

National Museum of the Pacific War
Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

General Vicente Blaz
United States Marine Corps
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Gen. Vicente Blaz
United States Marine Corps

Mr. Mannering: Good afternoon, this is Jerry Mannering. Today is the seventeenth of September, 2006. I am interviewing retired Brigadier General Vicente Blaz. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the Fredericksburg High School facility. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Gen. Blaz, we thank you for joining us this afternoon and taking time to answer a few questions.

Gen. Blaz: Thank you, Jerry, I'm flattered to be here.

Mr. Mannering: Thank you very much. Thank you for your service. Where and when were you born?

Gen. Blaz: I was born in a little island in the Pacific that a lot of people don't even know it exists even to this day. It's called Guam. It's a tiny little island. If you go west from Hawaii, you'll hit Midway and then Wake and then Guam and the Philippines. That's the route of the old China clipper in the old days. It is part of that chain of islands that leads you to the Asian mainland. From a strategic standpoint, it's attractive to people. To big wheels supplying all these big things for us. We just love our island. We like it because that's our home. Other people sometimes like it because they can station troops there. The Japanese occupied it during World War II exactly for that reason, so they could put troops there and defend themselves against the Americans.

Mr. Mannering: Who were your parents?

Gen. Blaz: My father's name is also Vicente Blaz and my mother's name is Rita Garrido. They also were born on Guam. My parents, my grandparents, everyone of the people in my family was born on Guam. In the days before World War II, one doesn't have very many expectations of

going any place because it was a poor island. So, you just expect to grow old and live there and enjoy. Go to the beach because that's all you got. Then get old and die and be buried there honorably. But the war changed everything because it opened up avenues we never thought existed. I was on that avenue that got me here right after the war.

Mr. Mannering: Just my curiosity, do get a chance to return to Guam yourself?

Gen. Blaz: Yes, I joined the Marines and made a career and then after I got out after thirty years of service, I returned to Guam.

Mr. Mannering: Oh, you did?

Gen. Blaz: I taught at the University of Guam. Then a couple of years later, I was teaching government. We ran a mock political campaign. The mock campaign was enjoyable and the guys really (?)elected. Then next year, there was a real campaign for the U.S. Congress. My students said, "You know, we ought to run this thing again." I said, "Yes, but you need a candidate." They said, "You're the candidate." We ran the thing and I'll be darn if I didn't win. That's how I got to the Congress.

Mr. Mannering: If I read this correctly, you served eight years in the Congress?

Gen. Blaz: Yes, I did. I came in the same class as Tom De Lay. I was president of the incoming Republicans so I know this guy. Dick Arme, I know Lamar Smith, and Phil Graham, and people like that. Of course, I know the president, George Bush, who was president when I was there. I got to know him fairly well just by virtue of my position.

Mr. Mannering: You've had a remarkable career.

Gen. Blaz: To be honest with you, Jerry, I'm really quite surprised at how things worked out. You probably will not see again another fellow who was a general officer and also a member of the United States Congress. I'm a rare breed of cat. I didn't sit down and design that. I didn't say this is what I'm going to do. I just took it a step at a time and I think, if this is for rhetorical purposes, I think the significance of what I can say is that I really didn't expect to be anywhere. But I was so impressed by the United States Marines that landed on Guam and liberated me, that I made up my mind way back there that I was going to be one of these guys. I just made up my mind. I mentioned this morning or yesterday morning that one of the most difficult things I ever did in my life was after liberation. We're not talking about the occupation and the guy says, "Oh." I say it's an entirely different story. After the liberation, the fighting was still going on and my father volunteered to help the Marines do something in the rear.

Our assignment was burying the killed in action. Although I was only fourteen, fifteen years old, burying a person, two persons, three persons who technically were your liberators, was an overwhelming emotional experience. Because you're looking at the guys. He died so I could live.

One of the things I try to do in this particular symposium is I'm trying to tell people that you ought to be grateful at being free because a lot of people are dying to keep you free. I can jump ahead and tell you that I told them this morning. I said, "You know, the thing you have to remember is when it's like the war in Iraq right now, at least we are fighting it over there." I cited a World War I song writer by the name of George M. Cohan. George M. Cohan wrote a piece that was just strictly designed, strictly designed to pep up the troops. The piece became one of the most popular pieces in World War I and it's called *Over There*. I don't think George M. Cohan intended for it to have a message at the end. But the fourteen words at the end is hauntingly prophetic. They are: "We'll be over; we're coming over. And we won't come back until it's over over there." This is really what we've done. In the Spanish-American War we fought it over there. Same thing for the First World War, Second World War, Korea. Every war.

Mr. Mannering: You mentioned the Spanish-American War, that's how we got Guam.

Gen. Blaz: That's right. This is where I came in. That's when we acquired Guam. I tell this from the position of the islander's people like me from the out post where they fly the American flag. From our position, the war is not over there. It's over here. I'm trying to tell people that you wouldn't want your war over here. I use the example that there is a big difference, huge difference between fighting or getting in a foxhole knowing mommie and daddy are back in Fredericksburg safe and sound and being fed, as contrasted to being in the foxhole with mommie and daddy and your siblings. Which is what I was in. I'm trying to make the point because I figure that I'm one of the guys that can make this point because there are very few. My being here was at the invitation of Helen McDonald. I was supposed to give a veteran's perspective. The problem is I was not a veteran at that time. I was not in the service. So, I twisted it around and I just said I think you ought to know every soldier or sailor or Marine was in a difficult situation in this whole idea of preserving freedom. He probably has a desire to return someday to that scene of battle. This is classic. It's been going on like this forever. To return to the scene of battle and say, "I wonder what happened to so-and-so?" Well, you don't have to return, I'm here. This is what happens. This is what happens. Defense exhibit A of why we fight wars of liberation and I feel an obligation. I've been a very lucky guy. I think I'm lucky because I have a profound appreciative streak in me. I started off with the idea that I'm beholden to a lot of people. People sacrificed to get me free. I don't

pay attention to all the strategies and you're getting too personal; we got that because we wanted to build an airfield. It doesn't make any difference to me. Just like they say, "You got on the stage because the primary ballerina was sick." It doesn't make any difference to me because I've positioned myself to be the understudy just in case. I'm the number two quarterback to put it in today's jargon. So, it matters to me not whether America took Guam back because they wanted a base for the B-29s. I'm one of those by-products of that war. I'm thankful to be a by-product of that war. I think it has driven me. Because of all this, I assumed this idea in my mind and in my heart that I'm indebted to a lot of people. I have a big principal on that debt. I'm now at the time in my life where I'm looking back and I find out that I don't have enough years left to pay that debt. So, I changed it around a little bit that I do have enough years to keep up with the interest payment. That's what I'm doing. Coming here is an interest payment on a debt. I feel very strongly about that. When people ask me to share something with them, I'm not doing them a favor. They're doing me a favor to pay a debt. That's how I feel. I think it's an attitude like this perhaps that might have gotten me to places because people might say, "Let's try this guy." I'm always a second fiddle with any band. Somehow I end up with the first fiddle. I don't even have to break the other guy's fiddle. This is old fashioned as the devil. You've probably never heard anybody talk like this. But the truth is, I feel it is my duty to be interviewed here. I did not hesitate when the guy said they wanted me. I didn't say, "Well, well, well." There's no well. You guys are asking me to share something. It's my job to share something. I don't want to sound Biblical here but I've made the comparison, I said, "I wonder what would have happened if Matthew, Luke, and John did not sit down and write. Our civilization would probably be completely just going this way. But at least we had a document upon which we could rally. You could make an interpretation here in terms, but the fact is, they wrote something that said, "Look, these are the principles." These are the things that are so valued to them as they were writing it and we followed. But anyway, I'm getting away from the subject.

Mr. Mannering: That's all right.

Gen. Blaz: I came here from Guam to the United States of America. Went to the University of Notre Dame on an academic scholarship. It was really an indigent scholarship. I didn't have any money. Notre Dame, I think, was just trying to reach out and get an occasional refugee here and a refugee there. If you want to characterize my scholarship, it's really a refugee scholarship. I don't want to have people think I was a hot tamale. My English was very halting when I came to the United States. My transcripts were unacceptable to Notre Dame because they were on a piece of paper that was mimeographed. This is to certify that Ben Blaz graduated from

this school. It has nothing else. It's not on anyone's list. We just made this in a Quonset hut. Notre Dame said, "This is terrible." They took me anyway on probation. I'm probably the only guy you'll ever meet who entered a university, and Notre Dame is a fine university, academically it's always in the top twenty every year, every year, every year, and it has been rated higher in its athletic department for a number of years now.

Mr. Mannering: Had a tough day yesterday.

Gen Blaz: I know. I stayed there and I was put on probation right on the spot. They'll accept me on probation. I stayed on probation until the day before I graduated.

Mr. Mannering: You made it.

Gen Blaz: Because I could not get off it unless I actually have a passing grade because I wasn't supposed to be there in the first place. So, when people come and tell me this and that, I have very little tolerance for people who say, "I can't do it." It's a question of wanting to do it. When I was at Notre Dame, I was moved by the fact that the Korean War had been declared. Moved in the sense that I had this compulsion to want to join and go as a payback tour for me. I joined the Marine Corps Reserve, actually, as an enlisted man. Then just kind of like jokingly, I said to the Naval ROTC instructor, who was a Marine major, I said, "I'd like to join the Marines." He said, "No problem." I said, "But I want to be an officer." He said, "No problem." He asked if I was going to graduate and get a degree and I said, "Yes." I said, "Okay." So, I signed a piece of paper. Then I said to him, "I think I should tell you something. I'm from Guam." He looked at me and he said, "I'm from Trenton, New Jersey so let's not waste any more time." I told him I was from Guam because the Navy had a regulation, a policy at that time, still effective, that if you are a Chamorro, a native of Guam, you may only be permitted to join the United States Navy. When you join the United States Navy, you're only permitted to be a servant, which is nicely described as a steward. But as you have probably noticed, Jerry, there's something in me that tells me that I don't think the good Lord brought me to this world specifically to be somebody's steward. I had a bigger obligation. My obligation is to resist that temptation. So, I resisted it and I resisted it vigorously. I was doing it when I wasn't even a citizen. Knowing full well I couldn't get commissioned because I wasn't even a citizen. But I wanted the satisfaction of knowing that in a school down at Quantico with all the states being represented across the board, that I could compete with them and pass the test. Whether I was commissioned or not was almost immaterial. I wanted to know that if I had had the technicality of citizenship, I would have made it. Well, my guardian angel worked on it and a few months before I graduated, the United States extended

collective citizenship to the citizens of Guam. So, I was commissioned.

Mr. Mannering: I didn't know that because I thought Guamanians were citizens. I didn't know. I thought Guamanians were citizens.

Gen. Blaz: No, no, not at all. They had a category called "nationals" but our political status was that of a possession. When you have something that you say you possess, that has a lot of meaning. I jokingly say that when you are possessed, you need a little bit of extra assistance to get it out. We resented being possessed. I resented being possessed. I resented being told, "You're from a possession." There's just something about the word. One would think that educated people can come up with a little bit more sophisticated and less abusive term. It's just filled with civil rights violations.

Mr. Mannering: I thought it was a trust territory. Am I wrong?

Gen. Blaz: No, no. A trust territory was around us. Now, if you want to, I can go into that because I think it probably is more educational.

Mr. Mannering: It's up to you. I don't know your time for today.

Gen. Blaz: What you referred to as a trust territory is a group of islands that actually were under the League of Nations. It stems back to World War I. During World War I, the Spanish had islands in the Pacific. The Germans had islands in the Pacific and the Americans had a few here and there. Japan, in the First World War, sided with the United States. After the war, they decided that, hey listen, we should probably give Japan something for its role. So Japan said, "I'll just kind of assume these islands and take care of them until you decide." The islands are called Saipan, Tinian, Peleliu.

Mr. Mannering: All the ones we fought for.

Gen. Blaz: Yes, but not only did they take over them, they actually put a curtain over them and nobody knew what they were doing. So, the United States being a trusting soul sitting on Guam, said, "Oh, don't worry about them." They were then called mandated islands. But then after the war when Japan was on the losing side, the United Nations decided that it would assume those islands and they now call them the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Essentially, they were the former mandated islands. Guam sits in the middle of that now as an unincorporated territory of the United States. No longer a possession. Unincorporated territory is a term that they use for territorial acquisitions where there is no intention of that territory being a state of the Union like the Oregon Territory, the Louisiana Territory. In the old days, as America expanded west and territories come

into play, it was always with the intention that when they qualified, however they were going to qualify, they would be incorporated. The whole idea of it was the circle of the wagons idea that the United States was going to go and circle its wagons. That's the United States. Anything else is outside of that. They really had a perfect situation. On the south they had the Rio Grande. On the east they had the Atlantic. On the west they had the Pacific. Canada was very friendly at the time. But nothing else intruded. Are you a history teacher, sir? What do you teach?

Mr. Mannering: I'm an assistant professor of history here for the college and I teach Social Studies.

Gen. Blaz: Okay, then you understand fully.

Mr. Mannering: Yes.

Gen. Blaz: I'm probably missing a few points here and there. But you understand fully. The way I describe it in my language is that Americans circled the wagons. They're saying, "If you're going to fight us, you're going to have to break the circle." Everything that counts is right within that circle. That's why they're called United States. The founding fathers were absolutely brilliant in designing it as they were brilliant in designing the House and the Senate. When you stop to think of it, July with their tunics made of wool and no fans, no air conditioners.

Mr. Mannering: Windows closed.

Gen. Blaz: Yes. It's an incredible story.

Mr. Mannering: I think that's why they did it in ninety days.

Gen. Blaz: No, they did it in ninety days because they had one incredible person that ever lived and his name is George Washington.

Mr. Mannering: Absolutely.

Gen. Blaz: Anyway, why don't you ask me a question so I won't keep wandering.

Mr. Mannering: You're doing fine. We'd like for you to go ahead and tell your story so it doesn't sound like we're scripting you. So, you're doing great. You've jumped to Notre Dame and Marine Corps. Would you discuss some of the situations on the island of Guam before it was liberated? Do you have any recollections?

Gen. Blaz: I do. I have recollection.

Mr. Mannering: I'd like to touch that a little bit if you have time. I know you've got some restraints about your service in Korea.

Gen. Blaz: I have recollection and I'm involved in not only recollection but preservation. The reason I submitted to this quite frankly is that this is a service we are providing for those who follow us so they'll know, as best as they can, from what some people call eyeball witness to history. You get the most lettered person who can write you a brilliant dissertation and gets himself two Ph.D.s, as long as he's basing his research on the observations of others, it lacks the genuine quality of hearing it from the horse themselves. In this instance, you see, I'm a horse. I believe in what you're doing. I believe that we have an obligation to research, to protect, preserve, and share the great history of America. One of the things that I might have mentioned to you is that I did what I did because I happened to be an American citizen. I commanded a regiment of the United States Marines. Can you imagine me commanding a regiment of German Marines or British Marines?

Mr. Mannering: No.

Gen. Blaz: No. Me, a guy with sepia color standing in front of five thousand people and I'm their CO.

Mr. Mannering: Must have been quite a feeling of accomplishment.

Gen. Blaz: It is, particularly because that same regiment, the Ninth Regiment of Marines, elements of that regiment, the patrol of that regiment, was the one that liberated me, personally, as they captured me in the bushes thinking I was a Jap. I spent a couple of days in the stockade until I was identified by some people passing by saying, "Hey, what are you doing there, Ben?"

Mr. Mannering: Were you in a stockade with Japanese prisoners?

Gen. Blaz: Yes. Actually, they had Japanese prisoners of war and they had a holding stockade. All I had on was clothing that had a lot of Japanese markings on it because we were required to wear Japanese markings. It was a concentration camp. The mentality of America was just go and release him from the concentration camp. So, if you find someone outside the camp, which was me because I didn't like the camp, so I kind of went for a walk and I walked too far. I walked right into these guys. It was an exciting period but it was a frightening period that I had. I had eluded all sorts of things during the war. I wanted so badly to be free and ended up in a stockade. I said to myself, "This is not working out too well." But it

was only for a couple of days.

Mr. Mannering: What was it like when the Japanese invaded?

Gen. Blaz: Let me try to explain in as few words because something like that could be the subject of a two-inch book. But let me just say that what they did was they came to the island and they shut it off. You're shut off from the rest of the world. Imagine you're going to Devil's Island if you're Papillon. You're on Devil's Island and you're there by yourself like, I think, the prisoner called Papillon. The difference is that you're locked in on an island but you're locked in with your mother and father, sister, brother.

Mr. Mannering: They all survived.

Gen. Blaz: We were all together. Maslow's basic needs are food, clothing, shelter which is fine. But what sometimes people don't talk about is this pervasive sense of personal insecurity. I mean, I can be hungry and can last long, but this idea of constantly being frightened. And your mother's frightened and your father's frightened and we were all like that. That's an indescribable feeling. So, that was the situation that we were in.

Mr. Mannering: How was the food and the clothing?

Gen. Blaz: We had whatever it was that we could muster. The Japanese took over the city and took over the houses. They just dispatched us to the boonies. You then go to the boonies and do the best you can. The distinction between us as an example and Europe is that the boonies to us is the jungle and the jungle is a commissary if you know how to handle it.

Mr. Mannering: Good for you.

Gen. Blaz: We just kind of went and picked our things out of the commissary. If I don't eat any fruit for the rest of my life, I'll still be ahead. I think that's the reason I'm a healthy fellow. I seventy-eight, almost seventy-nine years old.

Mr. Mannering: You're remarkably fit.

Gen. Blaz: I think I'm healthy because I'm very careful. At lunch today everybody was feeding us something; I just had nothing but fruit. Simply because I know that at my age I should not add another ounce if I can possibly do that. In any case, we have just wandered off the subject. You better bring me back.

The occupation lasted almost three years. We emerged from it. It was a difficult time. One of the most difficult things for me, personally, was I'm relatively large for a native of Guam. The Japanese is a short form. It hovers around 5' 2", 5' 3". The way they measure you is they just stand in front of you and if you're even or taller than they are, you're in a labor battalion. It doesn't make any difference how old you are.

Mr. Mannering: That's what happened to you, right?

Gen. Blaz: That's what happened to me. I describe it to my friends as that I was such a big shot I always got drafted in the first round. (laughs) I come back and they got another working party and they looked at me and I just know they're going to pick me. So, I just wait to be picked for a working group.

Mr. Mannering: Was it rice you were growing?

Gen. Blaz: Say again.

Mr. Mannering: Were you doing rice? You were working the rice fields? Did I read that properly? Your job in the labor, what did you do?

Gen. Blaz: The job in my particular labor battalion our job was to dig caves for the Japanese military because they always liked to hide in caves as they did in Iwo Jima. The more difficult job was to build an airstrip. If somebody were to say to you, "Jerry, I want you to build an airstrip." You say, "Oh, I can't do that." He's going to say, "Well, the airstrip is going to be between here and San Antonio." You'll probably say, "Oh, I can take care of that this afternoon. Just give me a bulldozer." It's flat. No trees. Nothing. Just go and knock over the sagebrush and say, "I got a strip." On Guam we have what amounts to rain forest. Imagine yourself going to, say, Costa Rica with beautiful rain forest. We have sugar cane as well. And all you have is a machete, a little bitty machete. You say, "Why don't you cut the Japanese with your machete and get it over with?" Well, he's got a bayonet and the bayonet is attached to a rifle and the rifle has six rounds. He's what they call at an advantage. You have this machete and they say, "Okay, kill the jungle." You sit there and you say, "How am I going to do this?" But you do it. The way we did it was we just cut the jungle down. Cut all the branches down. We just had a whole sea of branches. Guam is a very hot place. When it dried, we'd burn it. Then you were left with stumps. That's when the excitement came because removing a stump—I believe the Japanese had one bulldozer and one jack hammer, if you can believe that. But anyway, one of the things that really struck me during the time was this whole idea that what we're doing is actually building an airstrip to defend Guam against the Americans. So, I sympathize completely with all these things that are embodied in the movie

The Bridge on the River Kwai. We weren't building a bridge, but were building an airstrip. You're torn actually between two things and this is what the British did. I understand; I fully sympathize with the character portrayed by Alec Guinness in that movie because if you don't have a sense of pride left in you, you are going to die in that camp. What you need to do is you get to thinking something other than being incarcerated. I'm going to do a good job. I'm going to do the best I possibly can. This is what we actually had. We just said, "Okay, let's just do the best we can here because we don't know how to do this anyway." So, we just kept going. I'll be darned if we didn't do it. I think we survived but my leaders, my officers might say, "You know, we've never done this before. We don't know what to do." You're at it long enough and you finally get it flat. Then the Japanese came and put a little cover on it and they started flying over their planes. That was the most difficult part for me was the whole idea I was then fourteen years old, fifteen. So, I actually came out of the war very muscular.

Mr. Mannering: I bet.

Gen. Blaz: I was feeding on fruits essentially, coconut. The difference between being incarcerated on an island and being incarcerated in Poland is incomparable. You had nothing but dirt. We got nothing but coconut trees but if you know how to pick the coconut out you can live an awful long time. How do I know? Because an American serviceman named George Ray Tweed escaped into the jungle and stayed there for the entire duration. The Japanese couldn't find him because he had some help. We helped him. But then after the war, a Japanese soldier decided to do that.

Mr. Mannering: The last one in '72, wasn't it?

Gen. Blaz: Yes. He stayed in there for twenty-eight years. The remarkable thing is that everybody was looking for him. At least the American sailor half the population was sheltering him and the Japanese were looking for him. The Japanese soldier, we were all looking for him. And he still managed to escape for twenty-eight years. If someone says, "Describe the jungle," I don't need to think anymore. If you can escape something for twenty-eight years, then you understand then the density of the jungle and what you can do. Overnight heavy rain can just change the composition. If you have any tracks or anything like that, it's erased. Anyway, the war ended. There was intense jubilation. During the war, we patched a lot of clothes to—

Mr. Mannering: I'm interrupting you and I don't really mean to but, when you say the war ended, what happened at liberation? Talk about that.

Gen. Blaz: Our part of the war ended. You asked about clothing. Everybody's outfit actually looked like a quilt. You know, the patching. When I came here and I saw quilts up in Pennsylvania somewhere I said, "Why do you patch these things?" I did not realize that's considered an absolute beautiful piece of work and you pay a lot of money. I didn't know that. On Guam we had quilting. My mother had the brilliant idea that what she should do for me is make me a pair of shorts. The shorts were made out of a raincoat. That way then I could wear it night and day. When I'm ready to clean up, I just go into the river and clean up. I don't need to change my pants because they're going to dry. That lasted about two years. We just had two pairs. That gives you an idea. I have some pictures, which I don't have with me, that show the clothing that people wore. That's how we solved that. Anyway, liberation came. We emerged from—

Mr. Mannering: Did you witness combat when the American forces returned?

Gen Blaz: In the liberation?

Mr. Mannering: Yes.

Gen. Blaz: No, we were subjugated. I mean, we had no weapons; we had no rights; we had nothing. The only thing we did was just they said, "Come," and we go and they say, "Do this," we did it. A labor battalion is kind of like a slave labor battalion. If you don't cooperate, it's no problem. They just cut your head off. No problem with you any more.

Mr. Mannering: Right. I wasn't really asking if you were involved in combat but did you witness your liberators in combat?

Gen. Blaz: In a sense I was. I was lost even after I was picked up by the Marines, I was lost. I didn't know where my parents were because I had left the concentration camp looking for food. When I was away from the camp looking for food with some friends of mine, the Marines liberated the camp.

Mr. Mannering: Okay.

Gen. Blaz: They took them to relocation centers, about four or five throughout the island. I had no idea where they were. Of course, I had no transportation. I didn't have authority. So, I just stayed with the Marines. I finally started talking to them. They dressed me up. Actually, I was dressed just like a Marine because the only clothing—I mean, the only shoes I only had what amounts to Zories except they were called differently. They were made of leather. They were very slippery. They just were

awful so they gave me some clothing. I was dressed up like a private. I had no rank, nothing at all. I started learning a little bit about their language. They had these things we now call cargo pants, but they were combat pants in those days. The United States Armed Forces Institute, USAFI, created a series of books that really is like a very fat Cliffs Notes about this size designed specifically to put in your pocket. You could have a book of chemistry. So I would walk around and I had chemistry, geography, English, history. Six books, six subjects. Every time I stopped, I'd read a book. So, I learned to read.

Mr. Mannering: I'm interrupting you again, but what language did you speak before you spoke English?

Gen. Blaz: I spoke my own language.

Mr. Mannering: Guamanian.

Gen. Blaz: I can say a few words right now.

Mr. Mannering: Sure, go right ahead.

Gen. Blaz: It's a very difficult language. I'm going to say, "Hello, how are you?" This is what I'm going to say. Now, we also speak a smattering of Spanish. So, we could say to you, "*Hola, como (?)*?" In my language, you would say "*Hafa adai, hafa tatamanu hao*", which is really difficult. Very few people learn our language. For years and years and years it was just passed down by word of mouth.

Mr. Mannering: It's an oral language.

Gen. Blaz: It's an extraordinary language because even though the Chamorro, the native of Guam, numbering in Guam almost fifty thousand at one time with the neighboring islands, during the long occupation by Spain, as they are prone to do, they eliminated a lot of us. We ended up with about fifteen hundred left.

Mr. Mannering: From disease you think mostly?

Gen. Blaz: What's that?

Mr. Mannering: From disease? Were the people ill from disease?

Gen. Blaz: It was a combination of things. When you are an islander and you are on that island and somebody comes in, this eminent domain junk is junk. Nobody owns that island except us. This is the way we taught it. This is

the way my ancestors taught it. Then somebody comes along and says, "Here's my sword and here's my cross." What in the devil are you talking about? You can't do that. This is mine. So, that sentiment really stayed and stays today. I share that. My ancestors would resist. Then one time they say they're going to fight, so they fought what they called the Chamorro Wars for years. The Spanish decimated them to fifteen hundred people. My point is that although there were only fifteen hundred left, they retained their language. When the Spanish were there we refused to become Spanish. We just wanted to be us and if you want us to learn your language, that's fine, but not at the expense of ours. Then the Americans came and they say, "You can't speak Chamorro in class. You can only speak English." Well, that's fine. We ignore them. We spoke both. Then the Japanese came and they say, "You have to speak Japanese." "Yes, sir." But we spoke Chamorro and to this day, and I speak the language. I think that is probably the bonding thing for my people. I just recently wrote a book in manuscript form still, about that for the children of Guam. The whole thing centers around the fact that during the war, the population of Guam was 99.9% Chamorro, which is what they called natives. The entire trial of the war and these clothes we made and the way we made and the toleration factors that were very high and walking out tall is all attributed to us. All attributed to that generation. Never again will we be faced with a similar test because never again will we be dominant in the population. We are now 37% of the population. My thinking was that I owed it to Guam to write. I just finished a script on the same subject. It will probably be printed in about two or three weeks when I find enough photographs to accompany it. It's all going to be shipped to the children of Guam.

Mr. Mannering: Who's the publisher?

Gen Blaz: The Department of Education on Guam, if they buy my idea, they will take it and get it published. I expect no compensation.

Mr. Mannering: A wonderful legacy to leave to the people.

Gen. Blaz: You know, Jerry, the whole thing really, if I may say so, is that I'm surprised at people who say, "I don't want to bother with that. I don't want to bother with that." Imagine what will happen if during our own quest somebody said, "Jerry, I don't want to bother with that." Or "Ben, I don't want to bother with that." What amazes me is on any given day, all other things being equal, the Americans that I know, will not only bother with you, he'll say, "What can I do for you?" I think some of the people in America just seem to have lost that characterization. I'm a minority, technically, but I have a disdain for the minorities who want us to be minorities with them. This country was founded by some pretty decent

white folks. This Revolution and the Civil War was to form it, carve it the way we want it. To comply with the best written document ever, the Constitution. Then along came all these people. I don't mind. I was technically an immigrant. But if you're going to join my club, here are the rules of the club. You got to get a haircut; you got to do this; you got to pay your dues. If you're not willing to do that, then you're going to find yourself another country. We don't have politicians these days that have the guts to do that. I was in the House for eight years. The advantage I think I had in the House is that I was already an accomplished person by the time I got there. I was not looking for anything to distinguish myself. If you make general officer rank in the United States Marine Corps, you rate a salute.

Mr. Mannering: You bet.

Gen. Blaz: So I went there kind of cocky. I said, "Look, I already have a career, but this is what I think we ought to do." So, I actually didn't get along with a lot the guys. Tom DeLay, I know Tom very well, but I think he has a tendency to ignore me. After all, I was just a Marine. But he was a roach killer. This is what he did before he—

Mr. Mannering: Side two of our interview with Gen. Blaz. We have maybe twenty minutes and the general is going to have to depart for the airport. So, we're going to try to wrap this up. You were speaking of your time in the House. I started to say I wish to God you were still there.

Gen. Blaz: I might as well talk about it because I think this is important even for your class.

Mr. Mannering: Absolutely.

Gen Blaz: It is my belief that the Great Compromise was designed by the men of wisdom of the two houses. Then the Senate is designed for six years for longevity. You stay on the job. Everybody is equal. Rhode Island is equal to New York. It is important, I think, for the sake of that state. But the House is different. The House is by population. Five hundred thousand and this and that. I think the intention, and I don't have the word for it, the intention was that by doing it that way you have this idea of mobility and change so that you can bring relevancy and currency to the issue. But they liked it so much there they're drunken with it because there's so much power as evidenced by all these people being convicted because they got mad with power. I have no idea how in the world a person—let's say Tom—I cannot believe, knowing Tom, I cannot believe that he would fall for some of the junk that he fell for. And I'm a Republican. He's my friend. I love him. But I actually resent the fact that he did what

he did. In many respects, when you are a Congressman or something like that, the thought is as bad as the deed. If you're just thinking in that direction, then you don't belong here. I enjoyed being there because I had this privilege of having been a professional. I have accomplished something and I want to share the rest of my life trying to mold certain things for the sake of the American people. That part of my life was a very significant part of my life because I was very, very, very vocal. I didn't win too many friends.

Mr. Mannering: That's all right. You weren't there for popularity.

Gen. Blaz: As it turned out, as a Republican my best friends were two distinguished Democrats and that was a fellow named Mo Udall of Arizona and Claude Pepper of Florida. Claude was an old man but somehow we hit it off well together. I remember one time I said, "You know, Claude, I'm getting old." He started laughing. I think I was twenty years younger. I said, "What do you advise I do when I get your age?" He said, "Don't buy green bananas." (laughs)

Mr. Mannering: Good answer.

Gen. Blaz: That tells you the kind of a guy he was. One time we were overseas in Thailand to attend a big conference, a meeting of parliamentarians from around the world. They do this every so many years. Claude was the head of the delegation and I went with him. He asked me to go along with him because it was in Thailand and I could stop on Guam. We went in there and were sitting there waiting, you know how it is in a conference. The Soviet delegation got up and blasted the United States. I looked at Claude and I said, "You know, Claude, we've got to respond." He said, "Oh, they're just full of wind. Let them do it." I said, "We can't do that because it's going to be written. The setting, the sun, the sea, nothing is in there except the words and it's going to sound very, very damaging to us. We've got to respond." He said, "Okay. Why don't you respond, but be nice." I said, "Yes, sir." So, I went up there and I just started laughing. I said, "With respect to the Russian delegation's views, let me just tell you that I'll bet you of the sixty countries that are here everyone of you countries have a fiefdom in America representing your ethnic group and no other country in the world can claim that. So what is it that you like about my country so much that you'd come as an immigrant and the boats are always filled?" I don't think this is a lot of nonsense. This is just junk. I said, "You really think that by our actions we are the kind of people who subjugate people when we spent our lives trying to save others?" I said, "What you said is just junk and I wish you'd be serious." And I tell you, everyone was silent. I went back and Claude looked at me and he said, "You know, Ben, you weren't nice."

Mr. Mannering: That was nice?

Gen. Blaz: I said, "I know." He said, "But you were great." (laughs) So it cemented a relationship that lasted forever. Now going back to Guam, what happened after the liberation. You walked out of Devil's Island, so to speak, and they turn on the lights and you see that you don't have any more tertiary roads because the Sea Bees had covered it. There's no mud because they had what they called Marston matting they put on top of mud. There are depots and they're called food depots and there were seven hundred eighty-four vessels in the harbor getting ready for Japan. You couldn't even see the white-caps. There were B-29s. Not ten, not twenty, not thirty, not forty. We're talking about a hundred B-29s. The sudden change in the world is overwhelming. This is the transition. What happened, I make the point that I was never a teenager as a teenager.

Mr. Mannering: Probably not.

Gen. Blaz: I know it's not as lyrically phrased as some would have it, but I don't think there is a doubt in your minds to what I am saying. Sometimes when you're too lyrical, you don't get to the point. I say that because the immediate thing we had to do was to see if we can get an education and see if we could salvage our lives. But the transition didn't go like that, it just went like this "poom." There was a lot of adjustment. A lot of adjustment. My father said, "The avenue is open. The avenue is open. You're going to go to the United States. You're going to go and get an education. We don't know what's before us now but it looks like the whole world's opening up. And we don't know anything." Every bit of our energy was devoted to getting me off the island.

Mr. Mannering: You came to the United States. Went to Notre Dame?

Gen. Blaz: That's right. I studied a lot. The bishop wrote to all the Catholic universities and asked for scholarships. They gave a test and I passed the test. In fact, I was on top so I got to choose. I remember the bishop said to me, "Where would you like to go to school? We have the Loyolas, the Dominicans." I mean, all sorts of choices. I said, "I want to go to school in California." Loyola College. He said, "You can't go to school in California. I won't let you." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Because you look Japanese-American and they hate Japanese-Americans at this time." He said, "Where else do you want to go?" I said, "New York." He said, "Why did you select New York?" I said, "When you watch a movie whenever a plane takes off from California, it lands in New York. And when the plane takes off from New York, it lands in California. That must be the only two states worth anything." If you watch an old movie, if

somebody gets on a plane, nobody stops at Terra Haute, Indiana, or San Antonio.

Mr. Mannerling: Or on a train.

Gen. Blaz: Yes, you fly from New York. He said, “You can’t go to New York.” I said, “Why?” He said, “You look Puerto Rican and they–” (laughs) I looked at him and I said, “I don’t want to go to America.” His answer was, “Yes, you do because I can see right now that you’re going to be a feisty guy. I don’t think you’re going to survive unless you have an education to reason yourself out of the jams that you’re going to find yourself in if you’re just putting up muscle with no brain.” I said, “Okay, where shall I go?” He said, “There’s this little Catholic school in northern Indiana and it’s called Notre Dame.” I said, “Why doesn’t it have an English name?” He said, “Well, it’s a French name. It’s mispronounced but it should be *Notre Dame*. In America we can mispronounce it. We just call it Notre Dame.” It isn’t spelled “Noter;” it’s spelled “Notre,” but we say “Noter.” Anyway, they packed me off and they sent me to school. Like I say, from the day when I got there, I didn’t have any transcripts worth accepting. So, I was put on probation.

Mr. Mannerling: Did you have some trepidation about all this?

Gen. Blaz: What’s that?

Mr. Mannerling: Did you have some trepidation? I mean, you’re obviously a very brave person but to leave Guam and be dropped in Indiana.

Gen. Blaz: I had more than trepidation. I was frightened. We’re talking about a dramatic change in everything. As an example, my first letter home, I’ll never forget it, I wrote a letter home and it took about four or five months to get a letter home at that time because the war effort–

Mr. Mannerling: In what language did you write it, in English?

Gen. Blaz: What language did I write?

Mr. Mannerling: Yes.

Gen. Blaz: I wrote it in my language Chomorro. But you post it and there is no place going to Guam for mail. It’s all the war effort. It just gets lost somewhere and eventually it finds itself. It could be five or six months later.

Mr. Mannerling: Was this in ‘44, ‘45?

Gen. Blaz: We're now in '47. That's when we start drawing the troops back.

Mr. Mannering: Okay.

Gen. Blaz: The first letter I wrote I said, "I want you to know that in America and in this school, you can walk alongside anybody that you want to." I said, "I don't have to walk ahead to clear anything. I don't have to walk behind to pick up things. I can just walk along." As insignificant as that may seem to people, walking along shows equality and it meant a lot to me. I said, "Notre Dame is my home and I'm going to grow up here." And I did. I have a manuscript three-hundred and forty-one pages long entitled *God, Country, Notre Dame* is the name of this book which I hope to get published. It talks about my faith. It talks about my country, the United States and how I serve it both in the Congress and—. It now embodies and some of the things I've written here is captured in my book. The questions you are asking I have paragraphs on it. In any case, I succeeded at Notre Dame and went into Officers' Candidate School.

Mr. Mannering: Quantico, you say? In 1950?

Gen. Blaz: I was commissioned in 1951.

Mr. Mannering: You served in Korea?

Gen. Blaz: Yes. I really didn't intend to go in. I just wanted to make the point. The point was that I could be an officer and all this other crap is crap. The only thing they would let me become is a steward. Same thing with the Filipinos and the blacks. So, I became an officer. Then in Korea I got promoted to captain. Everybody is a reserve officer when you first get commissioned. I got a letter from headquarters of the Marine Corps that said, "Be advised that in view of your record indicates you may, if you wish, be accepted as a regular career officer in the United States Marine Corps." I looked at the thing and I had already applied to go to law school. I wanted to go there. Then I said to myself, "You know, we have lawyers in Guam. We have doctors now. We have dentists. But we don't have a single officer."

Mr. Mannering: No general officers.

Gen. Blaz: Just a commissioned officer. (laughs) So, I said, "I'm going to stay. I'm going to see what happens if I stayed." You've got to understand that when you make colonel in the Marine Corps, you are an accomplished person. When you're one of three hundred colonels from which they select eleven people to make a general, it's an incredibly

difficult task for the people. In the Marine Corps, when you are written a fitness report, unlike the other services that can grade you with a computer or type it in, you're required to write in your own handwriting what you think of this officer that you're grading. And you're required to show it to him. It makes honest people very earnest so they put a lot of stock in that. When I went up, there were three hundred others.

Mr. Mannering: I'm interrupting you and I shouldn't do that, but you are very modest. How did you get from captain to colonel? Was it combat in Korea?

Gen. Blaz: Combat in Vietnam.

Mr. Mannering: Vietnam.

Gen. Blaz: My big jump is I had a big responsibility in Vietnam. My point I was trying to make there is that when they come up to evaluate you, you end up actually almost even with everybody. But the advantage you could have is that who is on that board. That's where I had an advantage because the president of the board was my commanding officer in combat.

Mr. Mannering: Oh, okay.

Gen. Blaz: And he knew me. Then the second most senior officer on the board was a general under whom I was a chief of staff. So, I had a tremendous advantage because two of the five officers knew me personally. So, I was no better than any one of those guys I'm telling you. I mean, they were really good officers and much better decorated than I ever was.

Mr. Mannering: Where did you command the regiment?

Gen. Blaz: In Japan. We came out of Vietnam. That's how I selected. It was, in a way, it's the luck of the draw because it's who does the selection. You have to assume that everything else is equal. Here's how it happens because I have sat on boards. Somebody says, "I know, I know Jones. Let me brief him." They give his records out and everybody assumes the responsibility to study them and brief it before everybody. My briefing officer knew me but they wanted but they wanted to see what others thought of me. When they start up, I am assuming that they said, "Look, I know him. He's a known quantity to me. I don't know these other people. Since he's known to me, let's give him a shot." There are so many fine officers that I was embarrassed sometimes when I ran into them and they say, "Hi, General," because deep down inside of me I know that if they're not as good as I, they're at least better. But I had the ticket on the train.

Mr. Mannering: You've had a star-struck life.

Gen. Blaz: What's that?

Mr. Mannering: Your life has been star-struck. Your life has been remarkable.

Gen. Blaz: Thank you. I'm assuming that's a compliment.

Mr. Mannering: It is.

Gen. Blaz: It's remarkable. I think what may be remarkable is that I assume nothing. I mean when someone hands me a –like I gave a fairly effective speech here for a couple of days.

Mr. Mannering: I'm sure you did. You're very well-spoken.

Gen. Blaz: Chuck Rosen himself, at a function last night, embarrassed me by hugging me. I don't speak from anywhere except the abundance of my heart. What I say represents every fiber in my body. I make no pretenses of being more than anybody else. I assume I know at least as much if not less. I think if I have any advice to young people it is that you take things a step at a time. When you are a second lieutenant, don't be thinking about making captain. Think about making first lieutenant. When you do that, you see, then you fulfill all your obligations. But the minute you start thinking that someday you're going to be a general and you're going to do this, then you have destroyed the sync of this thing and you're going to mess up because you're not thinking with the job at hand. The job at hand is right now. I started off wrong, actually. I started off as, I'll say, an officer in charge of an officers' club. I reported to this command and they needed a guy. The officers' club was all screwed up. They needed a lieutenant so he could sign documents. I went to this officers' club.

Mr. Mannering: Where was that?

Gen. Blaz: It was in Japan. I went to this officers' club and it was awful. But that evening I found out that all the officers ate there because we weren't allowed to eat outside the camp. I said, "If all the officers eat here, then I really will get to know these guys." I wanted them to know they will be eating at finest damn club in Japan. I told my people, I say, "You know, let's just make it good." And we did. I had Japanese ladies that were waitresses so I dressed them up in kimonos, you know. Then I got a lieutenant who plays the piano. With his boots and saddle he sits there and plays the piano. Then one day the commanding general, a two-star guy called me in and he said, "Blaz, I hear you're the guy, you run the club." I just knew I was going to die. I say, "Yes, sir." He said, "Where did you learn how to run a club?" I said, "I learned it here, sir." He said, "Well,

lieutenant, I'm now sixty, fifty years old and this is the best damn club I've ever seen." I almost said, "No kidding?" but I didn't. He says, "That's all." I turned around and I said to this major standing by and I said, "Was I being chastised or was I being complimented?" He said, "When that old horse up there says something like that, it's the best club." So, from that humble beginning I learned a lesson. No matter the job, no matter the job the guy that you work for is going to grade you and say, "When I needed him, he produced." So, I was driven by that. Wherever I went I decided, for instance, you were talking about Vietnam. In Vietnam I was an operations officer of the same regiment that I commanded. One time we had twenty-two rifle companies deployed. Twenty-two, twenty-two. There are only twenty-four hours in a day and when you're in combat one of those guys could be engaged somewhere, or two, or three, or four. And I'm the operations officer. I'm the guy that's making all the (?). I remember it so well that I could not believe that I could do this but I was doing it. I remember I'd be in a big bunker, deep bunker. I remember we had an engagement. Everything was just going bananas. I mean, the air, all the noises, and everything. I couldn't get anyone's attention. I picked up my pistol and shot it right through the bunker.

Mr. Mannering: That should do it.

Gen. Blaz: They all looked at me and I said, "Look, you know, we've got a fire fight going on and I want you, the air officer, to sit there and just look at me. You're the cannoneer and you're the air guy and you're the naval gun guy. Just look at me. When I go like that, you come to me and I don't want anybody saying a damn thing because we've got a problem. We can't all be running this. Since I'm running it, for now, why don't we do it that way. The less noise we have the better off we are." People have a tendency when something's going wrong to all go bananas. What you need to do and what I tried to do with everything I did in my life, was at that moment when everything is going bananas is the time to sit down and say, "Hey, let's re-group and see what we can do." That probably was the thing that saved my career because I was frequently in trouble. In trouble for almost insubordination because my company in Korea was refused to go on liberty for three days after we came off the line because the company ahead of us had a high rate of VD. The colonel said, "I don't want my battalion to be rated so high in venereal disease, so you stay here and we'll lower the figure." I said, "Sir, if you do that you'd be committing a offense and it's called mass punishment." He looked at me and said, "How dare you say that to me?" I said, "Sir, I'm not joking. It's in the book and I have the thing marked." He was so upset. He was so upset he called all sorts of people, the division-. The net result is that at the end of it the colonel who investigated me said, "You know, we've got to run this by the book." He talked to the commanding officer and he said, "Mass punishment is not

acceptable.” So, my company and I went on liberty.
Mr. Mannering: Where did you go?

Gen. Blaz: We were outside of a little place called Yong Dong Po which is an awful name for it. There was a little Army camp nearby. The Army always had (?). We would go in there and we’d (?) but they had this base camp where they had some beer and showers and candy. But I kept them out of the villages because I didn’t want to go back — I think I’ve wandered too much. I don’t think this is of any value.

Mr. Mannering: I think it’s all very valuable. These are your recollections and your career. When did you separate from the Marine Corps? When did you retire?

Gen. Blaz: I retired from the Marine Corps in 1980. Returned to Guam; taught at the University of Guam for two years. Kiddled everybody about this campaign. We ran a campaign almost as a joke because we were just kind of teaching it. We found out we could win so we got serious and we won.

Mr. Mannering: You were in Congress from ‘82 until ‘90?

Gen. Blaz: ‘85 to 1993. Eight years. I was actually defeated in 1993 by a fellow at the university. I didn’t have a professor’s rank. I was an instructor. But the guy was vice-president of the university. A good friend of mine. So he ran. When I got home from the election that night, I told my wife, “I think we’re going to lose this election.” Guam is about ninety percent Democrat. I was a fluke.

Mr. Mannering: I didn’t want to say anything, but I knew Guam was usually Democrat and I didn’t know whether you were a Democrat or not.

Gen. Blaz: I’m on the right of Ronald Reagan and just to the left of Genghis Khan.

Mr. Mannering: I say I’m to the right of Archie Bunker.

Gen. Blaz: It was quite an accomplishment. It was bales of accomplishment because I defeated the Democrats. I went to Washington and hum, Ronald Reagan was the president. I remember the day we got to the White House. I led the trip because I was elected president. Because I’m president I got to sit next to the president. I remember him asking everybody what they did that won the election. He got to me and said, “What did you do that’s special?” I said, “You know, Mr. President, I just told them I was Irish.” He started laughing.

Mr. Mannering: He’s Irish.

Gen. Blaz: He's Irish, yes. He said, "Are you Irish?" I may have some great-grandmother and I said, "Yes, sir. The Fighting Irish of Notre Dame." That just lit him up because he played George Gipp All American.

Mr. Mannering: That's right. The Gipper.

Gen. Blaz: A couple of nights after that later, we had a big reception at the White House. I walked in with my wife. We got this little card on where to sit at the table. My wife got to sit at table number eight. They separate you. I got table number nine. So, I walked up to my table to see where it was while everybody was having drinks. I walked to the table and I saw it said President Reagan. He's at that table. I looked at the guy next to him and it said General Blaz. I got the card and went out to the Marine officer and I said, "We need to correct something very quickly here. Somebody just put me at the damn president's table. This is embarrassing as hell for me. So let's get this thing straightened out." He said, "With all due respect, Sir, there's nothing to straighten out." I said, "I don't want this." He said, "Sir, let me tell you something. I was in charge of putting it together. You're a general officer of our Corps. Do you really think I would screw you over?" I apologized.

Mr. Mannering: You're very humble. What was your thinking? You didn't really want to sit there or you didn't feel like you were entitled to?

Gen. Blaz: I thought somebody else belonged there. I was just a guy. There were some very hot tamales that come to Washington.

Mr. Mannering: Were you a freshman congressman still?

Gen. Blaz: Yes, I was a freshman Congressman. I had just got elected. It was the first banquet. I got there and I sat down next to the president. I became a life-long admirer of President Reagan. I admire him to this day. He just looked at me and he said to me, "Glad to have you here, General." He never called me anything but General. He said, "What problems might you have had when you were running." I said, "Well, the problem I had was that the guy had been here forever, a Democrat. He had been here about fifteen, sixteen years and he told me that he had worked with you and that I couldn't hold a candle to you. I really wasn't sure what the expression meant but I'm assuming that I cannot serve you. I cannot be in your company. That sort of thing." He said, "He said that?" I said, "Yes, sir." It was a big table and he reaches in and there's a candle in the middle. He pulls it and puts it between us. He calls the photographer. "Take a picture." He said, "Then you send this to that guy and tell him that Ronald Reagan is holding a candle to you."

Mr. Mannering: All right.

Gen. Blaz: I couldn't believe it.

Mr. Mannering: That's amazing.

Gen. Blaz: From then on it was just nothing but –. George Bush is a personal friend of mine. We became friends during his vice-presidency. When he became president, when he saw me he also doesn't call me by my name. He just calls me Gen. Blaz.

Mr. Mannering: I'm privileged to have both his and Mrs. Bush's autograph books.

Gen. Blaz: You do?

Mr. Mannering: Yes, I do. That's as close as I got to them.

Gen. Blaz: We've traveled with them. I think George Bush is one of the most decent human beings in the world. You would say something to him when I would try and he would say, "Oh, gosh darn it. I don't know if we can do it." I said, "What the hell? Let's just do it anyway." He was just such a decent human being. One last thing I'll tell you. We were coming off in Hawaii. Five o'clock?

Mr. Mannering: I've got 4:20.

Gen. Blaz: We were coming off in Hawaii. He asked me to come along because he was going to Hawaii and I was going to Guam. He said, "I'll get you half-way there." So, I went with him. I went with him on Air Force One. Along with him there were about four or five or six cabinet officers that he was taking to Hawaii for some special meeting, including at that time, the secretary of state, who was, I think, George Schultz, at the time. We landed in Hawaii. Barbara wasn't along. The president got ready and everybody stands up to get all spruced up. All the cabinet officers were lined up here and I was at the end of it. I got myself spruced up. The president waited and waited and finally one of the assistants comes back and he said, "The president is waiting for whoever is going to walk out with him." I said to George Schultz, who I know, I said, George, "I think he's getting a little upset. Why in the hell don't you go out there and let's go?" He looked at me and he said, "Why the hell don't you go out there because you're senior to me?" I said, "What?" I said, "I'm delaying all this?" He said, "Yeah, you're the one that's causing all this damn problem. So get your ass out there." (laughs) Excuse me.

Mr. Mannering: Don't worry about that.

Gen. Blaz: I got there and the president looked at me and he said, “Barbara was never late.” We started coming down and he started waving at the crowd. I was standing next to him and he said, “Why don’t you wave?” I said, “You know, Mr. President, you know they’re waving at you not at me.” He said, “Ben, we’re in Hawaii. They think you’re Hawaiian.”

Mr. Mannering: So wave.

Gen. Blaz: So for that morning I was Hawaiian like they thought I was. Here’s the president of the United States and back in Hawaii with a Hawaiian. That’s the kind of personal things that endeared me to both Reagan and Bush. I met the current president when he was running his father’s campaign for the presidency in which he lost. I met him then. I don’t make any claims about knowing him in the sense that if he sees me in a crowd he wouldn’t know who I was. I’m not trying to even get to know him. Every once in a while I see President Bush and he’ll just walk over. That’s why I made a point today to go to the Gallery here. I’m very comfortable with that. I worked with two of the finest Americans I have ever met and probably will ever meet. Ronald Reagan, in particular, drove the Democrats insane. He won’t let you hurt him. He dodges every bullet that’s ever shot his way and he laughs it off. “Gosh darn it, you almost did it, didn’t you, but you ain’t going to.” That sort of thing. I just enjoyed him. One time, the final story I’ll tell you is that he was invited to issue the first day issue of the Knute Rockne stamp at Notre Dame on St. Patrick’s Day 1987 or whenever it was. He invited all the graduates from Notre Dame. There were about twelve or thirteen of us in the Congress at that time who graduated from Notre Dame. We were packed and leaving and virtually everybody was a Republican except for one or two. I said to one of the guys, “Why aren’t the other two guys here?” The aide said, “Sir, we don’t have any room.” There were only fifteen of us and the plane carries seventy. (laughs) They didn’t have any room for these two guys. Anyway, we got on the plane and we’re going and he said, “I have an idea. When I get in there to speak, I want to introduce my friends from the Congress who are coming. But I want to introduce them as a football team. At right end we have Congressman Ron Mazzoli.” Just for fun. Everybody picks a spot and he said, “We need two guys for the back field.” I said, “I’ll play back field.” And then another guy. Then he said, “Is anybody here ever distinguished themselves in football that I might be able to add to this pie here?” I raised my hand. He said, “You were honored?” I said, “Yes, sir. I received high honors at Notre Dame as a back.” He said, “What kind of honor?” I said, “Well, it’s the only honor. I was told by my friends that I was the fastest wetback in Notre Dame history.” He laughed himself so silly. He laughed himself all the way to South Bend. All the way from the airport. All the way into the convocation center. He

started and he introduced the people. Then he got to me. He said, “And now, in the back field we have Ben Blaz, the fastest-learning person I know.”

Mr. Mannering: He recovered.

Gen. Blaz: Oh, he did. It would have blowed him out of there.

Mr. Mannering: Did he keep a straight face?

Gen. Blaz: Oh, yes.

Mr. Mannering: He didn’t crack up laughing?

Gen. Blaz: Oh, no. Later on he said, “I saved your butt.” I said, “No, sir. I saved yours.” That’s the kind of thing. He was such a delightful human being. This is a footnote to this: my sister Maria was a nurse at George Washington University Hospital in the thoracic surgery department. Before I got to the Congress this thing happened. Somebody attempted to assassinate him. Remember that incident? He was taken to the hospital. My sister was one of his nurses. He remembered her. In the first day I actually got to the White House I was walking through the line at the reception. You know, it was pretty formal. But we were wearing name tags to help the president to identify yourself. He got to me. I was actually the head of it because I was president. I think by default, but I was president anyway. He looked at my name and he said, “Are you?” That’s all he said. I said, “Yes, sir. She’s my sister.” He called, “Nancy!” There’s a lot of people in tuxedos. “Nancy! Nancy! It’s Maria’s brother.”

Mr. Mannering: It’s a small world. That’s pretty coincidental.

Gen. Blaz: Very much so. He was so delighted to know that. I was so flattered that he remembered. He said, “How is she?” I said, “Fine, but I think you’ve done her a great disservice.” He said, “What did I do?” I said, “Sir, she was a staunch Democrat and by the time you leave, she’s become an unbearable Republican.” He just looked at me and he said, “God bless her. She’s a fine woman.” I think I’ve screwed up your—

Mr. Mannering: You have not done that. This has been a remarkable interview with a remarkable general and congressman.

Gen. Blaz: One final thought on that. Because I have had those handles in my life, when I left the Congress, I was a natural for a lobbyist. The administration was Republican. I’m a minority. All sorts of things. So I was approached by a number of people to become a lobbyist. I turned

them all down. It would have been an instant financial thing for me.

Mr. Mannering: Windfall.

Gen. Blaz: But I turned them down. They asked me for a reason and I told them that I value and respect so much my general officer rank that I will never do anything to minimize its stature. Lobbying would minimize that. On top of that, I value and treasure being a congressman and I would be addressed that way for the rest of my life. I don't want to have anyone ever say, "How did he become one?" Or in some manner minimize that exalted position. I said, "A hundred thousand a year? Make it one million because I'm not going to take it because what I now have, you couldn't buy."

Mr. Mannering: Reputation.

Gen. Blaz: You couldn't buy that. Look at what happened to those people who—. Jerry, I have enjoyed this, but you've brought out things that I really—. You're an expert at this stuff because you just let people hang themselves.

Mr. Mannering: You didn't hang yourself. You did a wonderful job.

Gen. Blaz: What I mean is that you relax. This is not necessarily a relaxing experience.

Mr. Mannering: No, it's not.

Gen. Blaz: You relax me just kind of like, "Hi, I want to hear from you." And being an old man like I am, I act in a grand fatherly way and I'm very proud to act in a grand fatherly way. I am proud to be seventy-eight years old, almost seventy-nine. I'm proud to be called by my first and last name. I went to a clinic not too long ago and I walked in and this young lady comes out and says, "Is Ben here?" I didn't answer. She said, "Is Ben here?" There were about half-a-dozen old fuddie duddies like me. I didn't answer. "I guess Ben is not here." I said, "Excuse me, what would be that gentleman's last name?" She said, "Blaz." I said, "That must be this Ben. Why did you call me Ben?" She said, "We just wanted you to feel comfortable." We went into the doctor and he said, "I'm doctor so-and-so." I said, "How are you doing today, Richard?"

Mr. Mannering: Didn't like it, did he?

Gen. Blaz: He looked at me. I said, "I'm sorry but your nurse calls me Ben and I think she's trying to tell me to call you Richard so you'll feel better. I

just kind of need you to remind her that I'm the patient here and Medicare and (?) pays you, so I don't think we've got this thing right. If I went to an attorney, he'd be standing up when I walk in."

Mr. Mannerling: Good for you.

Gen. Blaz: I said, "If I went to a banker, he'll even walk me through. What is it about you doctors, physicians, who think that somehow you can call me by my first name and I have to call you doctor? Look at me. Look at how old I am."

Mr. Mannerling: I don't like that informality either.

Gen. Blaz: This guy looked at me and said, "I'll tell you what. We're going to have a meeting tomorrow. I'm going to pound the table and knock over this crap. We had this meeting with all these doctors that own this thing here and they said somebody came away from some business school somewhere and they told them that the way to get to a patient is to make him feel young." I said, "Well, maybe patients who don't think much of themselves."

Mr. Mannerling: A little respect would be nice.

Gen. Blaz: For your students, when you have something you want to say to them, I think what you might want to say, Jerry, is that, "Hey, young folks, we're studying today in the process of growing. We're trying to grow and in growing we all must prepare ourselves in life so that when we reach retirement age, we would be able to start a new part of their life and that it be glowing. So now is the time to grow and later is the time to glow." I am in the glowing stage. Without making an effort, I'm glowing. This is why I think I've got your interest. I am glowing with pride. But I'm not (?). I'm glowing because you're a young man and you might even be able to pick up a thought or two from what I say to you. If you did, you would have honored me because somebody somewhere had given me a thought or two. And here's a final thing I'm going to leave you. When I was liberated on Guam and when I was walked to Notre Dame with a bunch of guys that just wanted me to pass, in the process I incurred a real heavy debt. So that at the end of my journey I-

Tape ends mid-sentence

Final
Bonnie Day Rush
August 2, 2013

Dublin, Texas
Tape 1702