

*Admiral Nimitz Historic Site
National Museum of the Pacific War*

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

*Sally Bateman Morgan
Former Internee, World War II
Child Imprisoned in the Philippines
at Santo Tomas and Los Banos Internment Camp*

Interview with
Sally Bateman Morgan

Ms. Roberts: This is Virginia Roberts and today is January 26, 2008. I am interviewing Sally Bateman Morgan and this interview is taking place in Marble Falls, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies archives for the National Museum for the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Sally Morgan is here in Marble Falls with the American Ex-prisoner of War Mid-Year meeting, the organization's Texas Department. Ms. Morgan has generously agreed to tell us her story.

Ms. Morgan, would you please start by telling us about your family, and how you became imprisoned in the Philippines?

Ms. Morgan: My name is Sally Bateman Morgan. I was born in Tientsin, China, today we call it Tiajin, the mainland. My Daddy was military, with the 15th Infantry from North Carolina. My Mother is a Chinese national. My Daddy was stationed in China in occupational duties in the late '20s, when he met my Mother. And out of this union there were three of us born. I have two older brothers, Jim, Jack and myself. My Daddy died of tuberculosis when I was only three months old, so I did not know my Daddy. After his death my Mother was not able to care for us on a full time basis so there were different philanthropic organizations helped to take care of us and look after us and help with support. And through a philanthropic organization we met, a Methodist missionary, Dr. Perry Hanson from the state of Kansas. He was quite interested in us and he had a mission school in Shandong province. A short time later through Dr. Hanson we met a Baptist missionary who was sent to China by the name of John R. Blalock,. This was in Taian in another province. John Blalock was an independent Baptist missionary originally from Tillamook, Oregon.

In 1937, Japan invaded China, and as time went by the relationship with the Japanese became quite rough. John Blalock felt it would be safer if he received

permission from my mother to take me and my two brothers to the United States. Time was getting short and the last ship that we were able to connect with was a French ship traveling out of Shanghai. We caught that ship and arrived in Manila on November 2, 1941. We did not have any contacts in Manila. We were basically in transit hoping to come to the United States. Because my Daddy was an American citizen, the three of us inherited his citizenship so were born naturalized Americans.

We made some friends on the ship. Through some Chinese friends on the ship, they helped us to find a place to live when we landed in Manila. We did find a small apartment.

This is November, 1941, and you know that December was Pearl Harbor. Manila was declared an open city and in January, 1942, the Japanese sentry came knocking on the doors. I was the one who answered the door and because of my mixed blood of Chinese and American, he asked if I was a Filipino. I said no, I'm an American. He requested to come in and gave us instructions to take just a few items we needed to be interrogated. We were to go to the Rizal Stadium in Manila. This is where they had the interrogation. And the Japanese sentries were gathering up all American citizens and allies. So there were many British and Australians and from Rizal Stadium, they took us to the University of Santo Tomas. It was one of the oldest Universities. So the classrooms became our lodging. All the time, we were being told it would just be temporary.

Ms. Roberts: Were you able to keep your apartment thinking you would go back?

Ms. Morgan: At first we were able because we still had our belongings. Only later on we were able to ask some friends to pack up and to release the apartment. We didn't know anybody from the outside, so we were kind of strangers. Many of the people that were interned were business men. We had them from all walks of life. We had them in the ministry, in mining, engineers, teachers that had lived there and their children had been born there. They were more familiar. We were kind of a different breed. We didn't know anybody.

Ms. Roberts: At this time did Santo Tomas have military internees?

Ms. Morgan: No, they did not. It was set up to be a civilian camp. But, in World War II, they did not have anything set up for military. If you remember history we had Army and Navy nurses that were on Corregidor. Because they were women and because there was no military prison camp for them, they put the nurses in our camp.

Ms. Roberts: That was very fortunate.

Ms. Morgan: Yes. At the beginning it was chaotic because we had no directives. I was eleven years old, and as time went by, we all realized that we would be there a longer time than just a couple of days for interrogation. We had no inclination as it was supposed to be just a couple of days for interrogation. They wanted to record everybody. The adults in the camp started to organize to have some type of sanity and someone to turn to. The classrooms were turned into bedrooms. The men were separated from the women even though they would be married. When we were in another camp we were in they were allowed to be together, but in Santo Tomas they were not. In Santo Tomas, they had the Main building, the Gymnasium, and the Education building which were heavy built structures. Then in the back of these buildings, which we called an Annex, was a building which was mainly to take care of the babies. Now remember, these are civilians, and we had brand new babies up to people seventy years old. So the range is not like the military where there was a window of ages, but because these are all civilians. We had babies born in the camp. We had one young man who lives in North Carolina who said I was a prison for forty-five days before I was born. His Mama was carrying him and his Daddy was military. The sad part of this, he never got to meet his Daddy because he was on one of the hell ships that were going to Japan and was bombed.

The civilian camp was so complex because of the age.

Ms. Roberts: But the organization of the camp did try to put young families together and the older people together?

Ms. Morgan: Not necessarily. They divided by gender, but if you had a tiny baby they tried to accommodate you back there in the Annex. That way you might have special food or a special diet to accommodate the babies. I'm not quite sure how young they were or whether they were toddlers on down.

Ms. Roberts: How long were you at Santo Tomas?

Ms. Morgan: I spent approximately thirty-eight months in two internment camps. I spent two years in Santo Tomas and then the last year I was transferred to another camp outside of Manila in the agricultural area. There is a village called Los Banos. The last year of the war I was liberated from Los Banos by the 11th Airborne. Santo Tomas was liberated by the 1st Cavalry.

Ms. Roberts: Now during your two years at Santo Tomas you mentioned that they had organized some of the leaders. Did that work well? Did that give you someone you could turn to?

Ms. Morgan: We are called internees and our Government has not deemed us Prisoners of War, even though we were taken prisoners during war time. But our status was civilian. Where the military POWs apply through the Veteran's Administration for benefits, we go through the Department of Labor. I can't explain to you why. So for me to make a claim I go through the Department of Labor. There have been others that the time during internment was really, really hazardous. We are all different. But because of my Chinese background and my diet in China, my mainstay was rice. So when I was in the internment camp, my mainstay was rice. So therefore I survived better than the ones who were not accustomed to that diet.

Ms. Roberts: What was your day like? Were they able to organize classes for the students?

Ms. Morgan: Yes, they were. In fact, just for the short time I was outside of the camp, between the time of November and January of '41 and '42, I did start school outside of camp in Manila, H. A. Bordner School. My principal was Mr. Lauteenhiser, and he was interned in Santo Tomas, so when we started school in Santo Tomas he

was my principal there. That was excellent. There was continuity. So that the internees did not have to deal with the Japanese. We had different levels of officers. Each sleeping room had what we called a Monitor. Then we had a higher up officer that dealt with the Commandant. And then information is filtered down to the room Monitor and the room Monitor gave us what information needed to be passed down to us.

Ms. Roberts: How many people would be in a room?

Ms. Morgan: I remember two rooms I slept in. The first few nights we slept on school chairs. These school chairs had slats. And in the tropics the mosquitoes are bad and I remember trying to lie in these chairs, and the mosquitoes would eat between the slats. Later on we were able to get mosquito nets and then we graduated to a mattress on the floor. That's when they started to organize. I truly believe that the biggest help we had was from the Red Cross. I'm trying to think, there may be approximately fifteen to twenty in each room. I was eleven years old and all of this is foreign to me. What is a war? When I was in China I remember the Japanese set up the barbed wire in my hometown of Tientsin. I could not go see my Grandmother and we were isolated. They blocked off different streets so we could not travel. So I had already had a taste of war, but still too young to realize the full concept of war. As a youngster I really had an advantage because if I was unhappy or disturbed, I would go to an adult. An adult could calm me, but not necessarily tell me the whole truth. That's a natural comfort. You would comfort your children with the best way you know how, and the burden is on you not on the children. You don't want to pass that burden to your children.

Ms. Roberts: So you had fairly decent school work, and the food was provided by the captors?

Ms. Morgan: Yes, and as I mentioned, some of the people had outside help. So in the early days of the internment, many had housekeepers and friends and Filipinos who would bring food from the outside and line it up outside the gate. The recipients could then go pick it up. This went on for a while. Some of our people that were over there at the beginning, they had businesses and had money, and the Japanese

allowed the food to be brought in, or bought, from the Filipinos to supplement what was furnished to us by the Japanese.

Ms. Roberts: Would people share?

Ms. Morgan: We didn't know anybody so we had to depend solely on what the Japanese provided. I don't remember sharing from others, but again the food was sufficient at the beginning.

We organized sports, schools, and some people who were entertainers in their outside lives. So we even had music which they allowed. I remember one of the floor shows, we all sang *Old Suzanne* in different languages and I remember I sang mine in Chinese. All the kids sang in German, Polish and different other native languages. Actually, we were confined but since I was a child, I still didn't understand the whole concept. There was so much about the war that we were not given privy to that information, which was a good thing. We were able to continue with our childhood.

Ms. Roberts: How about clothing? Were you able to take enough clothes with you?

Ms. Morgan: Well being the tropics, you didn't need much. We went barefooted most of the time. During the length of time I was in the camp, I remember receiving what was called comfort kits. They were approximately sixty or seventy pounds and would come from a different Red Cross, not always from America. And in these comfort kits, we had some clothing, some toiletry article and some of the things I can relate to the military POWs, we had instant coffee that became so hard you had to chisel, because of the dampness. When you talk with the military they talk about KLIM, or milk spelled backwards. It's actually powdered milk. I remember eating that by the spoonfuls, and it would stick to the roof of your mouth.

Ms. Roberts: What were your bathing facilities?

Ms. Morgan: These are classrooms and I remember Santo Tomas was several stories high, and my room was on the second floor. At each corner there was a bathroom that was a public facility. You couldn't have any modesty with everyone in there. Now the first two years went by relatively okay, and then we could always tell when our troops were getting close because the Japanese would cut our rations. So they couldn't get to our military personnel, so they would take it out on the civilians in the camp.

So at the last year of the war the Japanese decided that they wanted to evacuate the internees to another location. By now I'm approximately thirteen years old, still not very up to date on wars. But I heard that one of the reasons was that our troops were getting close. They needed those heavy structures for their own purpose. They decided they would take us outside of Manila and to an agricultural area. The first group that went, they were supposed to be "able bodied" to go out and build barracks. There were no living quarters there so they transferred the group of people to build them. My oldest brother went with the first group. The second group, included the Baptist Missionary and me. Now we were out in the country. These were not heavy duty brick buildings. They were made out of nipa. Nipa is bamboo that is shaved real thin and braided into mats and then formed into building material. The rooms are smaller and the barracks were long with a central hallway. The central hallway is dirt. The rooms on both sides are elevated approximately six inches and the partitions for the rooms are elevated about three feet. So the partition was not all the way down to the floor. I tell you this because later in my story it has to do with the liberation. So if I was lying down on the floor in my room I can see the hallway. There are six of us in the room. All during this internment I did not have a mother so the ladies in the camp took care of me. At that time, they were not my favorite people.

Ms. Roberts: You were becoming a young lady at that time.

Ms. Morgan: But as I look back, I was a late bloomer. The ladies looked after me. There were three beds along one wall, and three beds along the other wall. I remember my sleeping buddies, on cots with straw mattresses and mosquito nets, but also bed bugs.

Ms. Roberts: Since you are now out of town and away from your friends, were they still able to bring in food?

Ms. Morgan: Yes. We had our own kitchen. John Blalock volunteered for wood cutting detail. We are in the country now and we are not using electricity to cook, but wood stoves. To get the wood to cook they needed volunteers to go outside the camp with a sentry guard. So whenever John Blalock was hunting for wood, if he saw anything that he thought would be edible, he would pick it and tie it to his belt. By now our rations are cut tremendously. This is our third year. John tried to supplement with whatever he could, such as the inside of a baby banana tree. It's very fibrous, but you could get some nutrition by chewing it and spitting it out. For survival, we discovered we could eat just about anything. He had to be very careful because some plants were poisonous.

The critters in the camp were disappearing. They offered some nutrition. So whatever critters we could find, we ate. John Blalock had put up a kind of "lean-to". It was just a little shade where he had a little pot and if he found something to eat, he could start a little fire and cook. He always shared his food with me.

In the comfort kits, there were some corned beef and spam. The sad part was, many people thought there might be worse days than today and some died of malnutrition, with food under their beds. But it kept us going.

Ms. Roberts: How long were you at Los Banos?

Ms. Morgan: For a year which made over three years, actually thirty-eight months. I think short of twelve months at Los Banos. We might have been transferred there in May, '44 then we were liberated in February of '45. And remember, whenever our troops were getting closer, our rations would get cut.

Ms. Roberts: How could you tell our troops were getting closer?

Ms. Morgan: We could hear the planes. Even as a youngster, non-military, I was able to distinguish the engine. As today, you can tell that's a diesel truck or a gasoline truck. The difference is the engine, so we could identify the Japanese planes or the American planes. So that gave us hope.

Ms. Roberts: Please tell me about your liberation.

Ms. Morgan: By now, our camp is surrounded by a barbed wire fence. Actually, two sets of barbed wire. We had one going around the camp and in the corners we had Japanese sentries in what we called "pill boxes". Then we had another set of barbed wire fence and in between the two sets of wire, we called it "no man's land". If you are caught in between they would shoot your first and then ask questions. They were about sixteen feet, to accommodate anybody sneaking out. It could be done. We did have internees sneaking out during the night and then sneaking back in. The Japanese were doing roll call every night. By now there were no lights at night. They didn't want any lights shown. But every evening we would stand outside our rooms and be counted. Then in the morning they would count noses. The internees that were sneaking out, they would sneak out in the dark and then sneak back in before morning roll call. Some did not make it. The reason for going out was trying to reach the Filipino guerillas to let them know what is going on. By now many are dying of malnutrition. If you are familiar with the Pacific history in the tropics, there was a lot of berri berri due to lack of vitamins. You swell up and eventually water reaches your heart. Many people were dying of that and dysentery. We did have the nurses. When they transferred us to Los Banos, the Army nurses stayed at Santo Tomas. The Navy nurses went with us to Los Banos. So we did have nurses.

At the early part of the war, the Japanese opted not to intern the priests, or missionaries. I was told that John Blalock, as a Baptist missionary, did not have to go in the camp. But we couldn't survive outside of the camp. So without knowing what the future held for us, he thought it would be safer if we stayed inside the camp. Later on, they did bring in all the priests and missionaries.

Ms. Roberts: Were they able to bring any food with them?

Ms. Morgan: The priest and the nuns had a separate location. There was a gate there, and later they opened the gate and allowed us to mingle. For what reason, I'm not sure except for perhaps it was because they were new coming in.

I remember going to school, and one of the things that I remember, they didn't allow us to study geography in the camp. This was confirmed for me as I talk to older people who were more aware. And there was another subject, I believe history, but we were not taught that. In Los Banos, we no longer had school. From then on, everything just became chaotic and deteriorating, people were dying, and we can no longer get food from the outside. We only had what was given to us by the Japanese. We did have gardens in the camp. They told us that if we wanted to work in the garden they would give us an extra little tin can of rice. It was about the size of a can of potted meat. The garden supplied to the main kitchen. So six hours a day, I would sit on a stool and weed in the garden. I made myself a promise that I would never work in a garden again. So today, I don't work in the garden.

Ms. Roberts: Now how did you know liberation was coming?

Ms. Morgan: Rumors. When you are in a prison camp, and whether you are military or civilian, you live on rumors. We believed all the rumors. Remember I told you we had people escaping, and when they would come in, the information would filter down. We collected recipes for the time when we got out. And we knew from the sounds of the planes, from the roll calls, the depreciation and ration of food, that our time was getting close. All these things added up. We also heard a rumor that they had trenches set up around the camp and were to have been killed. I told you earlier I participated in a History Channel documentary several years ago. During this time, I met one of the 11th Airborne Recon. I have very little knowledge of the military reconnaissance, so I learned from the interview of Mr. Terry Santos that recon units go in ahead of time to make sure everything goes according to plans.

So, one morning we get outside for roll call. There were these engines and the planes and we knew they were not Japanese. There is a book, *Rescue at Dawn*, about the Los Banos raid. Now, the room I'm in there are six of us, five ladies and me. So they were all my mothers. We were out there and we heard these engines, we looked up and saw specks coming down...specks. Then those specks turned out to be paratroopers. It was spectacular. They landed in front of the camp and Filipino guerillas came from the back.

They were called angels, as we saw angels coming down from the sky. I told you about the people who were escaping. They were meeting with the Filipino guerillas. And the story went that the military had to coordinate this real fast and they literally threw things together..

Ms. Roberts: Possibly because the recons saw the trenches?

Ms. Morgan: Exactly. Evidently they knew that time was short. I've been told that General Collin Powell used this liberation as a textbook teaching, because when I tell you about it, it's absolutely amazing.

So here come these Filipino guerillas and the 11th Airborne. Now the Japanese are very callisthenic minded, and they left their firearms in the barracks. So they were in their g-strings doing exercises. So when all this shooting commenced, the ladies, my Mothers, said...Sally get under the bed. So I did and they put mattresses around me to protect me. I stayed under the bed and all this commotion was going on outside. I told you earlier that the partition in the room only went part down. From under the bed I can see, and I looked out and saw paratrooper boots. It was the most beautiful sight you can ever imagine.

Ms. Roberts: Were they able to capture or kill the Japanese?

Ms. Morgan: They were able to capture. Now remember we are still behind enemy lines. The troopers came through the barracks and said only take what you have on you. Do not try to pack anything, and go to the front of the camp. The internees were so happy to see them they wouldn't let go of them. The story went that they had to

start burning the barracks to get the people to leave. The internees never thought about their own safety, all they thought about were these were our soldiers and I'm safe. But they had to get us out and now. So they got us to the front. There is a lake out there called Laguna de Bay, a body of water outside the camp. Here comes these heavy duty amphibian tanks and they plowed down the barbed wire and the shrubs. The back side dropped down and had the women and children load into them.

Ms. Roberts: Where did they take you?

Ms. Morgan: They took us across this body of water to a civilian Philippine prison, New Bilibid. There is another Bilibid that the military are familiar with, but this is New Bilibid. Now, we are outside of Manila. There is an old Bilibid and a new Bilibid. It's a civilian prison. They took us to the town of Muntinlupa. I didn't know where my brothers or John Blalock was but I was with the ladies that looked after me. All this time we had these soldiers with guns on top of the amphibian tractors. We are in the tropics and surrounded by all of these shrubs with shooting going on. Read Psalm 66: v. 12. I can't quote it directly but it says that thou hast caused men to ride over our heads, and put us across a body of water and brought us to safety. That described the liberation. How did they know there would be men flying over our heads. That is awesome.

Well, it took all day as the tanks had to come back and forth. There were two thousand four hundred of us and some babies. At the last camp, the men and women were together and you know nature is nature and we were still having babies. My life has so evolved surrounded by our military. I am not ashamed of my love for this country. I love this country. I do not apologize for my love of the military, past and present. They are so integral in my life. My Daddy was military, my husband, who was an atomic bomb victim who died of a residual of radiation, was in the Navy. I was liberated by the 11th Airborne, 5th Air Force flew the plane, the amphibian tractors took us to the New Bilibid prison, 21st Evacuation Hospital set up and gave us our first meal, and the USS E. W. Eberle troop transport ship brought us to this country.

Ms. Roberts: Right after you were rescued they put you on the ships to come to America?

Ms. Morgan: Not directly. We had to stay in this New Bilibid prison to build us up until we were strong enough. The 21st Evacuation Hospital fed us our meals.

Ms. Roberts: Now you came by ship to America?

Ms. Morgan: This was my first time in America.

Now, as I mentioned, we stay in New Bilibid prison for R & R. We were there from February, March and April. Maybe even two months I was liberated on February 23rd. I landed in San Pedro, California on May 2, 1945. Maybe we were three weeks on water. All these branches of the military, I've had the opportunity to go to their reunions. I've met my liberators. I've gone to Indiana for the 21st Evacuation Hospital and met the fellows who cooked my meal for me. I went to the 5th Air Force and met the fellow who flew the airplane. And last but not least, the Coast Guard who were with the USS Eberle that took us to San Pedro. Some came on a hospital ship and some were flown home. John Blalock was flown home early. His Mom and Dad lived in Concord, California, so he came to this country ahead to find us a place to live. We were three youngsters from a different culture.

Ms. Roberts: So you did meet with your brothers at the rehabilitation site?

Ms. Morgan: Yes, and also John Blalock. My oldest brother decided to stay in Los Angeles, so by now he is old enough, about 19. Then Jackie and I went on to Concord, California. In my early years I lived with missionaries in their homes. I probably was not an easy child to deal with because of my different culture and what I went through. I met my husband in California and married him in 1949, and we have four children and seven grandchildren and three great grandchildren. I'm very blessed and the Lord has blessed me with good health. I'm really happy with my volunteer work.

Ms. Roberts: What you are doing with the organization is priceless. We must tell the story and

And we appreciate very much your story. Thank you so much for taking the time to record it with us.

Transcribed by:

Evan and Virginia Roberts

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