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Interview with

BRIGADIER GENERAL
BEN BLAZ

October 8, 1994

Place of Interview: Kerrville, Texas

Interviewer: Ronald E. Marcello

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Admiral Nimitz Foundation

and

University of North Texas Oral History Collection

Brigadier General Ben Blaz

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Brigadier General Ben Blaz for the University of North Texas Oral History Program and the Admiral Nimitz Museum. I'm doing this interview on October 8, 1994, in Kerrville, Texas. I'm interviewing General Blaz in order to get his recollections and experiences while he was a youth on the island of Guam during the Japanese occupation there during World War II.

General Blaz, just to begin this interview, let me start by getting some biographical information. Tell me when you were born and where you were born.

Gen. Blaz I was born on February 14, Valentines's Day, in 1928 on the island of Guam of local ancestry. I'm a native of Guam. I'm a Chamorro, a son of Guam, as were my father and my grandfather. Historically, we're all from Guam. My name Blaz,

as may be obvious to you, is a Hispanic name. The reason for that is that the Spanish crown occupied Guam for over 300 years after [Ferdinand] Magellan discovered Guam in 1521. They Catholicized Guam. I'm a Roman Catholic as a result of it. But I look like I do because of the tremendous amount of intermarriage that took place, as I understand it. So we no longer claim to have a pure race on Guam, which is sad in a way, but it's also the reality of life over the years. People ask me why I look like I do if I'm from Guam, and that's because people from Guam look I do, that's why (laughter).

Marcello: Where were you born specifically on Guam? In one of the towns or in the countryside?

Blaz: There's a town in Guam, and it's the capital city. It's called Agaña, a Spanish name as a result of that occupation. But I was born in a naval hospital, a U. S. naval hospital, because after the Spanish-American War, Guam became a prize of war for the United States. The United States Navy took over, and the naval hierarchy became the government--the military government. So for the most part of my early life, I knew nothing but naval government. Everything happens in a naval hospital, so I was born at a naval hospital, although my father was not in the Navy at the time and we were not dependents.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what your father's occupation was.

Blaz: My father was actually a very unusual person. In a way, he was a customs officer for Guam, but, ironically, just a few minutes ago I met a fellow named Mr. Egger, who is one of the veterans here [at the Admiral Nimitz Museum Symposium], and he told me that my father used to work for him. I was fascinated by this, and, indeed, I can verify that he must have worked for him because one of the laments of my father in his life was that, although he joined the U. S. Navy for World War I, he was discharged at Charleston, South Carolina, for tuberculosis. He was hauled all the way up to Colorado Springs, Colorado, to a sanitarium up there to recover. He was operated on, and they took out part of his lung. He went to school up there and came back to Guam. As a result of this exposure to American education, he got a nice job. The job was that of being customs officer on Guam. But, as he told me later on in life, "You know, no matter how old I get, I always seem to have a Navy lieutenant as my boss." (Chuckle) When he was only twenty-five, the Navy lieutenant was thirty-five; and when my father he was forty-five his boss was still a Navy lieutenant, but younger than he. He smiled at me, and he said, "That's what happens. Why don't you become a Navy

lieutenant." (Laughter) So it turns out that one of the Navy lieutenants was this fellow Egger, whom I ran into, and I said, "Were you a lieutenant in Guam?" He said, "Yes." I said was it 1947?" He said, "Yes." I said, "That was the year before I left Guam to go to [University of] Notre Dame. My father had said, 'Once you graduate from Notre Dame, I want you to be Navy lieutenant!'" (Laughter) An interesting sideline, you know.

Marcello: Tell me a little bit about your education there on Guam.

Blaz: My education on Guam, actually, was a very limited education in a way because the Navy was running Guam. The education program was run by the Navy, and the superintendent of schools was, in fact, a Navy officer--another Navy lieutenant--except in the Navy at the time, the chaplains were the education officers. So whoever the chaplain was was the education officer, and if he was not Catholic, he was completely insensitive to the Catholicity of Guam. Being someone from Texas, I think you understand exactly what I'm trying to say. For instance, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception is a Catholic day of prayer. If the chaplain was not a Catholic, then there would not be a holiday and you would be unable to go to mass. So you've sinned because you didn't go to church.

Somehow, this had no impact on them whatsoever. We went to school when this guy wanted us to go us to go to school, regardless of the religious holidays.

In other words, the whole school system really was designed for the training of people, in my judgment, with the idea of becoming a civil servant or a tailor or something. It was not a prep school for college. It was just to learn to speak enough English so you could go and work for the naval government.

World War II really had impact around the world, and it was also felt <u>tremendously</u> and <u>dramatically</u> in Guam. All of a sudden, it was as though someone came in and said, "Hey, listen! We have a 150-watt bulb while you've been lighting with a 25-watt bulb. Let me show you this new bulb!" They "turned on" the whole damned world for us, you know--new vistas, new avenues, new opportunities. All of a sudden, the Navy guys and the Marine officers were <u>not</u> these rather hard-headed, very "you do what I do, by golly," guys. All of a sudden, the war introduced us to a different type of military person. A guy would say, "I'm a schoolteacher from New York, man. I'm just fighting here because I've got to." They were civilians, people who talked your language, people who talked to you and with you--not condescendingly and telling you what to do.

Marcello: In other words they talked <u>to</u> you instead of <u>at</u> you.

Blaz: Yes, right! They were glad to be there and glad to be liberating you and glad to see that they were doing something--not just liberating an island with a bunch of falling coconut trees, but rather with people in it. They had an entirely different culture, different language, and it was also a very revealing thing for the liberators. It was very revealing for the <u>liberatees</u> because now we saw another side of America that we never saw before. We thought that, you know, "You're brown, you're brown, and this is the way it is. Well, maybe when we get to Heaven, then somebody is going to explain it to me." (chuckle)

Marcello: So going back to your education, then, what you're saying is, they taught just enough English so that you could fit into, perhaps, the civil service system, or they taught you some sort of a trade, perhaps.

Blaz: That's right. Let me give you an idea of how <u>casual</u> it was in the Navy, especially in there. We were nominally in the seventh grade when the war came. I was in the seventh grade--thirteen years of age. But it came in December, 1941, so the schools were closed. The Japanese allowed no more schools. No more nothing. No English, nothing. Everything was Japanese. So here I was, you know. We have our own language, which makes it difficult because we were bilingual. We spoke the

Chammoro language, and we also had people who could speak Spanish. Ours is a language that borrows from Spanish. We count in Spanish--uno, dos, très, quatro, cingco--these are borrowed words from an occupation force. But now, all of a sudden, when we had learned Spanish, the Japanese said, "Forget the Spanish! Forget the English! Now you're going to learn Japanese!"

Marcello: At home what language was normally spoken?

Blaz: That was Chammoro. I mean, the idea of speaking English was something you didn't do. I mean, your mother didn't speak it as well as you did. Consequently you didn't, either. So we spoke some Chammoro, and we literally just forgot all about English in the period 1941 through 1944.

Marcello: Back to the school again, where did the Navy dependents go to school?

Blaz: In their own school, of course. They had an American school--fenced in like the Alamo. You know, the only basketball you get is whatever comes over the fence, and I remember, when I was a kid, that they played a lot of tennis in there. We didn't have any balls, so we just waited for a tennis ball to fly over, and we'd get it. And we didn't play tennis because, you know, that's a rich man's game, right? We played handball, but we didn't have any handballs like they did; so we'd

take this tennis ball, and we'd rub it against the sidewalk to rub off the fuzz, and then you could play with the bare ball. But then you'd have to find a house with a wall. So that's how we played it (laughter). It'd be such a hassle. Every once in a while we'd get a volleyball that would fly over. We'd just take it and run like hell before the Marines, who were patrolmen, got you.

But it wasn't at all like the segregation of blacks in America. But there was this very distinct...I mean, the American school kids weren't allowed to mix with us. There were all sorts of social reservations about it, but we didn't know any better. Yes, as you get older you start wondering, but I didn't really care, quite frankly. I was having so much fun with my own friends, and the Americans weren't very friendly.

Marcello: In general, what kind of a relationship existed before the war between the Americans and the Chammoro population?

Blaz: Well, the Americans were almost exclusively military people. I did not realize it until much later on when my education started, and I became more serious about it, that there was an attitudinal problem on their part. The American Navy is a very sophisticated group of people. There's a hierarchy that is just

unbelievable, and if they came out of Annapolis [United States Naval Academy], they were considered exclusive. There was an elite. There was an elitism. If your father was an admiral, you were going to be admiral, and that's all there was to it. You'd go overseas to serve your time, and you'd go to these little places. The British go to India, and the Americans go to Guam and the Philippines, you know (chuckle). So there is this attitude. I mean, you go overseas, and they classify you, you know, as Samoans and as Chammoros and Filipinos, and they have a various gradation as to which ones were more socially presentable; and we joined the Navy, and every one of us became a steward.

My father was a very extraordinary man. He joined the Navy, but he didn't become a steward because he was a boxer. He made a deal with a flag lieutenant. He said, "I'll tell you what. I'll box for you if I don't have to be a steward." So he made him a post inspector. So he got away with it. But he had to fight, literally fight, his way. He said, "When you stop boxing, you're going to go back to being a steward." So he never stopped boxing. He fought. He just couldn't stand the idea of serving someone. But that's the way it was.

I'll go ahead and finish talking about my education and whatever else you want to talk about. I

can tell you this. When we went back to school in 1945, after the occupation, we went back to the seventh grade. I couldn't have handled it. Remember now, it was 1941 when I was in the seventh grade. Now it's 1945--four years later--and I returned to the seventh grade. In May of 1945--I'll never forget it--I went to the seventh grade. In June of 1947, I was graduated from high school, and in August of 1947, I matriculated as a freshman at the University of Notre Dame.

Marcello: How did that come about? This jumping way ahead of what we were talking about.

Blaz: It came about because there was a tremendous amount of desire on the part of our people. They had met all these different kinds of people--all these new kinds of Marines, new kinds of sailors, new kinds of thinking. They said, "You've got to go to America." So our people decided, "We're going to have school twelve months out of the year and, if it's necessary, all day long. But we're going to speed up." So they gave us tests.

In the old days in the services, there was a thing called USAFI--United States Armed Forces Institute. And in order to keep the men and women--primarily the men--of the armed forces occupied, they had this enormous capacity at the time to condense--much like Reader's Digest would condense books--and they

condensed physics and chemistry and English to its most, <u>most</u> simple form. These came in little booklets that they gave to servicemen to put in their hip pockets. Well, my father traded a lot of things for them--coconuts, whatever he could--(chuckle) to the servicemen to get these books. You'd just ask a serviceman, and he would give us a copy. So we had a whole stack of them, and we studied these things.

So, when I was taking the tests, I was passing these tests because I had this <u>tremendous</u> advantage. To understand math you don't really need to be an English major. So, anyway, I was with a group of people, and we were tested, and everytime we tested we would pass, and we would be promoted. It got to the point where I don't think we spent any time in the ninth grade. I think it was the seventh, the eighth--we skipped the ninth--and got to the tenth. We skipped the eleventh and got to the twelvth grade. But the payback was later on at Notre Dame when I showed up, and I said, "I'm here. Let me in school." The registrar wanted to see my transcript. I said, "What is a transcript?" (Laughter) He said, "Oh! Ah! Well, you get one and send it to me!" We wrote a letter, and they said, "Send them!" And the bishop wrote a letter to the president of the university, whom he knew. He said, "We've got a problem." And I remember it so

well. His name was Thornton--Father Thornton from Alabama. He said, "Son, you came here with no transcripts. You didn't go to an accredited high school. The State of Indiana says you can't accept a person at the collegiate level without a high school diploma from an accredited high school. "You've got a problem!" (laughter)

Marcello: So you actually got, at least, to Notre Dame simply due to the connection between the...

Blaz: Oh, yes! Through the connection between these two people, but it was called a scholarship--a financial scholarship. It wasn't exactly an academic scholarship. It was a difficult time for me because Notre Dame wanted to help because of the war. I did not realize it, but Catholic schools, every one of them in the country, seems to be a prep school for Notre Dame. The freshman class that I joined was the crème de la crème. I had done okay on Guam, but I was now with the best in the country and I was ill-prepared.

But aside from that, there was one-third of my class that were veterans. They were fighter pilots, you know; they were bomber pilots; platoon commanders; company commanders. They had been through the war. They had seen Rome, had seen Berlin. You know, they had fought and were still wearing their military clothing. The only thing missing was the officer's

bars. They had taken to wearing their Navy khakis. They were serious, man. They had been denied schooling. They didn't come back to school to cheer for "Old Notre Dame" football. They came to get a degree in chemistry and engineering. I swear to you, Doctor, I was probably, in 1947, the least qualified person at the University of Notre Dame--out of 3,500 students--to be there. I was there on the good graces of a priest--another priest--who just felt sorry for me.

Marcello: Let's go back a bit. This brings us to the eve of the coming of World War II. As conditions between the United States and Japan obviously worsened, could you, even as a thirteen-year-old, detect any changes in the routine of the island at all? After all, it's a part of the Marianas, and Saipan is close by; Tinian is not too far away.

Blaz: I'll tell you what, Dr. Marcello, there was no way that I was able to detect anything. Guam is an insular community that was also insulated and isolated in many, many ways. There were no radio stations. The newspaper was whatever the Navy printed, and there was no communication with the outside world. And you didn't miss it because you had your own little world, and the world was tranquil or else serene. It was a very tranquil world, and, if you didn't know the way

the others lived, you really didn't miss it any.

When the war came [to Guam] on December 8, 1941 (because of the International Date Line), it was, as a matter of fact, ironically, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. When it came, it came suddenly. In fact, I was already outside the church. In the month before that, the British apparently were ferrying planes to Singapore, and the British logo or marker is like a target. You know, it's red. From a distance, it just looked red. So when the Japanese planes were flying around, it looked like British planes passing through just like they normally did, except they stopped (chuckle). So there was no inkling.

The war came, and there was a lot of expectation, but I think what probably hurt us more...it's very hard to respond to your question in the narrow parameters of education. I mean, I cannot tell you what education they let us have. I'll have to tell to you about what happened, and then somewhere in there you'll have to sort in the education problem.

So the invasion came, and we expected the Americans to return. We should have really known better because the only indication of war coming was when the Americans starting moving out their dependents in the months preceding this thing. My father said, "Something's happening." But we didn't know. We knew

about Japan: "Sure as hell Japan is not about to challenge the United States." But we also had heard that Paris was being overrun by the Germans and so on, so there were some indications of war. But the only indication was that the Americans started evacuating. Many of the sailors had really fallen in love with local girls, but the law of the Navy--the policy--was that, if you married local people and had some children, that sailor had to leave and not take his family. That was really something that bothered a lot of people--a lot of people--because they had deserted these families. In some instances, it resulted in some tragedies. In any case those were the indications of the winds of war.

Marcello: Describe the coming of the Japanese.

Blaz: Well, it's an awesome thing to describe it, in a way. I'll just say this to you. When the bombs started landing, it was just so shocking. My father, being a former Navy man, knew what a bomb was. So we just started picking up our things and started going to the "bushes," you know. Agaña--the city--was obviously going to be a target, or at least we thought it was.

But the other thing of it was that I came from a family of eight--four boys and four girls--and I was thirteen. I was the third child, so you can imagine how many more were younger than me. But here we were.

Within minutes we were already carrying whatever we could carry on our backs.

I remember going up the hill, but fortunately for us, my father owned some property in the "boonies" [jungle wilderness], I suppose is the way that whoever is listening to tape will understand, but it was really the "bushes" or the jungle. It was commonplace for people to own a little property there. We had these little chicken farms--chicken ranches. We'd go there on weekends to barbecue and that sort of thing. We had a little garden, which Americans called "victory gardens," but there it was just a "necessity garden." (chuckle) In any case, we were gathered there, and I remember going up, and we were hurrying and hurrying and hurrying as we were trying to flee, and I said, "Papa, what's going on?" He said, "We're at war!" This is in my mind, as well as I can get it. I looked at him and I said, "What is a war?" And his answer was, "Well, I'll tell what, when we have a lot of time, I'll tell you about it." And we did have a hell of a lot of time. We had almost three years of occupation by the Japanese.

So the coming of the Japanese was shocking. Remember, these were the guys that had had all the experience in Nanking and using the Chinese for bayonet practice. It was Japan that was trying to <u>shock</u>

America into submission, and their army was so bad. I mean, you knew you'd easily subdue the population. The the occupation itself is another story, but I'll wait for a question on that.

Marcello: So the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor on December 8, your time.

Blaz: December 8, yes.

Marcello: You mentioned that you came out of the church, and you saw these planes.

Blaz: Well, I saw them at a distance, yes. They were going through. I wasn't sure whose they were.

Marcello: What kind of resistance did the American forces put up when the Japanese came in? What do you recall from that?

Blaz: Oh, yes, I recall that. It was just a handful. I believe there were about 5,000 Japanese soldiers, and we had about 300 Marines. And there was maybe about a hundred more Japanese than the Marines could handle (laughter). There was sailors, too, and there was a Guam militia. It was a little militia that had training and some drills and whatnot, but no one had ever fired a weapon. Going to the rifle range was not an option. It was just something that was mostly for ceremonial purposes, like, they had Fiji troops in front of hotels--this sort of thing. So it was just nothing. They attempted a resistance, but it was so

obvious to the governor of Guam, who was a Navy captain, that any further resistance would just be futile. There were some casualties--some local casualties. A half-a-dozen people were killed defending the plaza, Plaza de España, a very interesting name. The governor surrendered and came out with a white flag. They were all in "skivvies" [underwear]. The Japanese had them remove all their clothes so that they wouldn't run away. That was a very embarrassing--a very humiliating sight. They gave up after a couple of days.

Marcello: In the meantime, where were you at that point?

Blaz: Well, we were already in the "bushes."

Marcello: You were still in the hills.

Blaz: Yes. We were all leaning against a banyan tree, just waiting for the Americans to come back, you know. And we all just had lean-tos against a coconut tree--whatever we could find--because, you know: "Surely, America is not going to stay away for long. They're going to get so upset this!" (Chuckle) But it didn't happen. It didn't happen.

Marcello: You mentioned something I'd like to pick up on. You mentioned that the Japanese, in essence, had disrobed the American troops or at least got them down to their " skivvies." Obviously, this was a deliberate attempt to humiliate the Americans before the local population.

Blaz: Oh, sure. Oh, sure. Of course. Of course, it was. Despite the fact that we had our difficulty with the American administrators, our people are very conservative people, very respectful people, very religious people. I think the elders were just shocked that anyone would do that. You just don't do that, and despite the fact that they maybe despised some of the American officers who were so arrogant, to see them humiliated like that was just so pointless. So it didn't make them any friends. But you weren't even thinking about that, quite frankly, at that time.

So what the Japanese did was, they went into the "bushes" and gathered us, and, coming onto the plaza, I witnessed this humiliating surrender. They brought them out. So you were brought out. If you were found in the "bushes," they were going to kill you, so we started marching down there. It's hard to describe in a short interview, quite frankly, some of the details, but I think you're getting the flavor of what was happening. This was happening fifty-two, fifty-three years ago, and I still have total recall because I was thirteen at the time--thirteen years old. I was at an impressionable age. I <u>really</u> was. This was just too much to forget. I said, "I've got to remember this for the rest of my life." So I did--I <u>do</u>.

Marcello: You mentioned that the local population was forced down

to the plaza to watch this humiliation. Did the word simply come to you that this was what you were supposed to do, or did Japanese troops, in your particular case, simply come up into the "boonies" and take you down there?

Blaz: Oh, yes, they came around. They had no intention of speaking English. Apparently, they couldn't. They didn't know how. So they brought with them some the people from the northern Marianas, which included Saipan and Tinian. All these things that we were hearing at the [Admiral Nimitz Museum] Symposium about Saipan and whatnot, you have to understand that for Guam [the American invasion of Guam] it was the liberation of Guam, but for Saipan it was the capture of Saipan because they weren't being liberated--they were Japanese nationals. But they were my people ethnically.

What people don't understand when they talk about that part of the world is that the Marianas chain is populated by one people--one people--called the Chamarros. These people speak the same language, and at one time we all belonged to the same flag. We were all under the Spanish. The Marianas is named after Queen Maria Ana of Spain. I think it's two words. They put the two names, Maria and Ana, together, and they called it the Marianas or Mariana Islands. So we

were all together, and we were all administered by Spain.

But in the course of time, the islands changed hands, and Spain sold some islands. Anyway, Guam became separated from this whole chain by itself. The other part belonged to Germany for the longest time. But because Japan sided with the Allies in World War I, it was awarded the Marianas (less Guam) as a result of Germany's defeat, and these islands were known as the Mandated Islands.

So when the Japanese came to Guam, what they did was, they brought with them Chamorros from Saipan who spoke Chamorro and Japanese. Historically and biblically it has always been shown that one of the worst persons you can have is one of your own who collaborates with the enemy.

[Tape 1, Side 2]

We could tell from their names--Guerrero, De La Cruz, Camacho. I mean, they were all the same names as ours, and they spoke the same language, but they came down, and they'd say, "Are you a cousin of [So-and-So] from way back?" Well, they didn't act like cousins. Some of them acted like criminals--actually like criminals.

Marcello: When the Japanese came in, did they...

Blaz: I'm getting you interested in this project, aren't I (laughter)?

Marcello: When the Japanese came in, did they ladle out any of this business about "Asia for Asians" and that you were to consider them your liberators and all this sort of thing?

Blaz: Oh, yes! It was propaganda of the highest order, and we weren't used to that. It was called the...

Marcello: Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere.

Blaz: Sure. We went about pretending we really belonged to the same race, that we were brown and therefore we should find that the Americans have had it too good for too long. We went through all that, but nobody believed that. Whether you liked the Americans or not, because of the arrogance of some of the military, the truth of the matter is that when you hurt, an American will kneel down and say, "Why are you crying?" I mean, they're kind. I just can't tell you how much that meant to us to...the elders didn't like the idea that we had to go to school and had to submit to certain things. But the truth is that an American individual--on an individual basis--when you say, "Hey, listen. I need your help," he'll say, "What can I do for you?" So there's this kindness that you notice about them. And even moreso, by the way, from those who came as liberators. When we get to that point, I'll tell you some stories that are really remarkable and that make you realize that an American really is an extraordinary

person that's a composite of so many cultures. His name might be Costello, but he's probably got Irish blood in him, you know (chuckle). You know what I mean?

Marcello: Yes.

Blaz: Or his name might be Blaz, but he probably has some German blood in him. In other words, what has happened in our country, this is the way that we have turned out as a country of immigrants. Really, what we see is some <u>really</u> remarkable preservation of the greatest genes, it seems to me. Usually, the best of everybody comes out as an individual, so your name may be O'Malley and you look like a Japanese, but you're an American. So what I'm saying to you, I suppose, is that there was nothing the Japanese could do that could persuade us.

They were <u>brutal</u>. If you didn't answer a question properly, they'd slap you. I'm a fairly big person physically, and I was almost this big when I was thirteen. One of my most humiliating experiences was when a Japanese soldier told me to go get him a box so he could stand on it and be tall enough so he could slap me (chuckle). That's pretty low, and you stand there. Their favorite punishment was to slap you in the face.

Marcello: Did you notice, however, that corporal punishment was a

way of life in the Japanese army, also?

Blaz: Oh, yes, sure. Of course, yes, yes. They had run amok in China, where the Rape of Nanking and some of the other places were <u>remarkably</u> tortuous, and indecent acts of inhumanity took place, you know, against women and children. This was the same. They came out of the same army, and now they came into the islands, you see, though they were trying to tell us they were doing it for our own good. It was pretty hard to swallow that. So nobody swallowed that. There was an article that was written several years after the war. There were no Quislings [collaborators so-named for a man who collaborated with the Germans in Norway during World War II] on Guam because there weren't any. There were no Quislings on Guam. Only educators like you will know what a Quisling was (chuckle).

Marcello: Were there only Japanese army troops on Guam, or did they bring in navy personnel or air force people and so on?

Blaz: That's a good question. There wasn't any air force personnel, to speak of, at the beginning, but the army finally left and was replaced by the navy, and, I'll tell you, the difference was unmeasurable. Basically they were attuned to trying to establish some kind of a structure, some kind of an infrastructure as well. And they <u>really</u> were decent. They seemed to be along the

lines of the British civil service system. They tried to recruit people, you know. They weren't successful in converting anybody, but they were much more decent. They were more like civil affairs-type people as contrasted to military-type people. It looked like they might have been an occupation force that had been trained somewhere to say, "Hey, listen, if we don't inoculate these people and they contract a disease, it's going to kill us as well." So I think they were doing it for their own preservation as well as ours. They had quite a number of troops, and you don't want to have the locals pass on disease with them being your servant or being your gardener and you're going to get the same disease. But at least they went through the process. They established a hospital--the same hospital. The naval hospital became a Japanese naval hospital.

Marcello: How long did the Japanese army remain before it was replaced by the navy people.

Blaz: Oh, I couldn't give you exact time. It was maybe about six, seven months, and after that they must have had some function elsewhere.

Marcello: How did life change for you and you family when the Japanese came?

Blaz: Well, this is going to surprise you. My answer is going to surprise you, young man. I'll tell you why

it's going to surprise you. It's going to surprise you because, actually, it was not a bad life for me. I wasn't going to school, and we were out in the "boonies," and you could actually isolate yourself. Guam only had 25,000 people, and it's a fairly large island and has a lot of jungle. We had some property--a lot of people had property--so you just went out and did your own thing.

Now the problem was that the Japanese had so many people to feed, and they started assessing you some food [in lieu of collecting taxes]. I mean, it was kind of like the old days. So they came up and said, "Give us part of your harvest!" But we solved that, too, because the jungle was so thick. So what we did was have a little plot up front, and then you'd go to the "boonies," and you'd have a little vegetable garden, a little chicken coop. So you'd have your own little supplies growing in the back, and they couldn't find it. If the Japanese couldn't get to it in a vehicle or on a horse, he's not going to get to it because he feared the jungle. Some of them didn't come out when they went into the jungle (chuckle). So that's how we solved our little problem.

Marcello: So you actually left Agaña and then went back into the "boonies."

Blaz: Yes, we did leave Agaña. Yes, we went back into the

"boonies" on the farm, and we farmed. We went right down, you know, to the good earth, and we made friends with the jungle. Guam is a very fertile land--very productive--and my father was aware of this from his own experience. So I learned how to use a <u>metate</u>. It is a little like a mortar and pestle, and you just grind corn with it. We'd do the same thing. We made tortillas. We ground corn, and we boiled it, and then we'd just make tortillas.

Marcello: Spanish heritage, I guess.

Blaz: But it was a lifesaver for us because we went back to the good earth. Rice was our staple at the time.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what other crops you grew.

Blaz: Japan was the one bringing in the rice. But Japan had better ideas with what to do with their own rice for their own troops, so we had to supplement the rice with corn. So we ate a lot of tortillas. That's what we ate primarily, was corn tortillas.

Marcello: So, generally speaking, as you look back, was the family eating fairly well?

Blaz: Well, we were fairly healthy in that we had no excess food to eat (chuckle), no fat to eat. We were almost <u>literally</u> vegetarians, and we had a lot of exercise in working on the farm.

Starvation was not a problem, and I'll tell you why. If you went into the outskirts of San Antonio,

and you went to search in the brush, you'll have a hell of a time finding fruits or other things to eat. If you went into the jungle of Guam, it's kind of like going to a supermarket. The jungle produces and yields and offers and hoards an enormous amount of food. But the most dominant thing on Guam for survival was the coconut tree. The coconut tree is probably one of the most underestimated, underappreciated, and the most wonderful thing.

Let me tell you what you can get from a coconut tree for survival. If you're talking about building a house, then you cut the tree, and you use the tree trunk for the piling. If you're talking about a roof, then you take its leaves, and you weave them and put them on top. If you're talking about something to eat, you can crack the coconut, and there's the pulp there. If you're talking about something to drink, you can drink the milk inside of it. You can take one of the palm fronds, and you tie it up on the outside, and you cut the tip of it, and you catch the sap. If you catch the sap, it is so sweet that you can boil it and make syrup. If you put a little bit at the bottom of the container to contaminate it and start fermenting it, you can get a drink called "tuba," which is slightly intoxicating. If you wait long enough, you can make vinegar out of it. Now going back to the meat of the

coconut, you can take it and grind it, and then you can sqeeze it and boil it and get oil out of it. So what do you do? You get oil for cooking; you get oil for lighting. You get syrup. You get the feed for the chickens because that's what they eat--the coconut. You get roofing. You get a drink. And you get the husks. The husk of the coconut, if you cut a coconut, you can burn it slowly, and it chases away the mosquitoes that eat on the mango trees--the flowers--so they can bloom. Then you take the coconut shell itself, and that's what used to make a fire for cooking. It's an astonishingly versatile plant.

So you don't starve in a situation like that, but you've got to know how to handle it. You've got to know how get to it. You've got to know how to handle it. If I gave you a coconut right now, you're going to starve to death before you can get to the damned coconut itself because you can't husk [open] it with your teeth. And I don't care what they say; you have to husk it. The way you husk it is that you take a piece of wood, and then you make, like, a little pick, and you just stick it in there and just pry it open. But that's not the reason we're talking. I just want to tell you the reason there was no starvation. We weren't even <u>close</u> to starvation. The Japanese wouldn't eat that [coconuts], but <u>we</u> did. And then we

gathered the wild papayas; there were wild figs; there were wild melons and so on and so forth like that. Many people who couldn't stand the Japanese just went to the "bushes" and got themselves inside of a cave and stayed there until the war was over.

Marcello: Do you find out pretty early that the best way to avoid being hit, slapped, or beaten around is simply to avoid the Japanese whenever possible?

Blaz: Exactly! Precisely what my father and I did--and the rest of our family--was to just kind of avoid them. The Japanese went about their business, and we made our [food] quota.

I mentioned earlier at the [Admiral Nimitz Museum] Symposium that there were some very interesting human aspects to this thing that I must say to you. I am large fellow physically, comparatively speaking, for my people, and, as it turns out, even for other people. You know, I just came out that way. My father is a very short fellow. I don't know how it came out that way. In any case, because of that I was made a part of the labor battalions early. They judged you according to size, not according to your race.

Marcello: So you were drafted into a labor battalion?

Blaz: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, from the moment they came. I was thirteen, fourteen years old. So as a result, I was involved in a lot of things. One of things I was

involved in, which is very pertinent to this whole thing that's happening here at the [Admiral Nimitz Museum] Symposium, was listening to these guys--the aviators in the "[Great] Marianas Turkey Shoot," which was a very interesting thing--and how they came to Guam.

Well, what happened was, one of the big projects we had on Guam was to build an airfield for the Japanese. I was in that project, and we built this darned airfield, and we finished it. Just about the time we finished it, the Americans started bombing the damned thing (chuckle)! So it came to a point where we hated to see the Americans come because the Japanese were fixing it so their planes would have a place to land during the coming fight. But the Americans were bombing it, so no planes could land. Then the Japanese were using us to fill in the holes, you see! So "Spider" Webb...there's a very interesting guy named "Spider" Webb, who was an enlisted pilot during the war, and he made a remark that just kind of really had me going [Webb was a speaker at the Admiral Nimitz Museum Symposium]. I just couldn't believe that he would provide me with this little impetus to recall what happened. "Spider" said, "We were on a bombing raid to Guam because we knew they had all these airfields. I could swear to you that we bombed the

thing here, and the intelligence officer said, 'Guys, you've got to go back and bomb it again because it's still operating!'" I didn't know "Spider," but when I heard that, I said, "I want you to listen to me when I speak, because I'll tell you why you had to come back." I told him, "The Japanese built the airfield with all coolie labor." I mean, it was just picks and shovels and gunney-sacks. I didn't know they were called gunney-sacks until later on (chuckle). We had no equipment at all. It was just machetes. It was really hard labor, and under the intense heat. Anyway, they would just get several hundred of us at the edge of the airfield. We'd just hope, "If the Americans are going to bomb, bomb the runway, guys! And don't miss!" Because the working party was at the edge of the runway (laughter). So they took off, and, of course, we just rushed onto the field and filled the holes. So the next morning the intelligence flights--the reconnaissance planes--had taken pictures and gone back to the Lexington and the Hornet, and they'd say, "Hey, guys! What did you do yesterday?" And all these guys would claim they had (chuckle) destroyed the airfield. Their commanding officer would say, "What's the story? You told me you destroyed the airfield! You've got to go back!" So they went back, and so I told him, "'Spider,' I've been looking for you!"

(laughter)

Marcello: So you mentioned that you were drafted for this work battalion, for want of a better word. When would your day begin?

Blaz: Oh, the day began...it was really an awesome thing because, first of all, you had some chores at home, I mean, to survive. Your day began early, and it ended late. I would say right at the crack of dawn, you started. The airfield was a long way away, so they would select a leader--a leader in the village sense--and you were responsible for getting those people down there. So you would tell them what to do. I remember it very well because we would have to run. In order to do this, we had to run. There was no transportation; there was no vehicle; there was nothing. And it was a long way away. So what you did was, you'd get up in the morning, and you tried to help as much as you could with the farm chores. Then as soon as you could, you'd meet at the church. They called it a capilla, which is a little chapel. The significance of this thing is that we were going from village to village to the chapel, and then we'd pray and walk some more. I just did a TV spot on Guam a few months ago, and "The Little Chapels Along the Way" was the name of it because that's what we used to do. We were praying for our safety, but it was also a meeting place. So that as

soon as they gathered, there would be people from the next community waiting over there. We'd start with a half-dozen people, and we'd end up with about forty, fifty people--running to the place where we were supposed to work.

Marcello: So from where you lived to where this airfield was being built, approximately how far was it? Take a guess.

Blaz: Oh, about five, six, seven miles, something like that.

Marcello: But it was your responsibility to get there.

Blaz: To get there. Oh, yes (chuckle).

Marcello: Normally, what time would work begin in the morning?

Blaz: Well, we would just start probably about, I would say, around 8:00, 8:30, something like that. When you went depended on how active the Americans were in bombing it, you know. This is now toward the end of the war.

Marcello: But now getting back to the actual building of the field, you were in on the actual building of the field, too.

Blaz: Oh, yes, we built the field, actually. We built the field on almost a twenty-four-hour basis.

Marcello: Were you under supervision of the military while building the field?

Blaz: Oh, yes, the Japanese military. No question about that.

Marcello: Were they riding you hard, so to speak, to get that

thing finished?

Blaz: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. There was a war. The Japanese apparently knew that the Americans were going to come, and they obviously knew from experience--from 1942 through 1943 activities--that the Americans were looking for bases. They probably assumed that Guam would be one of those bases, so what they wanted to do was to have an airfield for themselves so they could meet this [challenge] because it was too far from the mainland. But the Americans wanted the airfield for themselves.

Marcello: What was the runway made from? Did you use coral?

Blaz: Coral. Coral is remarkably hard.

Marcello: Yes.

Blaz: As a matter of fact, people don't understand how to use it. If you take coral and you actually just pound it, in minutes you don't need much more than that, except that it gets slippery. But when you're in a wartime situation, it's just so a plane can have a landing path, so to speak, and that's all you need. And that's what we had. The Americans came and put some kind of a macadam [asphalt-like surface] or some kind of an asphalt top on it. That was later replaced by something else when the planes got heavier (chuckle).

Marcello: I'm assuming that the Japanese were obviously under a certain amount of pressure to get this airbase built.

Blaz: Yes, absolutely.

Marcello: So how is that pressure being felt by you, the workers?

Blaz: Oh, it was enormous pressure. They just push you, push you, push you, push you.

Marcello: Beatings?

Blaz: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes! If you didn't work, you'd get slapped. But they also knew that they couldn't afford to lose many casualties [among the workers] because, if you injured someone, then you had less manpower. It was kind of like on a slave [propelled] ship. You know, you cut off one of the oarsmen, and you've got yourself a problem (chuckle) with speed. So they were careful not to do that, but at the same time, we were also very much aware that they were also recruiting people for other places. For instance, we were building obstacles on the beaches. We were building up, like, what would amount to concertina wire [a variety of barbed wire] and whatnot. That was a very difficult job because you were doing it in the tide. You were doing it a low tide, and you had to rush like the devil to get it done before the high tide came. But they needed to see the high tide because the American Marines were going to pick the high tide in order to land, and they wanted to make sure that the American Marines didn't see these things. It's a very tricky thing. I didn't know all this until I worked on

it (laughter). So it was a lot better to work, actually, at the airfield than down on the beach because down there you were working with barbed wire. It was slippery; it was hot; and they were very mean down there, and so you behaved yourself. "Either you work here, or you are going work down there. Which one is your choice?" So you didn't have much choice.

Marcello: As you point out, they were very, very quick to use corporal punishment.

Blaz: Oh, yes. No question about it.

Marcello: Physical punishment was a way of life.

Blaz: Oh, yes. Absolutely. There were no other options. You did what they told you to do or...and, as eventually we found out, many of the people that were not cooperating were just simply beheaded. I mean, that's just all. So you had a very good reason to cooperate--it's a question of survival.

Marcello: What was the worst thing that happened to you physically at the hands of the Japanese? Can you remember? Either in terms of being humiliating or in terms of actually injuring you or hurting you.

Blaz: I think being humiliated was probably the most difficult thing for me.

Marcello: What made it humiliating? Is it the fact that you can't retaliate?

Blaz: Well, that plus the fact that the guy wanted to slap

me, and I had to provide him the platform (laughter).

Marcello: You had to get him a box so he could stand on the box and reach you (laughter).

Blaz: Yes, and I didn't know that he was doing that (laughter). I'll tell you, I wanted to learn Japanese, and to this day I still speak a little Japanese. I still sing Japanese songs--I still do--and I'm very kind to the Japanese. So I thought that maybe he was telling me these things because he knew I spoke Japanese. So, anyway, my "friend" [facetious comment] said, "Hey, yeah. You're getting up in the world!" I said, "Yeah, sure." He said, "Get me a box!" So I got the box. I got the box (chuckle). He said, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." I said, "You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome." He stood up on it. POW (laughter)! It was just so totally unexpected. I thought I was doing well. I was speaking Japanese a little bit, you know, but apparently he was just wanting to show me up in front of my friends. He said, "Hey, listen!" These guys know who the leader was, and he wanted to cut me down to size.

I was a threat to them. I towered over every Japanese soldier on Guam. Everytime they wanted to find me, I was easy to find. I towered over my people. I towered everyone. I mean, I just stood out there. And so that was humiliating.

A couple of other things happened. I'm not trying to be "Mr. Nice Guy" here, but I do watch the human reactions of people. It's just something that fascinates me as a study--how people react under certain conditions. There were two incidents that stand out in my mind. There was this one Japanese to whom we were teaching English. When he left to go to the front to fight the Marines, I was surprised at how I really felt for this guy, you know. I mean, I felt for him as a human being. I had gotten to know him when we were discussing and he was trying to learn how to speak English. My father said, "Okay, the only way we can survive is to be able to speak Japanese." I mean, that was the key to the lock. And this guy, who was in charge of the local thing, was a very nice fellow. He really had attended classes at the University of Southern California after the war [World War I], and he spoke English. So he came up to my father, after kind of sizing us up, and he said, "I want to speak English, but I don't want my people to know I'm learning this." And my father said, "I want my son to speak Japanese, and I don't want the Japanese to know he is learning it." So we made kind of a deal. So he taught me some Japanese, which I actually learned fairly well.

Marcello: Was he a navy person?

Blaz: Yes, he was. He was an ensign. When rumors that the Marines were landing went around, he came and he said, "I've got to go, and I can't come back anymore." He was dressed in his official regalia with this ridiculous...the sword was bigger than he was. I started laughing. And he said, "What are you laughing at?" I said, "I don't think you can fight in that." You get to a point where, as a human being, although he's the enemy...and my father was a die-hard Navy guy, so he wasn't enjoying this little conversation I was having with this guy. But this guy wasn't much older than I was. Besides, he was the one who had asked my father, "Why are we at war, anyway?" My father eventually suggested to him, "Well, you and I aren't at war, but my country is at war with your country. I'm for my country, and you're for your country. That's why we're at war." But I was a kid--I was a teenager--and I thought, "This is kind of silly." So when he left, it bothered me that I knew he was going to die.

As a matter of fact, later on--after the war--I asked my father to accompany me to the stockade. But, when they got the prisoners out, they had shaven all their heads, so they all looked the same (chuckle). There was no way to distinguish him. He had no mustache like he had and no nothing. And if I did recognize him, he didn't acknowledge it. But I did try

to find him just to see how he was doing.

The next thing that happened is something that occurred in coming back one evening from this excursion to the airfield in order build it. We were always dismissed at night so we could come back. So it was getting real, real late. We were running back, and let's just say it was probably about 9:00 at night, and it was in the "boonies." I was running, and, all of a sudden, I heard some noise, and I stopped. This guard in the village had run out of the bushes with his bayonet and had just missed me. To my utter surprise, he stuck it into a tree a few yards away. So, not thinking he was trying to get me (chuckle), I said in Japanese, "Can I help you?" (Laughter) So I helped him pull his bayonet out of the tree. He got it out, and he said to me, "What are you doing out?" I said to him, "Do you think I'm a criminal? Do you think I'm going to hurt you? And now you want to kill me?" He was almost more scared than I was. Like I say, it's hard to tell a Japanese's age. I mean, even he's forty or something, he sometimes looks like twenty. He was <u>so</u> tiny that he looked like a kid. And I was not much older, if older, and yet I was looking at this fellow like he was younger.

I said, "Come with me!" This was something I wished I hadn't done because my father would have

killed me. In the war, what you needed to do on Guam was to locate a cave. You'd go from the farm, and you'd have a little secret cave that you'd dig by hand so that, when you'd hear something coming, you'd just run to this cave and hide. So I went to the cave with this guy because, when my parents heard the commotion and the dogs barking, they went to the cave. We went to the farm, and there was nobody there. I said, "I know where they are. They're in the cave." My father said, "Who's there?" I said, "Me." He said, "Is someone with you?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Who is it?" And I said, "The guard." He said, "The <u>guard</u>!" And I said, "I think he's a <u>good</u> guard." (chuckle) And so my father lighted his coconut thing, and he went around to peer at the guard.

And I could swear to you that he cried. I really think what happened to this guy is that he probably thought that his family was probably in some cave somewhere just like us. And he just turned and bowed, and he left. I'm telling you this, and it sometimes irks the hell out of some Marines, you know. But it's part of my life. It's something that happened to me, and I <u>remember</u> that. Here I am, being a Marine--I even became Marine general, and I fought in Korea, fought in Vietnam.

That doesn't take away the fact that, on the human

level, at this time in my life...I was a teenager, and here was another teenager, and somehow we communicated. We didn't bond. We just communicated that it was of no value to him to kill me. It was of no value to kill anybody! We're not hurting anybody, and he's not hurting anybody, and so we decided to just leave it that way. And he left us. I'm sure that there's a thousand stories of Germans like that and whatnot. All I'm saying to you is that I didn't become a "peacenik" at that time in my life here. All I'm saying to you is that, for a guy like me, who's a military guy (chuckle), it's astonishing that one of the things that stands out in my life is this memory of this little thing. You asked me a question about what was the closest thing to being killed. Well, that was as close as I ever came to being killed. Yet, when I looked at the guy, even if he had a chance to do so, I don't think he would have.

Marcello: It sounds like you didn't have any spare time to have very much fun during this period.

Blaz: (Laughter) No way! Let me put it to you very quickly. There are people who dwell--for reasons of their own--on the miseries of life. They say, "Well, I had it tough!" I may have been very unkind to people who come and just lean on the Vietnam Memorial. In the forty-second year of their life, they're still in some

silly ol' fieldjacket. It's always obvious to me that they're using it as a crutch. Man is not made like that, Doctor. Man is made to survive, to think, and to overcome. I have seen people who just continue to brood and worry. But yet, all of a sudden, we have all these people just coming and sobbing because they have been shot at. Everything has changed for them, they say. Human beings, according to my understanding--I was a science major, and I think I have something to say about this--have received from the Good Lord the capacity to overcome, to forgive, to forget, and to adjust over time. I have great difficulty in understanding why people act like that.

[Tape 2, Side 1]

Marcello: The question that I'd asked before the tape had run out was, what did you do for entertainment or fun during this period, assuming that you had anytime to anything.

Blaz: Well, I didn't have any time, but what I do remember is that a lot people remember the war for all the bad things. I remember the war mostly for the good things, quite frankly. A long time ago, Ron, I made a decision--I made a conscious decision--that I wasn't going to have my brain cluttered with anguish and with memories of bad things. I want to remember the good things. And the good things are as follows: I remember

the soldiers that showed me the humanity of a person at war, but mostly I remember the time I spent with my father or my grandfather. We had so much time to talk. There was a lot of sitting on a log; there was a lot of talking; there was a lot of knowing how to do certain things. There was a lot of carving and making little things--making little hoes and making a little of [this]. I don't remember the first time we used carabaos out there. We used plows, and we used machetes. I mean, it's almost like being in South America, for example. It was just a jungle. I remember the first time we fell [cut a clearing in] a jungle. I mean, felling a jungle without a bulldozer is interesting (chuckle). Sometimes it is one canopy [reference to the number of levels of high foliage shading the jungle]. Then you get one with two canopies and so on. I mean, you've got to go up [high-top clear out the branches in order to farm beneath]. But, anyway, it's a pretty big one. So we had to fell a jungle to get half an acre of land [to farm] in these little bushes to hide from the Japanese. You burned this, and you had to be careful because they'd see the fire.

But I remember one time, when we'd finished this thing and we'd planted it--and it was a lot of work--that I was standing there sweating like hell. It

was hot, and Guam is humid. When you're in the middle of a little corner--this was the jungle--it can get really steamed up because there's no ventilation (chuckle). You'd cut a swath in the middle of the jungle--the Japanese forces, you know, didn't have any helicopters so they couldn't see you--and it's pretty humid there. I was just sweating, sweating, sweating, sweating. My father came up to me, and he said, "Why are you licking the sweat off of your lips?" And he said, "Welcome to manhood." And I said, "What are you talking about?" And in my language, he said--which I'll translate for you what he said in our language--"What you're tasting is the sweetness of the saltiness of sweat at the end of the day's toil." Said in my language, it is so poetically beautiful, and I've never forgotten it. I'll say it to you in my language [speaks in Chamorro]. "You're tasting the sweetness of the saltiness of sweat."

That was such a turning point in my life--I was probably thirteen-and-a-half, fourteen years of age--because it made me realize, I think, without realizing it at the time, that I was on the same level as my father. I was able to work; I was able to produce; and I was able to share in the Swiss Family Robinson-type thing, you know. I was providing. In the tradition of my people, I was the oldest son. The two persons older

than me were girls. I was the natural heir or the natural guy to assume the responsibility. It's just done that way, you know, if anything should happen to my father. But there was never a time before then where my father had in any way at all indicated that I had even come close to being ready. It was expected in your eighteenth summer, but I was only thirteen.

So due to the compression of time and the amount of time we spent working together, I learned more in the three years of the war about human relationships and the realities of life than I did in the thirty years that followed that academically. Oh, I learned chemistry, organic chemistry, physics, and all that. That's fine. But when it comes to dealing with people and understanding them, I think it [my experience during World War II] really has served me well. It has erased the bitterness that, I think, was in it [the war]. The memory of the war--of that period in which I was spending so much time with my father and my mother and sisters and brothers going through the jungle; getting your own water from the river and drinking it right out of the river, and so on and so forth--it just seems such a <u>beautiful</u> part of my life that I can see to this day.

You take this piece of bamboo--maybe twenty-feet long sections. You take a smaller bamboo, and you

punch in here [gesture] so that you can punch a hole through it, except for the last four sections. Then you put it on your shoulder, and you dump all the stuff in there, and you go on and fill it up with water, and you drag it just like Christ did going up the mountain. You dragged this thing, and you got up the hill, and you put it up against a coconut tree. Then, when you wanted water, you just tied a little rope in the back and rigged up a kind of little lever, and you pulled it up, and it poured water on the other side. It sounds so primitive, but in its primitiveness, I thought, was a chance for me to get to know the good earth.

I'm not trying to be overly philosophical about this, but I have drawn abundantly from it. Even in my own life, I didn't really do to shabbily in life, you know. I don't know if you know it, but I even ended up in the Congress for eight years (laughter). But that was no challenge, I'll tell you (laughter). The other day I was reading a survey grading the various professions. The one at the top is the military officer, and the one at the bottom is a congressman. I said to my wife, "As usual, I'm right in the damned middle!" (Laughter) Ah, yes.

I'll tell you this, my friend. I'm already closing this interview, and I want whoever is listening to this thing, whatever time of life it is, I want them

to hear this. I went to Notre Dame as probably the least qualified guy to go there. I went there because some priest sent me there. But because of the American students there, and the soldiers and sailors who came there, they lifted the standard. To this day, if you took a [look at the] U. S. News and World Report [survey] of 229 schools that were rated, Notre Dame is [rated] number twenty. And it's always been there. It's not known as an academic school in a sense because it's been so overwhelmed by its athletic department. But the truth of the matter is, it was outstanding in that day, also. In any case, I was forced to do well at Notre Dame because my surroundings were so damned good.

Then I went to the Marine Corps. In the Marine Corps, my people always were stewards, just like the blacks. I went in, and I said, "I don't want to be a steward." The Navy would have made me a steward, but I didn't go to the Navy. I went into the Marines, and I said to the guy, "I don't want to be a steward." He said, "Okay. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll send you to Officers Candidate School. If you can make it, we just won't tell anybody, okay?" And I said, "Is that the only way?" He said, "Yeah, that's the only way." He said, "If they find out you're from Guam, they'll just make you a steward in the Marine Corps."

And I said, "Well, okay." So I went and made the grade, and they commissioned me. All I wanted to do was to show the absurdity of the program that, just because I was born somewhere...if I had been born in California, I would have been all right, but I was born in Guam. So I became an officer. I became the first officer from Guam.

Marcello: Let me back up and ask you a couple of questions relative to the Japanese occupation. You mentioned that you had four sisters.

Blaz: Yes.

Marcello: And you were the third in line in the family?

Blaz: Yes.

Marcello: Were any of the two older ones girls?

Blaz: Yes. There were two older girls.

Marcello: How did they fare at the hands of the Japanese?

Blaz: They didn't fare well in the sense that there was a constant fear for women.

Marcello: Yes.

Blaz: There were thousands of soldiers. The Japanese realized early on the enormous influence of the Catholic faith and the potential for an uprising if they continued to molest them. One of the nice things--one of the decent things they did [vis-a-vis our women]--was that they imported their women from Korea. You've seen some very awesome...

Marcello: So-called "comfort women?"

Blaz: "Comfort women," yes. They imported them, and they left our women alone. But women didn't stop at that. They accepted being dressed more shabbily, and purposely did so, to make them look less attractive, which, to a woman--no matter where they are--is quite a sacrifice. But aside from that, they were also made to plant rice, so they did their share of the work. But the most fearful thing for a woman was being abused [raped] by a man, particularly by many soldiers, but we came to a resolution very early in the occupation, when there was a lot of problems with that. So I think the Japanese decided to end this: "Why risk an uprising here, when we can do this thing by just importing our women from Korea, the Philippines?"

Marcello: Now this brings us pretty close to the coming of the Americans. What happens when the invasion starts?

Blaz: That's when things had really gone to hell in a handbasket in a way because the Japanese had by this time herded us all into a concentration camp in the jungle. There were thousands of us, so they'd just find a little valley somewhere and just put us in the there and put the guards around it, and you'd just fend for yourself.

Marcello: I was going to ask you what provisions did they made for food or anything of that nature.

Blaz: Nothing! Nothing! No provisions for sanitation. Nothing at all. There was a river coming through there, and you can imagine what happened to the river. That was where you drew the water for washing, for cooking, and for bathroom purposes. It was just awful. But the same jungle that had served us continued to serve us well. We went farther south. The Japanese had a choice of either just keeping us and letting us starve to death or letting us go out into the jungle. So they kept the women in camp--your wife--and you'd go out and forage and get yourself some food for your family and come back. There were some surrounding farms that had to be vacated, so you just had to go pick up whatever you could. We were only there for about three months in the concentration camp, but it was so bad because it so unsanitary.

Marcello: Were there fatalities as a result of being in this camp?

Blaz: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. A lot of dysentery and stuff like that took people--old people. Old men, grandmothers, great-grandmothers were just dying on you because of that.

Then the Japanese started vacating the camps. The bad part about this is that they would be taking some of our people. I don't know how I managed this, but I was on one of these food forays--that's what I called

it--and I was gone when they came to my particular campsite, so I escaped being recruited to carry ammunition to the front. Well, we found out later, after the war, that those who went were actually killed--just beheaded.

We didn't know what was happening. There was a lot of noise. The Marines and the Army, I think, were on Guam seven days before we even had any of this news. There was no way--there was no communication with the outside world. The only thing we had known was what the Japanese were reducing the guards on us, almost on a daily basis.

Then one day--I was in the camp again on this particular day, and it was kind of a funny incident--they were all <u>gone</u>! All the guards were gone, but no one wanted to leave because the Japanese had told us earlier that anybody caught outside the camp would just be shot on the spot. My sister was telling me this--and I thought it was funny--and she said, "How were you all liberated?" In the meantime, I had run into Marines, myself, in the same neighborhood, and I was liberated early. I said, "You won't believe what happened. We were scared. There were hundreds of people." There were hundreds of people waiting, like, in a cattle car, but it was in the jungle. I said, "There were three Marines who came in--<u>three</u>." She

said, "Uno, dos, très. Très soldât." Then she said to me, "What did the guy say?" And I told her that he asked, "Are you American?" And I told him, "Yeah, man! We're Americans!" He said, "What are you doing here?" They looked funny because they had this new helmet. It wasn't the "basin" helmet of World War I that we had seen. But it was almost a German-looking helmet. Even then, it had kind of a curve around here [gesture], but it was below your neck, instead of a cocky Dick Powell and Jimmy [James] Cagney [reference to two popular World War II-era film actors in the movie "Fighting 69th"] helmet. (laughter)

So my sister Maria said, "What are you guys doing here?" They said, "We've come to liberate you!" My sister said, "All three of you?" And the guy said, "Yep! One, two, three!" And this guy said, "Anybody want to go?" And she said, "I've never seen 4,000 people line up so quickly." She said it happened in something like thirty seconds that they were lined up. (Laughter) This was a trip they weren't going to miss!

Marcello: Your whole family was going was all together then?

Blaz: Oh, yes, everybody was together except me. Then she said, "You have no idea!" As I say, they exited the valley. She said, "They realized why these guys were so cocky and so brave. There were just hundreds of Marines with rifles pointing down into the valley in

case Japanese attacked." So they had just sent these three guys in there: "Hi, guys. We've come to liberate you." And it must have been a funny sight.

I like telling that because what I want to tell you about the liberation is...I mentioned earlier about the difference between the American of the military administration--the administrators were civil servants--and the American of World War II, who was driven by this enormous compulsion to do right for the world. All of the women were back home in the war effort, and these guys were all fighting, having gone through island-to-island and finding nothing but soldiers and whatnot. Finally, they came upon an island that had people on it, and people who spoke their language and were nationals of the United States.

The response to them...I've always said that one of the most remarkable things about the liberation was that, if this can be believed, there were instances in which I honestly think that the liberators were happier than we were at being liberated. They were so proud and so glad to be doing something that gave some sanity to their casualties. They were giving their lives and actually saving lives instead of just a damned beachhead like Peleliu, that nobody used later on, after all.

I think, if you were to to ask me what was the

most memorable thing about the island's liberation, it was the sight of the United States Marines--just fighting like hell--and, as big as I was, they were picking me up and throwing me in the air as though I was just a kid. They were so damned glad. I sat down, and I thought, "Why is this happening?" My father said of the Americans, "They act that way, you know." (laughter)

From then on, it was just like the atomic bomb--it seemed that a new world had been created. Not only were we liberated, we were also introduced were to an entirely new dimension of the American form of democracy. All of a sudden, we were talking about no more military government [self-government], which we eventually got. All of a sudden, there was talk of citizenship, which we eventually got. All of a sudden, we were talking about going to schools, and I was one of the first guys [who loaded] in the boat to go (laughter).

Marcello: To bring this interview to a close, General Blaz...

Blaz: I thought we had closed already (laughter).

Marcello: ...I just want to get a couple of things on the record.

Blaz: Sure, sure.

Marcello: You go to Notre Dame, and, of course, you graduated. After graduation from Notre Dame, is that when you went into the Marine Corps?

Blaz: I actually was going into the Marine Corps at the time I was still at Notre Dame. I was in ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps].

Marcello: Okay.

Blaz: Then I got commissioned. That commission depended upon my receipt of a baccalaureate degree.

Marcello: And you went in the Marine Corps when?

Blaz: In 1951.

Marcello: And you stayed until?

Blaz: Until 1980, twenty-nine years later.

Marcello: And you retired from the Marine Corps as a...

Blaz: Brigadier general.

Marcello: ...brigadier general.

Blaz: And then I went out and ran for Congress, and I went to Congress. (Chuckle) I did it only because, after I got out of the Marine Corps, it was kind of like [the line in] that movie, "What do I do now?" [Reference a line in the Robert Redford film, "The Candidate."] (laughter)

I'd like to make the point now, and I do it with some sense of pride--that I'm am very proud to have carried both the pen and the sword. And I'll tell you this--the pen is bloodier that the sword. The pen is bloodier than the sword. The things that we did in Washington--things that members of Congress do in committee meeting battles, without the slightest idea

of what the hell they're doing--makes it a bloody thing. I have written about this, and I'll put it here for the sake of whoever is listening. One of the things that I wish could happen, which <u>never</u> will, is this: I hope that it's possible for me to go to the Capitol and rearrange the physical setup of the building so that you cannot enter the Capitol as a Senator or as a Congressman to go to the floor unless you go through a certain passage. And in this passage, there is a curve. There is a glass on it, and you can't make this turn unless you look up. And when you look up, you see the crosses at Arlington Cemetery to remind you of the price you pay for the stupidity and the folly that you indulge as a Congressman. And then you turn around, and you sit down there. The crosses represent a lot of the men and women who died in a war, but also the people who starved to death, who died of cancer. We do stupid things.

I'm telling you this. It may be twenty, thirty years before anybody listens to this tape, but I'll tell you this--let me make an observation. In 1994, there was a fellow who spent almost thirty years as a soldier--a Marine--and almost ten years as a politician. I've never been able to understand why it is that we have a Congress that can enact laws and always include exceptions for themselves. I cannot

even imagine that the Founding Fathers really had that in mind. Somebody interpreted this thing somewhere along the line. But it turned my stomach, all the time I was in the Congress, that we would be able to sit there and do these things. I said, "Well, wait a minute! I don't know!" They said, "Don't worry about it! It doesn't apply to us!" And it was said almost cavalierly, as though, "Hey, we're special!" I thought of <u>all</u> the places we ought to be, that would be the place that we would be the least special, you know. Yet, it happens. That's why, when people ask me how I should be introduced...and, you know, as a Congressman, you can be introduced as "Congressman" for the [rest of your] life. I would say, "Don't introduce me as 'Congressman.' Just say 'Brigadier General Ben Blaz, United States Marine Corps.' That's what I want to remembered as." That's all: "Ben Blaz, United States Marine Corps."

Marcello: Okay, I think that's a pretty good place to end this interview, General. Once again, I want to thank you for your help and your time. You've said a lot of interesting things, and you put in a great deal of feeling, and that's important.

Blaz: Oh, I probably messed up your entire program.

Marcello: Not at all (chuckle).

Blaz: But, you see, it may not mean anything right now, but I

think later on, when someone is listening or something like that, at least you know the fervor in which I say and believe this. There's something working in your favor right now, quite frankly. This [Admiral Nimitz Museum] Symposium of the fiftieth anniversary [of the last year of World War II] is the last celebration by my generation. We have this ridiculous situation in America--in Americana--where we celebrate things by quarters of centuries. So it will be another twenty-five years before (chuckle) we do it again. So I have some plans for the next celebration. For the seventy-fifth anniversary, I have some plans (laughter).

Marcello: Okay. Very good. Thank you very much.