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Interview with
Mr. Loren H. Brantley
November 19, 1971

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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(Signature)
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Oral History Collection

Mr. Loren H. Brantley

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: November 19, 1971

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Mr. Loren H. Brantley for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on November 19, 1971, in Dallas, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Brantley in order to receive his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Brantley, to begin this interview, would you very briefly give us a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words would you tell us where you were born, when you were born, your education, things of this nature.

Mr. Brantley: I was born on April 10, 1917, in Wills Point, Texas-- close to Wills Point. Then I moved to East Texas to a little town called Daingerfield where I spent most of my life. During that period of time I enlisted in the Marine Corps.

Dr. Marcello: Why did you join the Marines?

Mr. Brantley: I just always had an ambition to get out and look the country over, and I thought that was a good way to do

it because I was a poor boy.

Marcello: I see. Well, a lot at that time, I think, did join the service mainly because they couldn't find a job, for one thing. I'm just wondering if perhaps that was one of your reasons.

Brantley: No. I had a little job but I just more or less wanted to get away from the area and see the country.

Marcello: When did you join the Marine Corps?

Brantley: December 12, 1939.

Marcello: I suppose at that early date you had no inkling whatsoever that the country was eventually going to be getting into a war with the Japanese.

Brantley: I believe at that time there were rumors of it, especially with the Germans.

Marcello: How old were you at the time that you joined the Marines?

Brantley: I believe I was about twenty or twenty-one--somewhere along there.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Brantley: San Diego.

Marcello: I believe that's probably where most people in Texas did take their boot camp, was it not?

Brantley: That's right.

Marcello: When was it that you went overseas? I'm speaking now of a year. You don't have to be too specific on this, of course.

Brantley: Well, in March of 1940. I put in for Alaska and they sent me to China.

Marcello: I see. How long were you in China?

Brantley: A little over two years.

Marcello: I suppose any overseas duty in the peacetime service at that time was considered to be pretty choice duty, was it not? Pretty plush at times?

Brantley: Oh, I had a wonderful time in China. I don't know why they put me in the MP's. I had to run the city.

Marcello: Where were you in China?

Brantley: Shanghai. Of course, I had lots of time off while I was there. We evacuated just before the war broke out with Japan.

Marcello: What were things like in China? I mean did you ever have any contacts with the Japanese because I'm sure they were in Shanghai around the time that you were there.

Brantley: They traveled up and down the streets all the time. We had a section, you know. We had an American section and a French section, an Italian section, and a British section. They would come through going to their section. It was out of bounds for Marines to get out of those sections, it was one of my jobs to help keep them out.

Marcello: That was about the extent then of your contact with the Japanese at that time.

Brantley: That's right.

Marcello: What was the reason for the evacuation from China?

Brantley: Well, everybody figured that we were fixing to go to war with Japan. Of course, we were out at sea one day, and a Japanese battleship stopped us, took our captain off, and we just stayed anchored out there for about two hours. The Japanese war planes would fly low over. Of course, they finally turned us loose. Our submarines convoyed us and took us on into the Philippines.

Marcello: When was this? I mean approximately--can you pinpoint the month and year perhaps?

Brantley: It was in December of . . . I had been in the Philippines maybe two or three days before the war broke out. They bombed Pearl Harbor.

Marcello: Now that was pretty close to Pearl Harbor when this Japanese battleship had stopped your ship on the high seas. This was on the high seas.

Brantley: Yes, sir.

Marcello: And what sort of ship were you on? Was this a transport or troopship?

Brantley: This was an old Henderson troopship. You might have heard of it, the USS Henderson.

Marcello: Right.

Brantley: Yes, they stopped us. I imagine we may have been out a day or two days before they stopped us. Of course, they had some destroyers with them.

Marcello: In other words, it was a whole convoy of Japanese ships. Did any of the Japanese board your vessel?

Brantley: I think they asked the captain to come off and come over to their's or something like that.

Marcello: What did you think about this particular incident?

Brantley: I had had my two years in, and I thought maybe I was on my way home. I didn't give it much thought.

Marcello: I see. And when did you say you got to the Philippines?

Brantley: I believe about three or four days before the 8th of December, the day they bombed Pearl Harbor. And, of course, I always call it the 8th, but back here they call it the 7th.

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

Brantley: In a little town right across from Corregidor.

Marcello: Could this be Mariveles?

Brantley: Mariveles--that's correct.

Marcello: In fact there was a Navy base there. Was there not?

Brantley: Down from Mariveles was an Army fort on a little island. I forget what the name of it is. We were assigned to that area in case they dropped paratroopers there.

Marcello: In other words, at the time you got to the Philippines it was right on the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack, and

it was quite obvious that there was going to be some sort of hostilities with the Japanese.

Brantley: That's right. The Henderson unloaded us there, and they were going by Peking to pick up some more Marines.

Marcello: I suppose when you were in China you were considered one of the North China Marines, is that correct? Were you connected with that group when you were in China?

Brantley: No. I think we were called the Shanghai Marines.

Marcello: The Shanghai Marines. Can you describe what you were doing and what your reaction was when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Brantley: Oh, yes. I was in bed asleep and the lieutenant came in and yelled, "Pearl Harbor" about four o'clock in the morning. "Pearl Harbor is under attack. Fall out." He told us to get our gear, and we just laughed and rolled over in the bunk and told him not to disturb our sleep. (chuckle) If they did attack we'd take care of them in about six months or something like that. A few hours after that they started dropping bombs around there. (chuckle).

Marcello: This was just a few hours, actually, after the Pearl Harbor attack that the Japanese planes came in and started to drop bombs.

Brantley: They dropped these bombs on us, yes.

Marcello: What were your reactions when you saw the Japanese planes? By this time I assume you were out of the sack.

- Brantley: Oh, yes. We were out of the sack and had moved down around the beaches and dug our foxholes.
- Marcello: Since you were only there a short time before the actual attack took place, I assume that you in no way were able to observe in any great detail the lack of preparations that had been made in the Philippines.
- Brantley: No. In fact, very few of us ever got to go on liberty. Maybe the first day there were a few that did get to go, but most of us were preparing our quarters and places to sleep. In fact, we didn't even come in contact with none of the Filipinos there.
- Marcello: What sort of weapons were you using at the time?
- Brantley: We had old worn out machine guns that had been used, I imagine, ever since they had the Marine detachment in China. Of course, we had good rifles and some 33 millimeters and that's about all.
- Marcello: What rifles did you have? Probably the old Springfield 03.
- Brantley: Yes, 03's.
- Marcello: What happened then after this initial Japanese attack took place? You said you dug emplacements on the beach and what have you. And was your particular unit still guarding against some sort of an air attack or a paratroop landing or this sort of thing?
- Brantley: No. We didn't have any anti-aircraft guns. All we had

was the rifles and these machine guns. And, of course, we set up the machine guns in what I call the crow's nest on that old battleship and a few were set around in certain areas to be used against Japanese fighter planes when they strafed us. And, of course, during the night we'd move out of this little community into the wide open spaces about three or four miles from town to scatter out in case they dropped paratroopers at night. We were to kind of serve as protection in case there was an invasion in that area.

Marcello: Incidentally, would you identify your Marine unit?

Brantley: I was in what they called the Headquarters 1st Battalion.

Marcello: And what was your function in the Marines? Were you still an MP?

Brantley: No, we gave up those titles after we got into battle.

Marcello: I guess everybody was a rifleman at that stage.

Brantley: Rifleman and on the machine gun or on the BAR.

Marcello: Well, how long did these Japanese attacks continue? Was this a daily occurrence?

Brantley: Not at this one point. They came in there . . . of course, we had a good many PBY's--Navy planes--in there, and they came in there and strafed those, and after that they'd come on by and fly over occasionally.

Marcello: Were you under any direct attack yourself?

Brantley: No. We weren't in this area.

Marcello: I see. In other words they were trying to get that Navy equipment that was there.

Brantley: I think they were figured that ship was probably in operation, which it wasn't.

Marcello: Did you participate in any of the actual fighting on the Bataan Peninsula itself?

Brantley: No.

Marcello: Well, how long were you on Bataan before you were evacuated to Corregidor?

Brantley: I'm not sure. We went across to Corregidor about . . . I don't know, about . . . I was on Corregidor just a little while before we came under attack.

Marcello: Can you remember when the Japanese made their first landing let's say on Bataan or came down the peninsula? I just wondered whether you remembered anything at all about that.

Brantley: I remember being in the presence of one of our officers, an Air Corps officer, who was talking to somebody in command, Mac Arthur, I think. And they were begging him to let them go out there and intercept this convoy with the B-17's and these Navy planes and what fighters we had. And he wouldn't let them go. He said, "Wait and let them land and then we'll test their strength."

Marcello: Now on Bataan at this point had you come into contact with any of the Filipinos yet?

Brantley: No.

Marcello: I was referring here now to the Filipino Scouts which I've heard a lot of talk about.

Brantley: No. Not at this stage. Well, I'd seen some go back and forth. As far as talking to them, I never had talked to them.

Marcello: What was the reason for evacuating your particular outfit to Corregidor?

Brantley: They wanted us to move into a position where we could defend two points on Corregidor and keep anybody from landing there.

Marcello: Did anything eventful happen on the trip from the peninsula over to Corregidor? I know that isn't a very long distance.

Brantley: No. We went across in a very short period.

Marcello: What did you do when you got to Corregidor then?

Brantley: Well, they moved us up to topside where they had the barracks.

Marcello: Topside was one of the highest points on Corregidor, isn't that correct?

Brantley: That's right, yes. And they put us in those barracks, and they told us that they were bombproof and that we wouldn't have to worry. Well, those bombs went from the top clear

down to the basement. (chuckle) In fact, we sat up there and watched them as they came in and started bombing. Of course, they had anti-aircraft guns popping off all around us. They kept telling us we didn't have anything to worry about, but when that first bomb came through the end of the room where we were at, we moved. I went down into the basement where they had showers there, and some of us got inside those. These showers were built out of steel, and, of course, they hit all around us. It got so rough, and I'll never forget this Greek. It got so close to him that he ran outside and crawled in a ditch, and he'd holler everytime they'd drop one close. He'd say "Give him a cigar. They missed me." (chuckle) Kind of comical.

Marcello: Well, I assume these attacks were a daily occurrence during your time on Corregidor. I understand Corregidor was under fire of some sort every day.

Brantley: Yes, from both artillery and bombs.

Marcello: What did you find to be the worst--the artillery fire or the bombs? I mean both of them were certainly bad, but . . .

Brantley: Of course, their guns were more effective, but I think the bombs had more effect on my nerves.

Marcello: What were you doing during the days on Corregidor? Were you still taking care of those emplacements and so on?

Brantley: During the days and nights I was in charge of a 37 mm. They had little tunnels made out of concrete with probably a steel shutter on it. My job was to man it with another four people. We slept in the pit right by the gun.

Marcello: Incidentally, did you ever get to see Malinta Tunnel while you were there?

Brantley: Yes. We had to go there for our food and ammunition.

Marcello: Well, that was big enough for at least a truck to pass through there.

Brantley: Oh, several trucks. And it was long. After the surrender of Corregidor I helped carry food out of there and loaded it on Japanese ships. There was enough supplies to last for two years.

Marcello: I would assume that the Malinta Tunnel was kind of the main part of the whole operation on Corregidor. Headquarters was there, was it not, and you mentioned the food, and the hospital was there, I believe.

Brantley: The hospital, food, and all shelters for the top officers. I was in James Ravine, and they had a big tunnel there, too. The commanders in the field operated from it.

Marcello: When did most of your activity, moving around and so on, take place? Did you have to move mostly at night, or did you move in the daytime, also?

Brantley: Well, we finally dug trenches deep enough that we could move around in the daytime and not expose ourselves. Of course, we moved at night, too. When they'd drop a bomb, it would cause a crater or something. We'd never mess with it because if you'd go out and clean it up, they'd figure that people were there, so we'd stay away from those areas and make it look like nobody was there.

Marcello: What did it feel like to be under attack day after day and night after night? How did it work on one's mind?

Brantley: Well, it worked different ways. People had different breaking points.

Marcello: I would assume that at first you were probably scared and then as time went on . . .

Brantley: Not really. To a certain extent I was scared. But I never had the feeling at no time that I ever was going to get hurt, and I never did. One day three or four of us would . . . you know they put us on one meal a day as soon as the attack started. The first thing MacArthur did was to put us on one meal a day.

Marcello: Despite the fact that they had food for two years in the tunnel?

Brantley: That's right. And, of course, I was a tough guy, and not to go hungry I'd eat anything I could get my hands on. And we usually talked about eating. Well, one day

we were hunkered down in that gun position--three or four of us were eating canned food that we'd swiped out of the galley--and I said, "I've got a funny feeling that we'd better move out of this spot. Let's just move over behind these sandbags. I feel like they might open up on this place." And they said, "No." And I said, "Well, I'm getting over to that place." So I crawled over behind those big sandbags. And the other old boys said they were going, too, and soon afterwards there was a direct hit on the center of that thing, and it just caved it in. Broke my rifle right in two. Those guys said, "When you say move, we're going to move." (chuckle).

Marcello: Were you being told that help was on its way, and eventually you were going to get off the island?

Brantley: Yes. In fact, I helped stand guard part of the way while MacArthur went to the ships, and these are the very words that he said: "I'll be gone five days. I will return with hundreds of planes and thousands of men." And he passed out leaflets to that effect.

Marcello: What did you think when you saw the commander himself leaving? Did you have second thoughts?

Brantley: No, it didn't bother me. I thought he was on the "up-and-up" when he told me that. I didn't give it much more thought.

Marcello: You say you were pretty close to MacArthur when he evacuated the island.

Brantley: Yes.

Marcello: What were your impressions of MacArthur?

Brantley: I didn't have no respect for the man.

Marcello: For what reason? You're not alone in this opinion.

Brantley: In my personal views he put us on the one meal a day . . . a lot of people could have survived if they had had food to eat. They didn't make the Bataan Death March, and that's what broke them.

Marcello: And how about Wainwright? Did you ever have much contact with Wainwright?

Brantley: Not too much. He'd just come by our gun position and sit down and chat with us. I had a lot of respect for him.

Marcello: About how long did these constant bombardments keep up?

Brantley: About thirty days.

Marcello: About thirty days.

Brantley: Immediately after the fall of Bataan from the time the Japanese got their big guns brought up where they could attack us. Of course, we had some big guns over on the old concrete battleship, we called it. And, of course, we couldn't fire inland. The guns weren't set up for that purpose.

Marcello: Now apparently this was one of the weaknesses of Corregidor.

Is it not true that the island was more or less set up to guard against an attack from sea? And the Japanese simply put those howitzers behind the hills, and, of course, those Naval rifles couldn't get over the hills. And I think those mortars on Corregidor had been knocked out pretty early, hadn't they?

Brantley: Oh yes. In fact they fired them so rapidly that they burned up.

Marcello: I see.

Brantley: The Filipino Scouts did an outstanding job as far as I'm concerned. They had one Scout that every time he fired he'd holler, "Tojo, count your men." Those mortars were used so much that they melted and couldn't fire anymore.

Marcello: Well, let's go from this point then. Describe the immediate events as they took place leading up to your capture. Let's start with the Japanese landing. Let's start at that point and try and lead up to your capture.

Brantley: Well, of course, there were big mines all around Corregidor out in the bay. Our forces up at James Ravine had the controls to where you set those mines off. Some officer in command there was in charge of that, which one I don't know. Two days before they landed I was assigned to guard some prisoners.

Marcello: Were these Japanese prisoners, or were they Americans who were thrown in the stockade?

Brantley: No, Americans who had rebelled against the war and had tried to escape. And, of course, my orders were that if they tried to get out I was to kill them, you know. And in the meantime when I'd be relieved there--I'd guard them so long--and then I'd go back to my gun position. I was in charge of a detail setting off dynamite . . . we had dug a big tunnel there, too, in the meantime that we could put a bunch of people in. While we were building this tunnel, we had another gun position which I had to dig a bunch of guys out of after an air raid. They got caught and smothered in there. And on the night that they landed there, nobody ever did set off these mines. I never could understand that. The Japanese came in on one point above James Ravine, up on the east side of the tunnel. It was kind of a flat place. They landed around eleven o'clock at night, somewhere in that neighborhood. I was in guarding these prisoners, and, of course, the word came in that a landing had taken place. Our commanding officer came by, and I asked him what he wanted me to do about these prisoners. He said, "Shoot them, turn them loose, whatever you want to do with them." And I said, "Well, okay, I'm going back to my gun position." I just turned them loose. Then I went down where our guys were at, and I told my sergeant they were landing on the other point. You could

hear the rifle fire. And he said, "Aw, that's just practice. Don't be putting out these rumors." And I said, "If that's the way you feel about it, that's alright with me." I went over in my pit and hunkered down and stayed there. They never did come down into the James Ravine area. They came in the next morning. And, of course, they sent in orders for us to surrender, and our colonel said, "Marines never surrender, and I'm not going to be the first." And finally General Moore sent in orders that if he didn't he was going to have him court martialed because that was orders from Washington. But he called us all together and asked us if we wanted to give up our guns. At that stage everybody decided that that was best because at that time we were under direct fire from the mainland from the Japanese guns.

Marcello: What were your own feelings when you were told to surrender?

Brantley: Well, it stunned us. We didn't know what to expect because we had heard rumors that they didn't take prisoners and that they killed them. And we didn't know if surrendering was going to much change the situation. Really, I hid some pistols, kept them close by, after we ran up the flag. So I had some sort of gun in my possession. They made the rest of them pile their weapons so everybody could see where they were at. Of

course, the Japanese came in, and they marched us out of there up on top of the ravine.

Marcello: Did they come to you or did you go to them?

Brantley: They came up and hollered in and told us what to do.

Marcello: This was at James Ravine?

Brantley: Yes. And we marched up on top, and they put us in a line all up around a big old cliff. They lined up machine guns out there in front of us. And, of course, I figured that's what they expected to do--shoot us and push us over the cliff. But they didn't. They kept us out there all day.

Marcello: Did they search you and all this sort of thing?

Brantley: No, not me individually. Of course, we didn't have anything but our worn out clothes and shoes. Some of them were even barefooted. Of course, if you had any possession bags, they went through those.

Marcello: Were you now in an area known as the Garage Area? Is this where you were, or didn't we get there yet?

Brantley: No, I didn't get in there until . . . they kept us out there all day and way up into the night.

Marcello: And didn't harass you in any way?

Brantley: No.

Marcello: Did you kind of get the impression that they perhaps didn't know what to do with you?

Brantley: Well, some of them tried to talk to us. They offered us cigarettes, some of them, those that captured us. But around midnight they woke us up . . . we had just piled down because we hadn't slept much in thirty days.

Marcello: Incidentally, what was it like now that the guns had stopped firing?

Brantley: Boy, we slept right on a pile of rocks, and I slept better than I've ever slept in my life.

Marcello: Some people said it was kind of strange, in a way, after all that firing to hear the silence.

Brantley: There wasn't a green piece of grass or tree on that island. It had all been destroyed.

Marcello: Everything on that island had been destroyed.

Brantley: And they woke us up and marched us to what was called the Garage Area. They told us we were going to be there, and, of course, then they started putting people on work details. And by that time they hadn't fed us. Nobody had eaten.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if they had made any provisions so far as food and water were concerned.

Brantley: No, they didn't try to feed us. There was water on this Garage Area, and everybody was running over one another and taking water. People were forming up into little groups. There was no organization. They just run us all in there and sat back and let us go. No

toilets, nothing available. There were about four or five of us who decided that we better . . . we saw that nobody was going to get any food or nothing, so we decided we better get on a work detail and find something to eat. We kind of roped us off a little area, and we brought in food so we could eat. In fact, I had more food than I could eat and we started to divide it.

Marcello: Well, where did you get this food?

Brantley: From out of the tunnel.

Marcello: This was when you were on the details moving this food.

Brantley: That's right, loading it on these Jap ships.

Marcello: In other words, this was one detail that you volunteered for. Is that correct?

Brantley: That's right.

Marcello: One of the few in the service, I suppose. (chuckle)

Brantley: And, of course, a lot of people were at the point where they could not get water to drink. I talked to some of the officers and some of our guys and said we ought to put on some restrictions or put somebody up there who could issue water where everybody would get a little water. So we worked that out where everybody started getting water. Then, of course, some of the officers

tried to take all of our food away, you know.

Marcello: They tried to pull rank?

Brantley: Yes, but we wouldn't accept that. We felt that we should eat and, of course, we had more than we could eat and we shared.

Marcello: Now, at this stage I gather that the Japanese were more or less leaving you to yourselves. In other words there was no harassment or physical punishment or anything of that nature yet.

Brantley: No, they did not come in amongst us except . . . they came down in their group one day and took one guy and marched him off on the hill and blindfolded him and shot him.

Marcello: This was an American?

Brantley: I just saw them take him, and I couldn't tell.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't even know what they took him up there for?

Brantley: No. I understood he was connected with news broadcasts in some way.

Marcello: Well, how long were you in the Garage Area altogether then? And how long were you on these details?

Brantley: Oh, we were there about a week until they moved us all out. They took us from Manila to Bilibid Prison.

Marcello: You went from Corregidor to Bilibid Prison in Manila. Did anything eventful happen? What sort of a trip was

it across the bay to Manila?

Brantley: They took us across on these barges or something, and when we got up pretty close to shore they made us jump off and swim to shore.

Marcello: Did you have any possessions at all with you other than the clothes on your back?

Brantley: That's all.

Marcello: How about any toilet utensils--toothbrush, shaving gear . . .

Brantley: Everything of that sort was destroyed.

Marcello: You had nothing at this point, then, except the clothing on your back.

Brantley: Some of them did load up with personal gear, but I didn't try to because I felt like I had to preserve my strength.

Marcello: How far was the prison from the waterfront?

Brantley: Oh, we marched about five or six miles.

Marcello: They marched you through town?

Brantley: Right.

Marcello: In this march through town did they try and humiliate you in any way? Obviously, I'm sure, the Filipinos perhaps had been forced or were out on the streets watching the procession of prisoners going to the prison.

Brantley: They marched us through. In fact, some of the Filipino Scouts were still in amongst the civilians and dressed

up as civilians, and they tried to slip food to us.
They didn't bother us.

Marcello: They really didn't try to humiliate you in any way.
Incidentally, now I gather that these Japanese soldiers
were not the same people who had really fought on
Bataan. Isn't that correct? These were more or less
fresh soldiers or new soldiers and so on.

Brantley: I believe the new soldiers came in at Bilibid. I
think the ones that were in charge, more or less, were
the ones that captured us. They were pretty decent and
respected us. They had even told us that they dreaded
coming into Corregidor as much as we dreaded to see
them come.

Marcello: I'll bet. Well, what was Bilibid Prison like when you
got there?

Brantley: Well, it was a big compound and they put us in rooms,
and at that time they did feed us a little rice. They
started giving us rice. Now I did carry a bunch of
canned salmon and stuff along with me, so I had something
to eat with that rice.

Marcello: How long were you at Bilibid Prison altogether?

Brantley: I believe about a week or so and then they moved us to
Cabanatuan I.

Marcello: Did you do anything at Bilibid while you were there?
It was again just mainly sitting around?

Brantley: Just sitting around and waiting.

Marcello: Was there any sort of harassment at this point yet?

Brantley: Oh, some. They did some. But they never did bother me though.

Marcello: How was discipline at this point? Were you still more or less obeying your officers and this sort of thing?

Brantley: Most of us listened to our officers, but a good many of them didn't. It got pretty rough later on.

Marcello: At this stage was morale still fairly good, as good as could be expected under those circumstances?

Brantley: Oh, yes. I think very few people amongst us had given up. Most of them thought we wouldn't be prisoners too long.

Marcello: In other words you were still expecting that help to come yet at this point. You hadn't given up faith in that yet.

Brantley: We got mislead on that help when we saw Japanese convoy way out at sea one night. And we thought that was our convoy coming in.

Marcello: No such luck.

Brantley: No, it turned out to be the Japanese.

Marcello: Then you went from Bilibid Prison, and obviously not very much of importance happened there. From Bilibid you went to Cabanatuan I.

Brantley: That's right.

Marcello: Describe the trip from Bilibid to Cabanatuan.

Brantley: Well, they loaded us in boxcars.

Marcello: And I assume you were very tightly packed in those boxcars?

Brantley: Oh, there was just standing room. If you ever sat down on the floor, somebody would stomp on you. And they kept us on them boxcars, and nobody was allowed off to go to a bathroom or anything. You just went wherever you were at, and it was worse than a hog pen. And we went, I guess, twenty or thirty miles on that thing, and then they took us off and marched us the rest of the way.

Marcello: About how long were you on that train altogether?

Brantley: Well, we were on there over a day.

Marcello: What was the temperature like?

Brantley: Oh, hot. The temperature there was in the 100's.

Marcello: Now were these cars completely enclosed? In other words, they were not like a cattle car or something. These were completely enclosed boxcars.

Brantley: They were regular boxcars like you find on the railroads here.

Marcello: When they put you in those boxcars, they . . .

Brantley: Locked the doors.

Marcello: . . . locked the doors and the whole works. And not only was it hot, but it was dark and . . .

Brantley: That's right. No air, nothing.

Marcello: Did you loose very many people on this train ride?

Brantley: Oh, yes. By the time we got to Cabanatuan, I'd been put on a burying detail. And we buried as high as fifty to seventy a day.

Marcello: And I assume these people were buried in mass graves, were they not? No markers at all.

Brantley: No markers. We just dug a big hole and put ten into the hole, ten bodies. We stripped all their clothes and everything off them. If they had any gold in their teeth, they pulled that off.

Marcellb : Were you supposed to do this?

Brantley: Well, the Japs got all the gold, and they took all the clothes off them.

Marcellb : Oh, I see. The Japanese did all that.

Brantley: But we carried them out there and put them in the hole and covered them up.

Marcello: I assume this was perhaps one of the more distasteful details that you had to perform while you were a prisoner.

Brantley: That's right. And, of course, some of us were planning escape at this stage.

Marcello: Now this is after you arrived at Cabanatuan.

Brantley: That's right. I was still on that burying detail . . . and, of course, I'll come back to the other part. And they took me off the burial detail because the Japanese sergeant who was guarding us had malaria real bad. And

I knew what he had because he was just shaking and real sick from it. So I took some quinine--I had my pockets full of quinine and iodine, and I was using quinine to put in my drinking water to help purify it--and I gave him some quinine and got his fever down, and he took a liking to me and put me in charge of his barracks. There were four of them. All I had to do then was to go over to the galley where they cooked food for the Japanese and bring food over to them.

Marcello: In other words, you were kind of like their mess boy.

Brantley: That's what I was. And I'd set up the table, and for a day or two I'd wait outside. One day they were raising hell, and, of course, I couldn't understand them. They came out and got me, sat me down, and I ate with them, you know. This was after I'd given that boy that quinine.

Marcello: Well, what was your own physical condition at this time?

Brantley: I was in good shape. I weighed about 195. I was tough. I took care of myself.

Marcello: What was Cabanatuan like? Can you describe it from a physical standpoint?

Brantley: Well, it was about a mile long and it had a lot of bamboo shacks. They were made out of bamboo poles, and you had a lower deck and an upper deck.

Marcello: This was in the barracks?

Brantley: Yes, the barracks. They were all rolled up there. And they had a big barbed wire fence all the way around it with guard lookout towers all around. They kept guards in there all the time on guard duty. And, of course, they assigned us to a barracks. And the Filipino Scouts would come up at night and talk to us. They'd crawl through the weeds. So we, me and two other guys, decided we were going to join them. At that time the Japanese started assigning us to squads because some had escaped.

Marcello: About how long had you been at Cabanatuan at this point?

Brantley: About two weeks. And they put out orders that anybody trying to escape and caught would be shot. That did stop some people. Of course, they did catch them and shot them. And then they assigned ten to a group, and if anybody escaped out of the ten, they shot the others that was left. Well, that didn't slow it down because some were still trying to get out. Then they assigned ten to a group, then a hundred to a group. And the whole hundred had to go. If they didn't, then they'd shoot the rest of them. And they shot a good many.

Marcello: They weren't bluffing in other words.

Brantley: No, they took you right out there and shot you. They made you dig your own grave and shot you right in your own pit.

Marcello: Did you ever have to witness any of these executions?

Brantley: Oh, yes.

Marcello: What was one of them like? Can you describe it?

Brantley: I'd see them bend those boys over in their pit after they dug the grave. It was all I could do to keep from helping them.

Marcello: What was a typical day like at Cabanatuan? For you personally? Now you mentioned that you have given this Japanese soldier the quinine, and as a result you had been assigned to be a mess boy, I suppose you could say, for three barracks, was it?

Brantley: No, one barracks.

Marcello: One barracks.

Brantley: They treated me . . . later on at night they'd come in and there was a bunch of the Japanese who would want to wrestle with me. And I found out that if you didn't . . . if you could pop them against the ground, they liked it and they looked up to you. And, boy, I'd do my best to break their necks, you know. They didn't get mad about it.

Marcello: Now I assume that you outweighed most of these people, is that correct?

Brantley: Oh, yes. I had the strength and weight. And they also got me to shot-put with them. Some of them were pretty

good with that judo, but it didn't affect me.

Marcello: The reason I had asked you that is because I heard from several people that the Japanese Marines were pretty big fellows.

Brantley: Some of them were pretty good, especially these sergeants around there. I didn't know how to throw a shot-put, you know. I never had no practice with that. Anyway, I just came back and threw that thing, you know. I could out-throw them with that. And they just couldn't understand that. They'd try to show me how you were supposed to be doing it. Of course, the sergeant that was in charge of the Japanese mess hall, he disliked me. So one day he didn't fix me no food when I carried it over to the barracks, you know. So they came in and sat down and started eating and wanted to know why I didn't come on. They wanted to know if I had ate. I couldn't make myself understood, so they finally called an interpreter over, and he wanted to know if I had already went ahead and ate. I said, "No," that that was all the food the sergeant gave me. Boy, they got up and went to the mess hall, and they brought back all kinds of food. (chuckle). And I sat down and ate with them.

Marcello: In other words at this stage at Cabanatuan, you were fairing pretty well compared to what a good many others were getting.

Brantley: Oh, that's right. In fact, I carried some extra food into the barracks. I'd carry it in and feed the others. Of course, I got dysentery and malaria, too, for about two weeks. At one time I was unconscious for a little bit.

Marcello: By this time had you used up all of your quinine?

Brantley: Yes.

Marcello: And I assume there were very little medical facilities whatsoever at Cabanatuan.

Brantley: What little they had the officers had control, and they would pretty well divide what was to be had.

Marcello: Did they have a hospital at Cabanatuan?

Brantley: They tried to set up one with what medicine the officers brought from Corregidor.

Marcello: Well, from what I gather that was really the end of the line. If you were sick enough that you had to go to a hospital, usually the next step was the graveyard.

Brantley: Oh, yes. If they moved you over in that area it was just a matter of time. All they did was try to keep it from spreading to the rest of them. If they left you in there, you didn't usually come out.

Marcello: Did the Japanese take roll every day?

Brantley: Oh, yes. They counted you and checked you every day.

Marcello: What did you do in addition to fetching food and so on for the soldiers?

Brantley: All I did was to take care of those guards over there until they moved us to Japan.

Marcello: How long were you at Cabanatuan altogether?

Brantley: I don't know. But we left in November.

Marcello: How many people would you estimate died per day at Cabanatuan?

Brantley: Well, all the time I was on that burial detail--and, of course, I lost count--we averaged burying better than at least fifty or sixty people a day, sometimes more, I think, but it varied from about fifty to sixty a day.

Marcello: What were the usual causes of death? Malaria? Malnutrition?

Brantley: Dysentery, mostly.

Marcello: Dysentery mostly. That was the big killer. Had you ever witnessed people who just gave up?

Brantley: Oh, yes. Most of the guys that gave up didn't try to take care of themselves or clean themselves up. They lost all will to live. They just give up.

Marcello: I assume that while you were at Cabanatuan, you were not receiving any news at all from the outside world.

Brantley: Well, once in a while we'd hear rumors from these Filipino Scouts, who would tell us some news.

Marcello: I assume that the camp was a rumor mill, though.

Brantley: Oh, yes. There were all kinds of rumors. The Filipinos would sell whiskey and stuff to the officers and stuff

like that. But I had no money myself until one day a Filipino Scout did give me a fifth of liquor. Of course, the Japanese gave me a bunch of tea, so I'd boil that up and sell it to the officers--they had all the money. I'd sell them drinks--a peso a drink. So I picked up about two or three hundred dollars from that deal. And I was able to buy a little extra food with that.

Marcello: From the Filipino Scouts? Now all this was done, I'm sure, in secret, was it not?

Brantley: Oh, yes. You'd slip around through the fences. They'd slip up and try to sell it to you.

Marcello: Did you ever witness any collaboration with the enemy while you were at Cabanatuan?

Brantley: No, I really never did see any. They had a guy they threw in the brig there at Cabanatuan who had been collaborating. He had been collaborating in some way. The Japs threw him in the brig.

Marcello: The Japanese threw him in the brig for collaborating?

Brantley: There was some way that he was passing notes from the different camps.

Marcello: I see.

Brantley: He was on a traveling detail.

Marcello: But you never actually witnessed anybody currying favors from the Japanese?

Brantley: No.

Marcello: How about individual Japanese. Do any of them stand out in your mind at Cabanatuan as individuals for either acts of kindness that they performed or for acts of cruelty that they performed.

Brantley: Well, only these four sergeants that I was in contact with. Of course, the Japanese that drove the commander's car was awful vicious. One of these sergeants that I had taken care of would be mean to some of us at times. He threatened one day to take a two-by-four to me. I never did know what about, but he didn't do it.

Marcello: At Cabanatuan then you yourself were never subjected to any physical punishment as such.

Brantley: No.

Marcello: I'm sure you must have witnessed it from time to time at Cabanatuan.

Brantley: Oh, yes. People would take things, and they'd catch them and carry them out there and stand them out in the sun. They'd get caught buying something from the Filipinos, and they'd stand them up, take a bamboo pole, and beat him. And, of course, they caught one guy buying, and they stood him up and beat him. He finally broke down and run and got some water to drink; they wouldn't give him any drinking water. And, of course, after he did that, they shot him, killed him.

Marcello: I assume beating was perhaps the most frequent sort of punishment that they gave out.

Brantley: Oh, yes. They took great delight in--some of them did--standing them up out there and making those Filipinos beat them with clubs as they came by.

Marcello: At this particular stage yet did you have any nicknames for any of the Japanese guards? I know at some camps they used to have a nickname for the Japanese guards.

Brantley: We called one of them George Raft.

Marcello: George Raft.

Brantley: Yes. He looked kind of like him. And we used to nickname them. There was a guy that we named Edgar G. Robinson. He looked kind of like him and talked like him, you know.

Marcello: Then from Cabanatuan you were sent to Japan, I gather.

Brantley: That's right.

Marcello: Describe the trip. Let's say from the time you left Cabanatuan, to the time you got to the docks, and then, of course, to Japan.

Brantley: They marched us . . .

Marcello: This was approximately a year later. Not quite a year later.

Brantley: Yes. And they marched us all the way from Cabanatuan to the docks.

Marcello: You marched all that distance?

Brantley: That's right.

Marcello: About how long did it take?

Brantley: Oh, about two or three days.

Marcello: Did they make any sort of provisions for you on this march?

Brantley: Well, they did give us rice at intervals. They'd march you, and then they'd rest you awhile, and then they'd march you again.

Marcello: By this time had most of the weak ones been weeded out? Was there still a fairly high mortality rate?

Brantley: The Japanese they put me with told me that we were going to Japan and that they were going to put me on a farm and that I was going to have it easy. And, of course, they picked out the healthiest people, I'm pretty sure. Anyway, that's where the cruelties towards me started-- on board the ship. And they never did let up on me until the day I got released.

Marcello: So they marched you from Cabanatuan back to Manila again?

Brantley: That's right.

Marcello: And nothing really eventful happened on that march?

Brantley: No.

Marcello: Then, of course, they put you on the ships. What were the conditions like aboard the ship?

Brantley: They had big freight ships, and they just put you down in those holds and assigned so many people in there. And you just barely had room to hunker down, and maybe once in a while you could stretch out and sleep a little. And

they kept you down in there except at intervals when they would let you come up above and get some air. They gave you a little drink of water--but not too much--and a little to eat.

Marcello: How about toilet facilities. Were they provided in any way?

Brantley: Yes, they fixed you up, but they weren't too plentiful. You had to wait in line for it. And, we'd been out about three days, and a bunch of us was up on deck. And the alert sounds went off and they ordered us all back down below. And they commenced firing depth charges like submarines were around. In fact, we saw a submarine come up out there. They commenced to knock us in the hold with rifle butts. And that night they pulled us into Formosa, they called it then. We stayed there for three or four days at the dock. We didn't move.

Marcello: You were still in the ship even when you got to Formosa?

Brantley: Definitely.

Marcello: And what was the weather like at this point?

Brantley: Well, it was kind of rainy and misty like at times. They wouldn't let us out of the hold. Evidently, some American submarines had come in amongst them out there. And, of course, we stayed down in there . . . after we left there, they never did let us off board the ship until we got to Osaka, Japan.

Marcello: Did you lose very many people on the trip over to Japan?

Brantley: Oh, yes. A good many died on the way.

Marcello: What did they do with them, just haul them out and throw them overboard?

Brantley: Threw them overboard.

Marcello: How was your health at this point?

Brantley: I was still in pretty good shape.

Marcello: Other than occasional attacks of malaria.

Brantley: Malaria and dysentery is what I got, but I didn't have dysentery too bad. When I got to Okaka, well, they unloaded us, and we had to march all the way from Osaka out to this Yodogawa prison camp.

Marcello: So, anyhow, you did lose quite a few men on this trip over to Japan.

Brantley: There were 401 of us put in this camp at Yodogawa.

Marcello: How many do you estimate were lost going over on that ship?

Brantley: I have no idea. Several out of our group. And, of course, when we got to this camp we were 401--I remember 401. The rest of them went to the other parts of Japan.

Marcello: Now I assume that at this stage the bombing of Japan had not yet begun. This was still too early in the war for that.

Brantley: Oh, no. Oh, way too early.

Marcello: On the trip over, did you yourself actually fear being torpedoed by a friendly submarine?

- Brantley: We had thoughts of it, but I actually hoped they would. Really hoped they would. Maybe I'd have a way to escape. When we came in, you know, you could see the mainland of China from where we was at. Some of us even thought about trying to swim to the mainland.
- Marcello: Of course, the Japanese were in control of mainland China, too, weren't they?
- Brantley: That's right. But we thought that we might be able to scout around. We really had nowhere to escape to (chuckle) even if we did get out, when you get right down to it. Eventually they'd find you.
- Marcello: And I would assume an American would have stood out like a sore thumb with all those Chinese and Japanese and what have you.
- Brantley: That's right. It was hard to disguise yourself. You just had to live like an animal.
- Marcello: How was the morale at this point? Here you had been knocked off of Bataan. You had been captured on Corregidor. You had been moved to Bilibid and from Bilibid to Cabanatuan. And then there was this terrible boat trip across to Osaka. What was the morale of these 401 people at that time?
- Brantley: It was getting pretty low amongst a good many of the people.
- Marcello: Had you begun to get second thoughts about being rescued or being freed at this stage?

Brantley: No. I still had strong hopes.

Marcello: Now you couldn't give up altogether, of course, whether you actually believed it or not.

Brantley: I didn't care how long it was going to be. I began to figure it was going to be a good while, but I really had never given up hope--never did.

Marcello: So what happened now when you got to Osaka?

Brantley: Well, they put us in quarters on the top floor of a steel plant. And that's where they put our quarters. They had it built up high, and you had to go upstairs.

Marcello: What went on here at Osaka now?

Brantley: Oh, they put me to work on a cupola. And normally we put scraps in it and stuff and made steel, pig iron. And my job, to start out with, was to push these carts and haul this scrap away and dumping it in the edge of the ocean. Eventually they put me on charging it.

Marcello: Now what does that mean when you say you were charging it?

Brantley: Well, you add so much metal and so much coke and so much scrap and so much ore. And, of course, on Banzai Day they had me more or less in charge of that.

Marcello: On Banzai Day?

Brantley: That's what they called it. They issued saki to the Japanese. One day I told a guy to fill it full of scraps and not put no coke in it. We found out if you did that

it would all go together, and we'd have to tear down the whole furnace and clean it up. That takes about three or four months to really overhaul it. That's what we did, and we got beat up pretty bad for doing it, too.

Marcello : Were other people committing deliberate acts of sabotage, also?

Brantley: Individuals around would try.

Marcello: How long did you work per day?

Brantley: Eight to ten hours a day.

Marcello: Was this seven days a week? Six days a week?

Brantley: Sometimes seven days. Every other week we might get a day off.

Marcello: How were the rations at this point?

Brantley: They fed you four grams of rice a day with a little . . . twenty pounds of vegetables in a lot of water.

Marcello: Did you ever have any way of supplementing your diet?

Brantley: No.

Marcello: There was no food to steal, I guess, at a steel mill.

Brantley: Yes. In fact, I got a nickname from . . . carts would go by . . . they had a warehouse. It took me, I guess, about a month or two to work the nails out gradually so it wouldn't show where I'd get in there and swipe food. I had a nickname in prison camp because of that.

Marcello : What was your nickname?

Brantley: They called me "Slick."

Marcello: "Slick?" Because you were able to steal food, I gather.

Brantley: Yes.

Marcello: Well, how many people were working in this steel mill?
How many prisoners? All 401?

Brantley: No, the officers didn't work.

Marcello: No.

Brantley: But enlisted men worked.

Marcello: In other words, this group of 401 were at the steel mill.
Is that correct?

Brantley: That's right. And, of course, eventually, one day, you know, some of us had our old shoes--American shoes, of course--and the Japanese civilians would try to trade us out of them. Some of them would swap them off for food, and if they got caught at it, they got punished. And a guy named Chief Byrd in the Navy swapped his off, and he claimed somebody stole them. They brought us all in off the working detail--they had a big ore pile out there--and they stripped all of our clothes off of us, and we stayed on our knees on that rock from about nine o'clock in the morning to about five o'clock in the evening. You couldn't move or they'd beat you up with the butt of a rifle or something. They were trying to get the person who stole them shoes to admit it. Nobody ever did so

finally they let us up about five o'clock, and we wiped the blood and stuff off our legs. And this Chief, then, after we had done it, went down and told them what he had done. And they tied his hands behind his back and pulled them up to just where his toes would touch ground, and they took a pair of hobnailed shoes, and every once in a while they'd go by and beat him in the face with them until he died.

Marcello: Were physical punishments rather frequent here at the steel mill?

Brantley: Oh, yes. In fact, you can see the scars on my wrist where they hung me up a time or two.

Marcello: Do you want to talk a little bit about that? Exactly what happened that made them do this?

Brantley: Well, they'd done that when I froze up that furnace. Of course, they couldn't afford to shoot me or turn me in because they had let all the Japanese off from work so they'd get involved. So they just hung me up and beat me around.

Marcello: They just put your hands behind your back and . . .

Brantley: No, they hung me up where my toes touched the ground.

Marcello: Then they beat you?

Brantley: Yes. They took their time about it.

Marcello: How long did they keep you hung up there?

- Brantley: About three days. I passed out on it.
- Marcello: Who was running this steel mill? Were these civilians or were these military personnel?
- Brantley: They were civilians, but the military was in charge of them in some way. Of course, one time I bought some food off a civilian--they'd give us some yen for doing this work--I bought some potato bread. Of course, they caught me with it and wanted to know where I got it. I wouldn't tell them who I brought it off of because it would get him in trouble. And they took me in and put me in a little old dungeon or wooden cage and kept me in that for three days without anything to eat. That was in the wintertime, and I had no clothes or nothing.
- Marcello: I was going to assume there was quite a change in temperature from the Philippines to Japan. Japan gets pretty cold in the wintertime.
- Brantley: It was cold, snowy, sleet, and rainy. About like the temperature is here in the wintertime.
- Marcello: Had they issued you any new clothing and so on?
- Brantley: Yes, about that time they had given us some of the Japanese Army clothes. Of course, there was no heavy clothes, and you had two blankets which were thin blankets. You slept on the floor with these and covered up with them.
- Marcello: Was it fairly cold in that steel mill?

Brantley: Oh, yes, unless you worked on the furnaces. Of course, then you'd stay warm.

Marcello: I was speaking now primarily of your barracks or your living quarters.

Brantley: Yes, it was cold in there except they had one or two stoves made out of drums.

Marcello: What was your diet consisting of? Mainly of rice again with a little bit of soup and vegetables?

Brantley: Right. Once a month you'd get a little fish to go with it. You were lucky if you got a bite of it, but it was made into a soup. Once a month you got a spoonful of sugar.

Marcello: I'm sure that you witnessed all sorts of beatings and cruelties and this sort of thing, but on the other hand did you ever witness any acts of compassion on the part of the Japanese civilians or even the military personnel for that matter?

Brantley: I never did notice it, not here in this area. It might have been with some of them, but as far as I know they were all cruel.

Marcello: How long were you at this steel mill altogether?

Brantley: Oh, until Uncle Sam bombed it. I don't know the date, but he bombed it critically, and they took me and eighty or ninety more out of there and moved us to a little place close to Nagasaki, where they dropped the Atomic Bomb.

Marcello: Well, were you at this steel mill for about a year, perhaps? Or wasn't it that long?

Brantley: No, it was about a year and a half.

Marcello: By the time you left there, did you get the feeling that the tide of the war had changed?

Brantley: Oh, yes. We knew it had changed.

Marcello: When did the bombing start? When did you first start witnessing the air raids?

Brantley: I really don't remember. There was one sergeant there, Japanese, that I could talk to pretty good. And him and seven or eight of us were standing out in the compound one day. I looked up at the sky and saw these streaks, and I could see them B-29's. Of course, there was some Japanese fighter planes trying to get up to them, but they never did make it. He turned to me and I said, "One of these days they're going to be hitting here." Of course, they had never bombed there. And he laughed and didn't believe me. I said, "Yes, they are going to be bombing here someday." And the guard said, "You won't ever give up, will you?" And I said, "No, I don't intend to." And that was in the fall of the year. And on Christmas it was snowing like anything, and the air raid warnings sounded. You couldn't see it, but you could hear it. They did come over there in another big flight. You could hear some anti-aircraft guns across

the bay from us. Those planes didn't drop no bombs or anything.

Marcello: Did they ever hit the steel mill while you were there?

Brantley: Oh, yes. They bombed the dikes right near the building I was in. They flooded the place. In fact, they started one morning about three or four o'clock in the morning and woke us. And, of course, we could hear them bombing. They destroyed Osaka just about. And they marched me out of there. For fourteen miles, I don't guess we saw a building standing. The only thing I saw that was left standing was the building at the railroad depot where they loaded us on trains. Now they didn't touch the railroad, but they skipped right over it.

Marcello: How many attacks were you subjected to at the steel mill, approximately?

Brantley: Really, just one big one.

Marcello: Just this one. Did it more or less destroy the steel mill for the most part?

Brantley: No. This little plant, it didn't. It got them all around it.

Marcello: I see. What were your own feelings when the bombing started?

Brantley: Oh, we all started shouting and hooting, and they threatened to shoot us if we didn't calm down. And they was all out in foxholes. And we just kept hollering, "Drop them here! Drop them here!"

- Marcellb : But at the same time, did you ever think about the fact that you might get killed, too, in these air raids?
- Brantley: Oh, it passed your mind, but you didn't worry about it. You got to the state that you didn't care.
- Marcello: Where did they take you after you left the steel plant at Osaka?
- Brantley: They took me and put me in a coal mine close to Nagasaki.
- Marcello : In other words, the steel mill had been destroyed to the point where it was no longer . . .
- Brantley: No, part of it was operating. They kept part of it in operation. Of course, the water came into the barracks. We were way up at the top of the building, and water came up fourteen feet, I guess, or fifteen feet up there. And then it got nearly to where we were sleeping.
- Marcello: Well, in going from the steel mill to Nagasaki, did you go by train or . . .
- Brantley: Yes, by train.
- Marcello: Did you ever run into any hostility on the part of civilians? What I mean is, here were all these air raids taking place, and I'm sure that these people were losing relatives in these attacks.
- Brantley: No, I think mostly some of the civilians felt sorry for us. In fact, when I was working in the steel mill, a civilian girl used to give her food to me until she got

caught, and they moved her out of there, and I don't know what ever happened to her.

Marcello: Did you ever notice any changes coming over the civilians or the guards after the air attacks did begin to take place?

Brantley: After they'd lose a battle, they was rougher on us for a few days. And they slapped us . . . everytime they really got rough on us we usually knew there had been some engagement somewhere.

Marcello: Or perhaps they had lost some relative or something in one of those air raids. Well, what were conditions like at Nagasaki when you got there?

Brantley: Well, they put me to work in a coal mine.

Marcello: As a Texas boy, had you ever been in a coal mine before?

Brantley: No. (chuckle)

Marcello: I guess you had never been in a steel mill before either.

Brantley: No, I didn't know what they were, in fact. In fact, I went to work in a coal mine, and I worked nine levels down, and I kind of liked that because you were working with lights. And those Japanese, you know, they'd bring their lunches in and they'd hang them on the wall, and they were pretty easy to get to. (chuckle) I got my share of them.

Marcello: I assume that food was something that was constantly on everybody's mind. Isn't that correct? Everybody's belly

was always growling, I'm sure.

Brantley: It was the only thing you thought about--food.

Marcello: This is what I gather from all of the ex-prisoners that I've talked with--that food was constantly on everybody's mind. Did you ever think about any specific kinds of food, perhaps?

Brantley: Oh, yes. We used to sit around and talk about certain types--what we were going to eat when we got back home. And some people would crack up thinking and talking about it.

Marcello: How was the morale at this stage after moving . . . how was your morale after moving to the coal mines there at Nagasaki?

Brantley: Well, I imagine I weighed about 115 or 120 pounds.

Marcello: In other words, you had lost about . . .

Brantley: I went from a hundred . . .

Marcello: Sixty or seventy pounds then?

Brantley: Yes. I went from 196 down to 87 pounds when I got released.

Marcello : In other words, your weight was more than cut in half.

Brantley: That's right.

Marcello: Wasn't that kind of unusual for somebody of your size to have survived? In other words, one of the things that I've heard of in many cases was that the big ones--195 pounds was fairly big--but the big ones were usually in many cases the first ones to go because they apparently suffered most from that tremendous weight loss more than the smaller ones.

Brantley: I think that's true, but my opinion was that people gave up. And the ones who gave up were the ones that had lived the pretty easy life before they went into the service. I was raised in East Texas on a farm. And I knew how to hunt and fish and knew a little about the land. And, of course, my constant thought when I was there was to figure out a way to survive. And I know that you had to eat to keep your strength. And everything that I could turn into food in some way or another, that's what I did. And those people who didn't know nothing about such things and who didn't know how to take care of themselves, actually their will to live was less than mine.

Marcello: Did you ever make any close friends while you were in these prison camps?

Brantley: Oh, yes. When I was locked up in this prison back in Yodogawa, there was a guy named Tacket. He took great chances. He would even slip rice through the bars to me because he was the only one that would take a chance like that. He was close to me. There were several of them close to me.

Marcello: But I assume that maybe three or four or five might just work with one another and this sort of thing. In other words, there weren't large groups of prisoners who became extremely close friends. But you did form close

friendships with maybe a few people, and these people all looked out for one another.

Brantley: They done what they could to help one another.

Marcello: Well, describe what a typical day was like here at this coal mine at Nagasaki.

Brantley: Well, you were given seven cars to load up each day. If you got that much you were doing good.

Marcello: Were you drilling or shoveling, or what was your job?

Brantley: Well, we were drilling and shoveling and picking, and so after I had worked down there about a week, I found out if you filled seven cars, you'd get out in a hurry. So I figured out a way. What I'd do, I'd load them cars full of rocks and stuff right quick. This was the easiest stuff to get to. Then I'd put a little coal on top of it and send them out. And that went on for, oh, about two or three weeks. And my number was 270--we all went by numbers. One day I heard a Japanese coming down there hollering "nihyakunanazyuu, nihyakunanazyuu!" So he come up to me, and the first thing he did was knock me down. And he took me over and showed me what I had done to them (chuckle). So they kept me down there until I made up all them cars of coal (chuckle).

Marcello: About how many cars of coal did you have to make up?

Brantley: I was down there about two or three days before I got out of there.

Marcello: You were down in the pit for two or three days. How long did a working day last here at the pit?

Brantley: Until you got them seven cars.

Marcello: You worked until you got those seven cars filled up. A while ago you mentioned that as soon as you got the seven cars filled, you were finished. Didn't they ever try and increase the quotas? In other words, if you finished seven cars, it might seem that they might the next day make you do eight.

Brantley: No, they didn't do that. They'd laugh and pat you on the back when you'd get those seven cars--the guys in charge there.

Marcello: Now were these civilians?

Brantley: Yes. And, of course, they'd let you go. One day we were down in there, and we had a big cave in. And we had had spaces you had to crawl to. A bunch of us were sitting there waiting for them to cut another lateral tunnel off from the main tunnel, and we were talking pretty loud, and those guards stopped us from talking because big hunks of that roof would fall down. After we found out that was it, they got pretty aggravated with us and started kicking me around. I started whistling real loud, and they'd run from me to get out

of that area. So from then on they would always wait until the men got to topside if they planned to punish them.

Marcello: What sort of an attrition rate was there here at the coal mines? Did you lose very many people?

Brantley: Oh, I'd say we lost three or four. And, of course, you had to carry those heavy timbers and sometimes you'd crawl a long ways, you know. You couldn't stand up always; you had to crawl on your hands and knees at times and slide those timbers along.

Marcello: How close were these coal mines to Nagasaki?

Brantley: Oh, they were out a ways from town. I imagine about ten miles.

Marcello: About ten miles altogether. Now at this stage do any individual Japanese stand out in your mind so far as nicknames and so on?

Brantley: No, not the nicknames. I forgot the name of the officer in charge. He was a big, tall Japanese, and he was very mean to the prisoners.

Marcello: Were you ever subjected to any physical punishment at the coal mines other than having to make up that quota of coal cars.

Brantley: That's the only thing that they ever bothered me about. They didn't punish too many of them at that stage.

Marcello: Either here or at Osaka were you able to witness any Americans who collaborated with the Japanese?

Brantley: No. Some of the officers did in some way get awfully friendly with them to get extra food, and some of the guys got beat up for it.

Marcello: Now did you finish out the war at Nagasaki?

Brantley: Yes. That's where I got loose, yes.

Marcello: I think one prisoner told me something that I think is kind of an accurate statement, I suppose you could say. He said, "You know, when you're in prison, if you've been sentenced to prison or to jail, you always know when you're getting out. You can count the days at least, even if it's thirty days or thirty years. But when you're a prisoner-of-war, you don't know when the end is going to come. In other words, you don't know how long you are going to be a prisoner. So far as time in that way is concerned, you really can't keep track of time." Did you find this true yourself? Did you ever think about this?

Brantley: Well, that's right. When I was close to Nagasaki, well, we knew the end was close because all the surrounding towns were being bombed continuously. Many times when you were outside, you could look up and see our planes in the air, especially when they bombed Nagasaki, before they dropped the Atomic Bomb on it. They eventually took me out of the coal mine work and put me on another

detail digging pits for anti-aircraft guns or something. They were up in them hills outside of the town. We worked at night on that. On the day they dropped the Atomic Bomb on Nagasaki, I counted two hundred and some bombers, and you couldn't even count the fighter planes. And right after that that lone plane came over and dropped the Atomic Bomb. I saw the mushroom.

Marcello: You did.

Brantley: Yes, I thought they hit a gas dump.

Marcello: Well, describe this incident. I think this is important.

Brantley: I saw all this white smoke and stuff boil up, you know. We all laughed and said, "Boy, we really lowered the boom on them!"

Marcello: Could you feel the earth or the ground shake where you were?

Brantley: Oh, yes. Oh, well, of course, there was over two hundred and some bombers that dropped tons of bombs, and the ground was rattling like it was. And them fighter planes were dropping their empty gas tanks over us, too, and we thought they were bombs, too, at first. Then daylight came and they marched us back into our barracks. Of course, when you worked at night, they didn't see good in the daytime. Of course, that day they woke us up and brought us a big ration of rice. They told us it was a Japanese holiday and they were feeding us. Next day we

didn't have to go to work. They said it was another holiday. We didn't go out the next day. Boy, they shot the rice to us. Then the next day they called us out to tell us that they had reached a peace agreement with the United States and the war was over. And we were to stay in our compound until American troops came and got us.

Marcellb : What were your feelings when you heard this?

Brantley: Well, me and another old boy who'd been bunking together turned around to me and said, "Well, Loren, we made it." And he immediately dropped dead. Took one big breath and died right there.

Marcello: Had he been sick or anything before this?

Brantley: Not a bit.

Marcello: Do you think it was just the excitement of the thing or what?

Brantley: I think this was partly the reason and being undernourished. He just had a heart attack and died right there.

Marcello: Did you ever have any fear that now that the war was over that the Japanese might possibly take reprisals against the prisoners?

Brantley: No, because when they announced it they told us to stay in our compound. Me and three other guys didn't. We got out. We went into town.

Marcello: This was to Nagasaki?

Brantley: No, the little town near the corner of Nagasaki. We went up and they were issuing food to these Japanese. They were rationing their food. So we told them to give us something, and they refused. And we just crawled over the counter and helped ourselves.

Marcello: Weren't you kind of taking a chance?

Brantley: Probably was. (chuckle) I didn't think about it. (chuckle)

Marcello: Because here were all these American bombers coming over and dropping these bombs and killing Japanese civilians. I would have assumed that they weren't exactly the most friendly people in the world toward Americans.

Brantley: The civilians didn't pay much attention to us. The guards became aroused a little, but we told them, "MacArthur's coming back, boy. You bother me and you're going to answer to him now." So we stacked up a bunch of that food and carried it back to the compound. Of course, here comes the whole Japanese Army down there and wanted to know who got it, but nobody said anything. They walked around through there and walked out. They didn't try to get it. And so we ate. And the next day American bombers came over and dropped barrels of food for us. Of course, in dropping these barrels they busted and a piece of steel from one of them flew off and cut an old boy's leg off. And, of course, some Japanese civilians got killed,

and we divided everything with Japanese families.

Marcello: Do you think that the pilot knew where the prisoner-of-war compounds were, and did they try and avoid them?

Brantley: On this instance I think they knew where we were at. They dropped them out there on the edge, and they didn't drop them in it. They circled real low over us, and the Japanese guards told them where we was at, and they made arrangements to drop it out there. I didn't stay in the compound after they dropped that food. Three of us got on a train and rode around for two or three days.

Marcello: What did the countryside look like in the areas where you were?

Brantley: Well, they had tunnels dug into nearly every hill you would see. Those civilians were headed for the hills.

Marcello: Did you receive any sort of mail at all while you were in Japan?

Brantley: I got one letter.

Marcello: Were you allowed to write any letters?

Brantley: Yes, we wrote once or twice a year. They'd let you write according to how good an employee you were. And I wasn't too good.

Marcello: So you didn't get to write too often.

Brantley: No. (chuckle)

Marcello: How about Red Cross packages. Did you receive any Red Cross packages?

Brantley: I got them twice. One Christmas they brought it all out on the table and took pictures of it. Then they gathered it up, and we never did get it.

Marcello: Had the Japanese gone through the packages and so on?

Brantley: Oh, yes. And, of course, next Christmas they did give them to us. They give us part of a package. They kept the rest, I guess.