosan guards were?

Kent: I've seen guys, you know, let a guard play with him and, hell, he was just alright.

Marcello: Did you ever see much of this sort of thing among the American prisoners? Did you ever see very much evidence of homosexuals or anything of that nature?

Kent: No. I don't think any of them was able. (Chuckle)

Marcello: Everybody was simply thinking about food, I gather.

Kent: I think so. They was thinking about everything else but that.

Marcello: What sort of menus did you dream up? I know everybody dreamed up menus.

Kent: Oh, I don't know. I just kept telling myself that I was coming back to this country. They wasn't going to kill me. And then I was going to have everything. I would never see anyone go hungry again. Every day you would just keep telling yourself over and over the same thing and keep thinking that the war was going to be over every day. And we actually thought that, and the ones that let their morale go down so low wouldn't last long.

Marcello: I'm sure the ones that gave up are still over there yet.

Kent: They are. Yes, they're still over there.

Marcello: What do you think kept you going?

Kent: Just determination that I was coming back. That's all. That's all it could be. Sometimes right now I'm still thinking I'm dreaming.

Marcello: Did you ever have very much spare time at Cabanatuan?

Kent: No, not too much spare time.

Marcello: I was wondering because awhile ago you mentioned some entertainment and so on.

Kent: Well, that would be one night every so many days that they would let you put on a show that way.

Marcello: Yes.

Kent: There is a lot of talented people where you get a group like that. There is always talent in it, and so they would put on a show. Of course, everybody'd gather around, and they'd have a good time, and the Japs never did come in the camp to interfere with it.

Marcello: I would assume that after the first couple of months the death rate kind of dropped off. In other words, after the first couple of months only the strong were left.

Kent: Well, there for awhile there were over 100, between 140 and 150, a day dying. The American doctors that was in there and the corpsmen and stuff like that kept trying to check for dysentery. Finally they got it down to less than 100 a day, and then it would keep dropping down. It would keep dropping gradually, and I think when I left there there wasn't but one or two, maybe, dying there a day, and there was still a lot of people there when I left.



Marcello: I gather that one of the better liked persons in the camp was a doctor by the name of Colonel Schwartz. Did you ever remember him or anything about him?

Kent: Schwartz?

Marcello: He was the medical officer. In fact, I think he was the ranking medical officer at Cabanatuan.

Kent: Well, now, I don't remember. It seems like I remember the name, but I don't remember the man.

Marcello: One of the things that stands out in my mind is that even though prisoners were so desperate for food, some of them would actually trade food for cigarettes.

Kent: Yes, they would. They would. That was one thing that I never did do because I figured that the thing that I could put in my stomach was going to get me back home. But they did actually do that.

Marcello: Well, you mentioned that you were at Cabanatuan for about two years.

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: And during a great deal of that time you were actually laid up because of the burns you had received when those Japanese guards had thrown you in that fifty-gallon drum with the boiling soup or whatever was in it.

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: Where did you go from Cabanatuan I?

Kent: Well, now all of this is in Camp II, see.

Marcello: Yes.

Kent: This all happened at the same time.

Marcello: Right.

Kent: After we was there about two years, they pulled a group of us out and sent us to Japan.

Marcello: Oh, I see. In other words you were at Cabanatuan I for awhile, and then you moved on to Cabanatuan II during this two-year period.

Kent: Yes. They closed that Cabanatuan I, and they put the whole works in Cabanatuan II.

Marcello: Were conditions any better at Cabanatuan II than they had been at Cabanatuan I?

Kent: Well, no, not any better. It was just a bigger place.

Marcello: How about your barracks and things of that nature?

Kent: Same thing. Same thing.

Marcello: I gather then that when you moved from Cabanatuan I over to Cabanatuan II, you had the same guards, the same camp commandant. Everything was the same practically. They just closed down that one base.

Kent: Yes. Only there was just a lot more of them.

Marcello: I see.

Kent: Yes. There was several thousand people in Camp II.

Marcello: What did you think when you heard the news that you were going to go to Japan?

Kent: Again, I was scared because at that time we knew from the scuttlebutt and stuff that we had got that the Americans was getting pretty close, and so, sure enough, we went back through Bilibid Prison.

Marcello: You went from Cabanatuan straight to Bilibid? Or did you work at Nichols Field first?

Kent: No.

Marcello: I know a lot of people that were at Cabanatuan worked at Nichols Field.

Kent: Yes, some of them did.

Marcello: But you went straight to Bilibid Prison?

Kent: Yes. We didn't stop at Nichols Field. We went straight to Bilibid Prison.

Marcello: How did you get from Cabanatuan to Bilibid Prison?

Kent: It seems to me like they took us in trucks.

Marcello: I think this is the case. I believe most of the prisoners who made that trip from Cabanatuan to Bilibid did travel by truck, and I gather nothing really eventful happened on that trip to Bilibid Prison.

Kent: No. The guards were pretty nice going back down. But we went back to the Bilibid Prison, and then the next morning--we only spent one night there--the next morning they put us on this Japanese ship.

Marcello: Well, let's back up just a minute here. You mentioned awhile ago that you feared going to Japan because you

had heard scuttlebutt and you had heard rumors, and perhaps you may have even seen evidence of the fact that the war was turning?

Kent: Well, no. We hadn't seen any evidence. In fact, just rumors was all we was getting. Of course, we was eating those rumors up.

Marcello: You really didn't receive any news from the outside then.

Kent: No, not really news, just . . .

Marcello: Not the news you could believe.

Kent: There would be a working detail go out and, of course, some of them would come back and say, "Some Filipino slipped around and took us so and so," and that's the type rumors, see.

Marcello: Yes.

Kent: Never anything that you could actually believe, but we did believe it. We wanted to believe and we did, and I think that helped the morale of people by it being that way.

Marcello: But actually at the time you left Bilibid, you had no idea how the war was going.

Kent: No.

Marcello: So far as you were concerned the Japanese were still winning.

Kent: They were still winning as far as we knew.

Marcello: Even when you got to Bilibid Prison, did you see any evidence or did you observe any evidence that the war had changed?

Kent: No.

Marcello: How about when you got to the docks to make the trip back to Japan?

Kent: Well, then we got out on ship . . .

Marcello: . . . before you even get out on the ship, were you there when the first American air strikes had taken place and all that Japanese shipping had been sunk in Manila Bay?

Kent: Yes, there was a lot of ships out there, but the Americans didn't sink them. I went over in Japan. I was over in Japan about a year before the war was over.

Marcello: Yes, but even before you left, you didn't see any Japanese ships sunk in the harbor at Manila?

Kent: No.

Marcello: In other words, the harbor was clear when you left Manila?

Kent: Except the Americans' ships that was sunk out there.

Marcello: Okay, but you didn't see any Japanese ships.

Kent: No.

Marcello: That must have come later on then. Okay, so you boarded this ship.

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: What were conditions like aboard this ship?

Kent: Well, these Japanese sailors, we could tell that they was nervous, and we knew that there was submarines out there somewhere. We started out of the bay, and it seems to me like they come back into Manila Bay. And then we sat in there--seems to me like it was about a half of a day or they might have stayed there overnight--and then we left again the next morning. Then we went to Formosa.

Marcello: What were conditions like aboard that ship?

Kent: Well, they kept us down in the hold except at certain times they would run us all out on deck. I don't know if they wanted the American submarines to see that there was prisoners of war on it or what, but I do know that the Japanese sailors were pretty shaky.

Marcello: Were you crowded down in this hold?

Kent: Oh, yes. It was hot down in there, too!

Marcello: Did anybody die?

Kent: No. No, there wasn't a person who died.

Marcello: What sort of provisions did the Japanese give to the troops?

Kent: Well, we didn't do anything going over, but the only thing on the way over was that they had got a bunch of

Navy uniforms . . . but before they put those on us, let me tell you that we went in Formosa; and you know how the ships go up in this channel.

Marcello: Yes.

Kent: Well, some American submarines held us in there for about three days before they'd let this Jap ship out, and that's another reason why when we come out they run us all up on deck. There was no firing or anything, and so that's the reason that, I think, that the American submarines let us by because they knew that there was prisoners-of-war on it. And anyway, we went on to Tokyo, and before we got over there they put us all in Navy uniforms.

Marcello: About how long did this trip take altogether?

Kent: Oh, gosh. I don't know how long it took us.

Marcello: Was it a matter of weeks?

Kent: Well, it was a week or two or three. I just don't know.

Marcello: But you were on that ship a fairly long time.

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: More than the normal amount of time that it would take to go from the Philippines to Japan.

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: I gather that the ship was following the coast most of the way in order to avoid submarines.

Kent: Yes. We was looking any minute to get blowed out of the water. I know that because we felt it, and we could see the Japs. Anyway, they put those Navy uniforms on us, and when we got to Tokyo, and they paraded us up and down the streets in Tokyo. And they told their people they had just captured some bunch of American ships, and I don't know how many islands and all of that. They had their people built up pretty good.

Marcello: Now at this time Tokyo, I gather, had not yet really been hit by the American bombers?

Kent: They hadn't been hit. So anyway, after we paraded and all of that, well, they put us on a train and took us up north to a copper mine.

Marcello: What was the train trip like? Was this a pretty nice train?

Kent: Yes, it was a pretty nice train.

Marcello: Were you on coaches?

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: Did they allow you to look out the windows and observe the countryside?

Kent: Well, no, but they didn't say anything to us about it. The only thing they didn't like was for us to look down on the Japanese. They still didn't like that. I forget



the name of the town, but it was a copper mine north of Tokyo. They would put us down in this mine. We didn't have on anything but little old G-strings. And hot, boy, we come out of there sweaty. Well, you was just solid sweat and dirt from the time you went down!

Marcello: What did this camp look like?

Kent: This particular camp wasn't but two barracks--two or three barracks. It wasn't what you would call bamboo. I don't know what kind of wood you would call it, but we still slept on the floor.

Marcello: Were bedbugs or lice ever a problem?

Kent: Oh, yes! Sure was, but we had the biggest problem on this lice and stuff like that at Mizushima, on a dam and a machine shop. It was a dam project, you know. They was putting a dam across that river.

Marcello: Was this after you were at the copper mine?

Kent: Yes, and at this copper mine, we worked between 100 and 200 feet down. We was lucky. There wasn't an American that died up there that I know of, and there wasn't any that got caved in, but there was a lot of Chinese prisoners down there that . . . I guess they put those in the most dangerous places.

Marcello: Were these Chinese or Koreans?

Kent: They was Chinese.

Marcello: Chinese.

Kent: Yes. They had a lot of Chinese prisoners over there. At this copper mine they had a hospital up there, and they operated on five of us. They took our appendix out.

Marcello: You got appendicitis at the copper mine?

Kent: I didn't get it, but they took them out anyway.

Marcello: They took out your appendix . . .

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: . . . and you didn't have appendicitis?

Kent: Yes. They done five of us that way.

Marcello: Why did they do that?

Kent: Well, they was young doctors experimenting.

Marcello: What was the operation like?

Kent: (Chuckle) It was rough.

Marcello: Can you describe it?

Kent: . . . because they didn't have any anaesthetics, and there was a whole bunch of little old Japanese nurses around you to hold you. It didn't bother me until they cut down so deep . . . well, they cut all the way in, I guess. You could feel it, you know, and it hurt! But I didn't pass out until they caught something, and it felt like it was pulling from up in here (Gesture). I went out like a light, and when I woke up, well, there

was a whole bunch of little old Jap nurses standing around playing with my thing and trying to get it hard. And so, heck, there I was about dead, and that's when I went down so fast. I mean I went down . . . I guess that's the lowest point that I ever was.

Marcello: In what ways did you suffer?

Kent: Well, heck, I was just weak.

Marcello: From this operation and lack of food?

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: I would assume your diet did not increase very much after your move to Japan.

Kent: It didn't increase any. No, that operation made me so weak . . . of course, I was already weak, and it made me that much weaker, and before I got completely over it, well, they'd put us on another march to bring us down to this Mizushima camp. That incision busted open and there was a lot of stuff run out of it, and after we got down to this other camp, well, they gave me some days off until that healed up again.

Marcello: Well, this must have been a pretty rough march for you from this copper mine down to this other camp.

Kent: Well, it wasn't too rough, but that side hadn't even healed up. And, of course, walking just bursted it open again.

Marcello: What happened after you got down to this camp where you were working on this dam?

Kent: Well, they got us down there, and there was some of us working in the machine shop and we was welding. They was making us weld these cement mixer teeth that had been broken off. They was making us arc-weld those back on and filing them down, smoothing them up. We had a bunch of . . . well, we had 100 American soldiers. We had 100 Limey soldiers, British soldiers, and we had 100 officers. We had three different buildings. The British soldiers were teaching the Japanese how to speak English and telling them what sons-of-bitches and slant-eyed bastards and all that meant, you know. Well, it was on the tenth day, and we were supposed to have a day off, so they were making us carry wood out of the mountains with those racks on our backs.

Marcello: Yes.

Kent: And so they told me to "speedo," and so I told them, "You go to hell, you slant-eyed son-of-a-bitch!" Well, they knew what it meant, see. So they worked my back over, and they knocked my back out of place. They clipped the disc up in my back, and I'm drawing a pension on it now.

Marcello: I gather that you didn't have very much love for the British.

Kent: I still don't have it. Well, they would steal rice and stuff which belonged to all the prisoners, and then they'd tell the Japs the Americans done it. Well, we'd have to stand at attention all night long, and they'd come through beating and knocking around on us, trying to get the ones to admit it, and we come to find out, it would be the British soldiers who were the ones that did it.

Marcello: I gather they weren't too clean either.

Kent: Well, I don't know about that because the only time, the closest time . . . well, we'd just gone as far as we could, and we went over and challenged them. Our building went over and challenged theirs.

Marcello: And what happened?

Kent: They wouldn't come out, but the Japanese got wise and they went through their barracks like they did ours. The old boy that got the rice admitted it, and they almost killed him.

Marcello: Now, when you were at this dam site, were you still being supervised by Japanese soldiers, or were these Japanese civilians?

Kent: Well, it was the Japanese soldier that had fought in China. Now "Big Glass Eye" and "Little Glass Eye" was the ones that knocked my back out of place.

Marcello: Do you want to talk a little bit about those two characters?

Kent: Well, they got electrocuted after the war was over. Yes, they was rough. They worked together, see. They'd come by and tell just what they were going to do to your country, and that they was coming back over here and get them American girls--just agitated you, see! I couldn't stand one of them, and I guess I got worked over more, and it was my own fault for not keeping my mouth shut, but I don't know. They asked us to turn the ones in after we got back, and so there was several of us that turned in "Big Glass Eye." The reason we called them "Big Glass Eye" and "Little Glass Eye" was because one was a great big Jap and the other one was real small, and I believe they both had the right eye knocked out. They got it in the China war, you know, fighting the Chinese. I guess that was the reason that they was so rough on these Chinese over there because most of them had fought against the Chinese, and all of them that was guards then had been wounded some way or the other and wasn't able to be in the service.

Marcello: I gather that the Chinese even had it rougher than the Americans then.

Kent: They did. They were used to it, see. The Americans can take a lot more than people think they can take--the human can--but those poor Chinese, that's all they've ever known all their lives. It don't bother them. If they kill them, it's okay. They don't seem to worry about it.

Marcello: When did you see your first evidence that the tide of the war had changed to the Americans' favor?

Kent: Well, see, when we were out on working details, we'd try to pick up a Japanese paper.

Marcello: This was down at the dam site?

Kent: This was at this machine shop.

Marcello: Which was where the dam was being built around there.

Kent: Yes. I had a dictionary, a Japanese dictionary. I brought back that book with me, but it's got lost somewhere. I let a school here in Dallas have that, and they kept it. Well, it was at several of the different schools' carnivals, you know, when they'd put it on display. I had some of these little old pipes, some of their old horsehair tobacco. Well, I just let them have all of that, but I don't know where it's at now. But you can take one of those Japanese dictionaries and read one of their newspapers. They'd tell the people in their newspapers that they took a

certain and certain island and a bunch of propaganda, you know. And we got just to figuring that "Well, it's right the opposite." And it was. It was right the opposite from what they was telling the people. It's just hard to remember all the things.

Marcello: Did you ever witness any bombing raids?

Kent: Oh, yes. Not close, but I was forty miles from where they dropped the atomic bomb.

Marcello: Now were you still at this machine shop yet?

Kent: Yes, the same place. That's before I was out when we was released.

Marcello: Well, I would assume that hearing or seeing those American bombers did wonders for your morale.

Kent: It did. We knew it wouldn't be long then, but we counted over 100 B-29's, and I mean the nose of them would be lit up just like an angel. All of the sudden we wouldn't know where they were hitting, but we could hear them, and at night, boy, they'd have air raid warnings. You could hear them buggers up there droning, and we knew they wasn't going to hit them camps if they could keep from it.

Marcello: Did the Japanese ever threaten to kill you if the Americans did invade the islands?

Kent: No.



Marcello: They never made any threats of that nature?

Kent: Not to me. They might have to some of the guys, but they didn't to me in particular.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you did remember the day that the atomic bomb was dropped.

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: Was this the one that was dropped on Hiroshima?

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: I gather you didn't know what it was. What was the feeling? What was the sensation? Describe this incident.

Kent: Well, now that's the only time that the Japs really pinned us down. Well; no, it wasn't now. I'll take that back. When they really pinned us down is when the B-29's first come over.

Marcello: What did they do to you?

Kent: And you couldn't see anything but the vapor.

Marcello: In other words, they made you all get inside and wouldn't allow you to watch these B-29's?

Kent: Well, they'd call different ones of us up and want to know what the secret weapon was that the Americans had, and they'd slap you around, and some of them went through the water treatment.

Marcello: What was the water treatment?

Kent: Well, they'd just make you keep drinking water, drinking it and drinking it, until you just couldn't hold any more, but still you had to drink it. We didn't know what it was either. We thought they was rockets because when they would make a turn, well, it looked like they was diving, and that's what we thought they were--some type of rocket. And, so anyway, every time they'd get lower and lower and lower, and more of them would come over. The Japs started getting really shook up, and that's when they started getting pretty rough. They'd take us out on work details, and they was very careful, and they kept up with us a lot closer than what they had been.

Marcello: Did they have to protect you from civilians?

Kent: No, the civilians didn't bother us. In fact, some of the older Japanese was better to us than some of our own people. They'd slip us rice balls. In fact, there was an old Japanese woman that used to come in the machine shop. She'd come in every day, and she'd have two rice balls here in her breast. But they caught her and they beheaded her. Their own people!

Marcello: Did you witness this?

Kent: No.

Marcello: But you heard about it.

Kent: That's what they told us that they done to her. I do know she was giving me and another boy one of the rice balls when they caught her, and that's what they said happened to her. We never did see the old woman any more.

Marcello: Was stealing much of a problem among the prisoners?

Kent: No. You just didn't have anything to steal. In going down to working spots, well, if we passed a garden or anything, we was going to get something out of it. That's about the only thing. We used to get this dough off of their graveyards and that they put up over their doors. I forget now what they called it, but it's to keep the spirits away. And all it is, is just rice, flour, and water. We used to get that and dig holes in the ground and bake it to where we could and eat it, and if we could get it off of tombstones, that's where we'd get it, too.

Marcello: Well, let's go back and talk a little bit more about the day the atomic bomb was dropped. Describe what that was like. Obviously, you didn't know it was an atomic bomb.

Kent: No. We didn't know. When they dropped it, we were about forty miles away from there. The whole thing shook just like you'd dropped 1,000 pounds of bombs

right out here close to you! And the Japanese got real excited, and they said the Americans had a secret weapon, something. I don't know now just what they did say, but they said the Americans had a secret weapon, that they was probably going to lose the war or something. I don't know just how they put it now. But anyway, after they had dropped this, well, we got up the next morning, and there wasn't any guards around the base at all.

Marcello: They just left?

Kent: They left that night. There wasn't no one there but just the old commanding officer.

Marcello: And what happened then?

Kent: Well, he come out and told us that the war was over and that he was going to take us down to this place and turn us over to American people, and he said there would be food coming into the camp. And sure enough, that day carrier planes dropped parachutes of food in there.

Marcello: Was this the food that came down in the forty-gallon oil drums?

Kent: No. They didn't come down. Ours was in sea bags.

Marcello: I see.

Kent: Now I heard that they dropped some oil drums, and some of the prisoners got hurt.

Marcello: Right. They did.

Kent: Yes, I heard that. That was around Tokyo, though.

Marcello: Yours were dropped in sea bags?

Kent: Yes.

Marcello: The planes came in low and just dropped this down out of sea bags.

Kent: Well, see, we was sitting down in between mountains, and this river come down through them. Well, these planes would circle the tops of the mountains to locate the camp, and the first thing you know, it was just like dive-bombing. The leader would peel off, and they put them right in this camp. There was only one that missed, and it went right through the top of a Japanese hut. Now I think, if I'm not mistaken, we give those people that sea bag because they had dropped so many in there. We had plenty of food and cigarettes, and there wasn't no one there to tell us what we could do with it.

Marcello: What were your reactions when you heard that the war was over?

Kent: Oh, I don't know. We were so happy that we didn't know hardly how to react. We couldn't believe it; and yet we did believe it. I don't think any of us slept that night because the next day . . . well, I know we didn't.

We stayed up and ate, drank coffee and milk and stuff all that night.

Marcello: Did anybody get sick eating all this rich food?

Kent: Yes, they did. That's the reason, when we got aboard the hospital ship, well, they put us on a strict soft diet, just soft-boiled eggs. They'd let us eat all of them we wanted. We couldn't have any hard bread. They'd let us eat soft bread.

Marcello: At the time that you were released, did you have any bitterness against the Japanese?

Kent: I was so glad to get away from there . . . well, they told us, though, if we hurt any of them we'd be court-martialed, and I wasn't about to get court-martialed after going that far.

Marcello: Today as you look back, do you have any resentment against the Japanese?

Kent: No, I guess I don't because actually they had a job to do the same as we, and if we had been in their place, we'd have probably been worse although the Americans was a lot better to their prisoners than they were to us.

Marcello: As you look back on it, what do you think was the key to your getting through this ordeal? How do you explain the fact that you survived?

Kent: How do I explain it?

Marcello: Yes. What do you see as being the key factor?

Kent: Well, it was, I think, just determination that I was coming back home to see my people--that I wasn't going to let them slant-eyed bastards kill me--and I think that was the main thing that brought me through it. I was supposed to have been killed three or four different times over there, and I always pulled through it, and I think that's what it is. If anybody's just determined that they're going to do something, they're going to do it.

Marcello: What permanent injuries do you have as a result of your ordeal?

Kent: Well, just my leg . . .

Marcello: Your burns on the leg.

Kent: . . . just my leg and back and where I was operated on. Of course, that doesn't bother me anymore now. The American doctor says they did a good job on it, so I guess that's the only thing that matters. My back still gives me trouble, and so does my leg during the winter, but other than that, well . . . I'm fifty-four years old. I made it this far; I can make it a little longer, I guess.