

Interviewee: Louis Bailen

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor, Ph.D.

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Location: Thomas Saylor's office at Concordia University, St. Paul, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, September 2004

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, October 2004

Louis Bailen was born 18 October 1921 near Benoit, in northern Wisconsin, one of ten children. His parents both died when he was young; as a result, Louis lived for many years in an orphanage in Superior, Wisconsin. In the late 1930s he spent about eighteen months in CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] Camps in northern Wisconsin. In April 1940, Louis enlisted in the US Navy and was trained as a mechanic.

In late 1941 Louis was stationed at Cavite Naval Base at Manila, in the Philippines. Japanese military forces attacked the Philippines on 8 December 1941. Louis was captured on 9 May 1942, with the American garrison of Corregidor. He spent the period until September 1945 as a POW of the Japanese, in the Philippines (at Cabanatuan), on Palawan Island, and later in Japan. Liberated, Louis spent more than six months in stateside military hospitals, recovering from his ordeal as a POW. He was discharged in 1946.

Postwar, Louis lived in the Twin Cities area and worked many years as a custodial engineer for St. Paul Public Schools.

Interview Key:

T = Thomas Saylor

L = Louis Bailen

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: Today is Friday, August 13, 2004. This is an interview for the Prisoner of War Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today I'm speaking with Mr. Louis Bailen of Falcon Heights, Minnesota. We're speaking at my office at Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota.

First, Mr. Bailen, on the record, thanks very much for taking time to come and speak with me today. For the record, you were born on 18 October 1921 by the town of Benoit, in northern Wisconsin. You were one of ten children. Your parents both died when you were young. Dad died 1924 and your mom died 1929. You were raised for many years in an orphanage in Superior, Wisconsin. You spent about eighteen months in CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] Camps in northern Wisconsin. Finished that 1939, and in April of 1940 you enlisted in the United States Navy.

I have to ask, why does a young man from northern Wisconsin join the US Navy? What made you join the Navy?

L: Because I had no job. I liked what I saw and read on the posters at the Naval Recruiting Station.

T: So you saw the images of the Navy and places far away from northern Wisconsin...

L: And travel. And it was attractive.

T: So, as opposed to joining the Army, for example...

L: Right. I didn't want to be a dogface. This is what they called them.

T: Okay. So for you the Navy. In 1941, you were in the Philippines, and when the US got involved in the Pacific War in December of 1941, you were at Olongapo PBY Base on Luzon. Is that correct?

L: No, I was in Manila. In the Cavite Naval Base.

T: Cavite Naval Base. In Manila.

L: Yes.

T: What do you remember about the day the war began? What was that like for you over there in Manila?

L: I saw the bombs fall on Manila. Then when I picked up the newspaper I saw quite a few dead Filipinos laying on the ground.

T: So the newspapers kind of really covered the beginning of the war, and you could read about what you'd seen?

L: Yes. What I saw. Yes. Because I saw these five Filipino children and their mother and the dad hovering over them. Laying on the ground. Dead from bombs. Of course the fires. Black smoke. A lot of black smoke. Then they put us to guard duty. At the dock. They gave me a rifle, an M-16. I never had one in my hands before (*chuckles*). Hardly knew how to shoot it. And I held it. I was on guard duty. Guarding the ships on the pier. Yes. Which is a funny...

T: For someone like you, the beginning or the involvement of the US in the war, was that something that you, if you can recall, felt completely surprised about or was it like, okay, I've been expecting this?

L: We were expecting it. We knew it was coming. We knew. Because we knew about Jap transports. Sixty thousand were on board Japanese ships in Formosa. So we knew. We were wondering, and we heard what was going on in Washington about Prince Canoy [who] was the ambassador, Japanese ambassador. He told our government that they would fight. Then we also wondered why the battleships were all tied up at their piers in Honolulu. Most of our submarines and ships were out to sea. At the time of the attack. We knew all that.

(1, A, 47)

T: You would say you weren't surprised.

L: We weren't surprised. No. We felt it was coming. At least two weeks before. You could feel it in the air.

T: So there was the sense of expecting something?

L: Yes. We knew it was coming. But we were wondering why Washington and everybody was so lax back home.

T: Now you were captured on May 9, 1942, with the garrison of Corregidor.

L: Yes.

T: Let me ask you about that time, back in May 1942. Can you describe the circumstances that day from your perspective, when you were surrendered and made a POW? What happened that day?

L: It's really hard to say. That was it. It was just...over. That's all. It's over. Nothing you could do about it. You saw the Japanese guards and they herded you in different places and you were fed whatever you had left in your knapsack or canteen. That was it. It was over. That was all.

T: So almost anti-climactic, the way you describe it.

L: That's right. Then no other feeling.

T: Now at this point you are a prisoner of the Japanese.

L: Yes.

T: How much thought had you given prior to that day or that moment really of what it would be like to be a POW?

L: Never thought of it.

T: Even when it was clear that this was going to happen?

L: No. Never thought of it. So be it. You knew there was no help coming. You were too far away from any help. Ten thousand miles away. And I never expected anybody to come to our rescue. Right. Because it was the whole British fleet was gone. Our fleet was gone.

T: Were people depressed and kind of resigned to their fate by this time?

L: No. They were resigned. They weren't depressed. No. They talked normal. Like you and I would right now. Nobody was screaming and hollering. Like a bunch of sheep. You went to slaughter.

T: Do you remember people around you talking about, gee, what's going to happen when the Japs come? What's going to happen when we're prisoners?

L: No. No. No. Nobody. You took it. That was fate. You just moved on. You did what you were told to do.

T: When you saw those Japanese—you've been at war with them for several months. They've been over there. You've been over here. Suddenly they're as close as you and I are.

L: Yes.

(1, A, 79)

T: What was that like when you had the Japanese really that close to you? What did you make of them?

L: No different than I'm talking to you right now. No different. No fear. Nothing. Like I said, you were resigned to your fate, but you didn't dwell on what was going to happen either.

T: So you didn't find yourself thinking about tomorrow or a week or a month from now?

L: No. Didn't worry about it. No. Never worry about what could happen the next day. You just took it day by day.

T: So your thoughts were at the moment of that particular day.

L: Yes. All the time.

T: Mr. Bailen, were you questioned or frisked or anything by these initial Japanese soldiers?

L: No. Never. No.

T: What did happen to you when they actually arrived? Did you have to walk out with your hands up or what did they do?

L: No. No. They just herded us all in different groups. Then they would count maybe a hundred in one group and another hundred here. They counted you over and over and over again. And you had to learn how to count. Ichi, nei, san...

T: In Japanese.

L: Yes. Yes.

T: You can still do it, it sounds like.

L: Part of it. Yes. You had to count. And then they would make a mistake. They were kind of stupid. Remember these weren't shock troops. These were the lowest ranking, occupation troops. Very lowest. Dummies. They couldn't even count straight. They had to count the same bunch of men ten times over to make sure they had—because they were afraid somebody was missing, see?

T: Now how long did you stay on Corregidor before you left then?

L: Not very long. No. It's really hard to say. I don't think it was a week. Because we went to Bilibid [Prison in Manila].

T: More like a week than a month though.

L: Yes. They cleared us off pretty quick. Because we went to Bilibid Prison. That was terrible.

T: How did you get from Corregidor to Manila?

L: They didn't take us by ship. We went to Marvales. They took us back to Marvales. Then they put us on a train. Boxcars. Yes. Herded us. Yes. That's how we did it.

T: So you went across the bay to Marvales. Not to Manila.

L: No. No. They didn't take us on any ship. Went to Marvales and then back to Manila.

T: You must have gone to Marvales by ship or boat or something, right?

(1, A, 107)

L: Oh, yes. You had to. Yes. To get from there. Or a barge. Open barge. I think it was an open barge. Then to Marvales by train. Boxcars. Cattle cars. Then we were put in Bilibid. That was terrible there, Bilibid. We only got one small rice ration a day there. I think I was—hard to say—maybe only two weeks there though.

T: Again more like a holding facility.

L: Yes. That's all. Until we went to Cabanatuan.

T: Were you in the Bilibid Prison or were you kept outside?

L: I was in it. Yes. I was in it.

T: What can you say about the conditions inside Bilibid Prison?

L: Oh, it's terrible. Terrible. From the prisoners I saw there already were pretty emaciated, skinny. So where they captured them I don't know. Some of them were awful poor. Because we only got one rice ration a day. Watery. We called it lugao or something. Then they boarded us on trains again. At night. Out of Bilibid. To...

T: North to Cabanatuan then?

L: No. They only took us so far. Hard to say. San Fernando maybe. And then we had to walk the rest of the way. We walked. Yes.

T: So you had a train to Manila, then a stop at Bilibid. Altogether a couple weeks maybe?

L: Yes. Yes.

T: And then a train to San Fernando and a walk up north to Cabanatuan.

L: We walked the rest. Yes. Yes.

T: What kind of physical shape were you in when you got to Cabanatuan?

L: Well, at least I could walk. I didn't have any injuries or anything. No. Like most of them did. Of our group. I could walk okay. I think there was about one thousand being moved.

T: So a larger group being moved out.

L: Yes. And then we'd stop at one place for water out of a spigot and that would be it. That's all. Until we got there, to Cabanatuan.

T: Did they keep you at Cabanatuan very long?

L: Yes. It was a holding facility, too. Until they decided where you were to go. Some went to farms. Some were shipped out to [the island of] Palawan. We were fed three times a day there, but it was just rice. That's all.

T: Can you estimate how long you were kept at Cabanatuan before they moved out to Palawan?

L: Couldn't have been more than two months.

T: But longer than you were at Bilibid or stayed at Corregidor.

L: Yes. Longer. Couldn't have been more than two because I believe we arrived in Palawan in June. Or July. July. Yes. July 1942. Then we were there until 1944. August 1944.

T: So Palawan, was that the longest place you stayed?

L: Yes. We built that airbase. Hacked it out of the jungle.

T: Let me ask about Cabanatuan there briefly. Were you on work details when you were there?

L: Nothing. No. I wasn't. No. Some people were. But no, I didn't go anyplace. I didn't go anyplace.

T: So in a sense you were just sort of waiting with a lot of other guys.

L: Just waiting. Yes. Just milling around the barracks and sitting down. It's a good thing it wasn't the rainy season at that time.

T: Talk about the barracks there at Cabanatuan.

L: You slept in tiers, you know. Flat, one, two, three tiers with a straw mattress. Sleeping. Buggy mattress. That was it.

T: One to a bunk?

L: Oh, no. It was whole flats.

T: Like a platform?

L: Yes. The same as Japanese troop ships. They were flat all the way. Like the shelves. You go over there. Just like that. Just like that.

T: And one to a shelf?

L: Oh, no. No, you had at least eight men on the shelf. At least.

T: A BIG platform.

L: Yes. Big. Big. That's just the way the Japanese troop ships were too. They slept exactly like that. On tiers. So they could haul at least maybe one thousand men.

T: At Cabanatuan without work details and with crowded space like that, how did you pass your time during the day?

L: Sat out in the sun. Did nothing.

T: Really nothing to do?

L: Yes. Nothing to read. Nothing to do. Let's say you were like a zombie. Brain dead. There was nothing to think of. Yes. Well, you would think of food. That kept you going. Food. Food. Oh, yes. The guys talked about food. "My mom made this..." and your mouth would water. Food. That kept you going. You thought of food.

T: And with all the places you were, Cabanatuan, Palawan, Japan, was that a constant topic of conversation?

L: Food. Yes. Food. Yes, you'd better, because you wouldn't think of death or worry about what's going to happen. You talked about food and you talked about what you did in your earlier days. At home.

T: So there was some talk of what one used to do.

L: Yes.

(1, A, 173)

T: Did guys, from what you remember, did guys, yourself included, talk more about what you had done when you lived in the States or the future?

L: No. Not the future. What you had done. There was no future. You talked about what you did. Yes. We talked about the CCs and where we worked and how we worked and what we ate. Food. Kept food, food, food (*chuckles*).

T: But you don't remember yourself talking about, "when I get out of here I'm going to..."

L: No! Never! Never! Because you knew Australia was a long ways away and what we saw, our Army and Navy was pretty pathetic. The British were wiped out already. The Dutch were wiped out. Can you imagine, had no heart at our fleet. In command of our fleet. Then you had to go to join hands with the British. I forget the British admiral. Then the Dutch admiral, Reuter, I think his name was. Neither one could understand each other and they were supposed to fight a well-organized Navy.

T: So it didn't give you much cause for optimism.

L: Yes. They fought a well-organized Navy who could understand each other and our ships, the Dutch, the British, and the Americans never practiced together. So that's a big mistake right there.

T: You know with a lot of young men around I can think that the topic might be women.

L: No. Food. There's no sex and women here. There was no sex. We were as flat as a—why would you? Food. Because there was no meat. Never got any fish there. There was no fish, at Cabanatuan. Never.

At Palawan I was lucky. Once in a while they would blow up some sea cow which was—I forget what they're called. Like a manatee. Sea cow. We ate that. It was pretty tasty but you only got one piece. Deep fried. At least you got that. Then in the jungle we would run in and get bananas and coconuts and mangos and stuff like that.

T: Was it possible to supplement your food by scrounging for things?

L: Yes. In Palawan, yes. You could sneak off. You'd tell the guard you had to go benjo, toilet. Then you'd pick some bananas. But they never seemed to care too much that you brought back some bananas, or what we used to call hand grenades. They were real delicious tasting. Fruit. They looked almost like a hand grenade. They tasted like pineapple-strawberry and it was really a good fruit. Then the mangos were delicious. They were about a foot long.

T: So oversized mangos.

L: Yes. Huge. Right on the tree. Ripe. And of course they were, the mango trees, they would fall on the ground. Just delicious. But see, that's where if you were in Bilibid you got nothing like that. So the guys, when we went to Bilibid, they thought, gee, these guys really look big. Well, we were eating a little bit better. Although the rice was just meager.

But then we had to work though. We were worked. A lot of us didn't even have shoes. We made sandals out of tires. We worked with our feet in cement. Pouring the cement.

T: The work you did there at Palawan, describe that work as much as you can.

L: Well, first we had to clear it. There was coral to be cleared. Coral. Used sledge hammers to bust the coral. Grub out the stumps. Chop the trees down.

(1, A, 221)

T: It was jungle area.

L: Yes. Jungle. But awful pretty. Then you'd see hawks and parrots. Just brilliant colors. It was pretty. It was almost like paradise. Puerto Princesa [a city on Palawan]. It was a beautiful place. But of course you had no use for beauty in those days.

T: But you noticed it. That's interesting.

L: You noticed it. Yes. The sky was blue, and the parrots and all that stuff. Of course a lot of snakes. A lot of cobras. You had to be careful. Them buggers would look right at you. I saw one chap pick up a cobra and hit it over the head and then he sucked out the blood and I think he ate the heart. Yes. He did. But he wasn't a soldier. I think he was from Korea. They were awful low class. He actually drank the blood of the cobra.

T: So you had to clear jungle growth and then work the ground as well.

L: Yes. And level it out by hand. Pick axes and shovels. Leveled it off. No bulldozers or anything. All by hand. Leveled. Then the Japanese carpenter would make the forms. He would make the forms. Then we would mix the cement and fill it up. Then of course they would put palm leaves over it. Palm branches. To keep it cool.

T: How many prisoners of war were there at Palawan? Can you estimate?

L: Three fifty [350].

T: Was it pretty much the same group of guys?

L: Yes. Yes. The same. There was no other.

T: So people didn't come and go here.

L: No. No. Same. Stayed there for three years or so. Yes. It was always the same. Like the captain, the officers, didn't have to work. But they had the doctor and the ensign had to be out in the field with us. Just standing there. But the captain, he stayed back in the barracks. The barracks was a constabulary barracks. Police barracks. They fought the Moros, which were at the southern tip of the island. We called them headhunters. They were on the southern, very southern tip. But this was a constabulary barracks. There was...

T: What did the barracks look like?

L: It was nice. It was just one story. You went up and then, like I said, it was a veranda. All the way around. In a U-shape with a nice roof. A regular U-shape. At the entrance in the main lobby, not lobby but porch, was a Gatling gun. A real Gatling gun that was invented by Gatling. That was evidently to, you know—that the constabulary, Philippine constabulary, police used to fight the Moros.

T: So this building had been used for something else.

L: Oh, yes.

T: It was now used to house POWs.

L: Prisoners. It was a constabulary barracks. That's why it was in such good shape.

T: And you all stayed in...

(1, A, 263)

L: Each of us had tents. I mean mosquito nets. Big ones. Like tents. So four men to a tent. I did get dengue fever there. But a lot of guys got malaria. And they did have

some malaria pills there for that. But the dengue, that lasted about six weeks. There was nothing for that.

T: How does that make you feel?

L: High fever. Your fever could go to 106 and you could still stand. Yes. Oh, yes. There were guys had 106 fever and still stood. But you would be kind of woozy. Evidently if we would have been fed good—like you could never take 106 here in the States. You'd be dead. Because [of a diet including] a lot of meat and all that. But we were so dehydrated that evidently it didn't kill us. We could take the high fever. Because my fever was high too. I would just lay down, dizzy. But that lasted about six weeks. But I didn't have dysentery there. Which I did later.

T: But you didn't have it at Palawan.

L: No. I didn't there. Never. No. I did have it—oh, that was terrible. Yes. That was at the mine [in Japan]. Dysentery. Yes. Nothing but water came out. Water. And mucus. Water and mucus. And yet you survived. But I did have—maybe this is getting ahead—the roundworm.

T: Where did you get the worms?

L: I could have got them in the Philippines. I could have got them in Japan. They were the roundworms. Because when I went to the Naval base in Oakland, Oak Knoll Naval Base [after being repatriated], they gave me some medicine. That's how long it was before I got treated.

T: Not until you got back to the States?

L: Yes. I went to the bathroom. I was at Oakland Naval Base and I was too ashamed to tell the naval doctor. I said, "Oh, my God, look what I passed out!" They were still wiggling. Some of them were ten inches long. Round ascaris worm I think they call it. I was too ashamed to call the naval doctor.

T: You did finally, though, right?

L: No. No. I flushed it down.

T: How did they find out?

L: They gave me the de-worming medicine.

(1, A, 304)

T: How did they know you had worms? Did you tell them?

L: They all suspected it. I suppose blood tests or whatever. Or stool tests. But I don't remember taking a stool test. Anyhow these horrible worms. I looked at that toilet, yuck!!! It was full of them. But you remember, they were eating what you were supposed to have eaten. And they were taking your nutrition. I don't know how long I had them. Some guys had tapeworms.

T: Did the medication work that you took?

L: Oh, yes. But they weren't completely dead. They were moving yet.

T: When you took the medication did they come out dead then or what?

L: No. They were moving in the water. They were still kind of moving. But it was enough to pass them out.

T: Did you start to feel better after that?

L: Hard to say. Well, because I had better food, yes. Better food. The surprising thing, when we first got aboard the hospital ship when we were still in Japan there, we ate like pigs. I never even threw up. They didn't know how to feed us. They gave us pork chops. Dumb. They gave us food. We ate the regular food that the... Then I had my bag. I had some lead zinc that looked awful silvery and I had some other stuff. Somebody aboard ship, they were rifling through the prisoners bags stealing.

T: They didn't? *(tone of disbelief)*

L: Yes they did. Our own guys. The guys aboard ship.

T: Stole your stuff?

L: They were stealing. Yes. Looking for souvenirs.

T: That's dirty pool, man.

L: That's people. Because I had beautiful pieces. Looked like silver almost. Piece of ore that was gone. And some other paraphernalia.

T: How did that make you feel when you had your stuff stolen by your own guys?

L: What could you do? No. These were guys aboard ship. Aboard the hospital ship.

T: Were you more mad or upset?

L: No. Well, just upset. What could you do? We were free.

T: Let me ask you about people. I mean you're a Navy guy, and most of the people that were captured on Corregidor weren't Navy guys.

L: No. No, they weren't. They were Marines. Marines and Army. The 4th Marines were there from Shanghai. That's the outfit I was with.

T: That was a smaller group than the Army.

L: Small. Small. Yes.

T: When you were at Palawan there, did you have a guy or more than one guy who you considered closer friends that you really hung with?

(1, A, 347)

L: Yes. Just a group. Small group. Because you'd sit on the bench there and you could gab with just maybe three or four guys. That was it. Yes. You didn't go around to the Army guys that you never knew.

T: So you had a small group of guys...

L: Small group. Yes.

T: Were they the same guys that you basically looked for every day?

L: Yes. Yes. We ate together and talked. Just sat and talked. Yes. That's it. Brothers.

T: Were they Navy or Marine guys too?

L: Just a couple of Marines, and mostly Navy.

T: Who were they? Do you remember their names?

L: One was named Herman Barger, and Bernard. He was Army though. Bernard was Army. And Barger was Navy. He was a boatswain's mate. I liked to talk to him because he was a gabby guy. He could rattle on and on and on. And he was a happy guy.

T: So he could carry the conversation.

L: Yes. Yes. Yes.

T: And he was a happy guy on the whole?

L: A happy guy. Another guy, Skinner. Skinner I saw. He was killed. Skinner was killed. He saw us boarding this small ship [when we left Palawan], and I was on the deck there and he was on the dock and they were seeing us off and he went just like this.

T: He was twisting his finger around, like you're doing now

L: Meaning the submarines, a torpedo is going to get you. Then he laughed and we laughed too. But he was left behind. And I knew he was killed.

T: Because all the guys on Palawan were killed.

L: Yes. The rest.

T: With a couple exceptions were killed.

L: Yes. Yes. Skinner. Because I went to Jefferson there in Missouri and I saw his name on the gravestone.

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 382.

T: Talking about friends. How could friends, the guys you mentioned, how could you help each other in tough times? I mean if you got really sick could you depend on these guys or...

L: There was nothing you could help [each other] with. There's nothing you could help because the guys I knew had ulcers on their leg that were three, four inches in diameter and circumference and deep that never healed. Never healed. So what could you do? You just looked at it and felt sorry. You were helpless. There was nothing you could do. You didn't really comfort each other. You just talked to them. Because you were all in the same boat.

T: If you were sick and couldn't get your own food, could you count on somebody to bring it to you?

L: Never happened.

T: Never happened?

L: No. To none of us. That I knew of. Down there. So we were okay there. Didn't have to worry about that. Nobody died there.

T: At Palawan.

L: Yes. Oh, one climbed a tree and broke his neck. Fell down.

T: But as far as dying from illness or....

(1, B, 394)

L: No. Nobody died. No.

T: So that happened earlier maybe but by the time you get to Palawan the health things have stabilized to a point.

L: Yes. Steady. Yes. About the same. Stayed like that for the length of the time we were in there.

T: Did your work change at Palawan or were you doing pretty much the same...

L: Same. Same. Same.

T: This airfield construction went on and on.

L: That's all it was. Yes. And we built revetments for the Japanese fighter planes. Revetments were like high banks. I think they dug a trench too. I was in on that. They dug a trench near—maybe that was for their own people to jump in in case of an air raid. But I don't know.

T: So the work didn't really change so much.

L: No.

T: What did you find most difficult about the work there at Palawan? What was the most difficult part of that for you?

L: Well, yes. The cement. Yes. Your hands and feet would get gritty from the cement. And dried out your skin. Yes.

T: From working with dry cement.

L: Yes. Yes.

T: Right. Now how long did it take to build this airstrip? It sounds like it took a while to get it done.

L: Oh, yes. Yes. Oh, it must have taken a year and a half from start to finish. At least.

T: So when you say you were on airfield construction, that was what you did for a long period of time.

L: Yes. Yes. The only piece of machinery they had was a steamroller, fired by wood. That was the only piece of equipment I saw there.

T: And everything else was handwork.

L: Yes.

T: Let me ask you about the Japanese at Palawan. What kind of people were they? The guards you interacted with.

L: Oh, they looked like they come—like I said, the lowest of the low. From Korea it looked like.

T: So you had Korean guards as well as...

L: That's what it looked like. Yes. They weren't Japanese actually. They were Korean. Yes. But Japanese commandant. He was Japanese. I forget his name though.

T: So you had Japanese, the upper levels of the administration were Japanese and the guards may have been Japanese or Korean.

L: Yes. They looked more like Korean. The lowest of the lowest. Yes.

T: What kind of treatment could you expect from them on a daily basis?

L: They just guarded you. As long as you, as you behaved, nothing. I didn't see anybody get beat up there. Not there.

(1, B, 420)

T: Didn't happen to you either at Palawan.

L: No. No. Nobody.

T: In comparison, was Palawan a better place to be than some other places you were?

L: Yes. Yes. For one thing the weather and climate. Never was too hot. So it was, yes, it was cool breezes. Yes. That was by far [a better place to be]. Especially the zinc mine [in Japan]. That was terrible up there.

T: So Palawan was a better place. The Japanese, you don't remember any kind of physical abuse of prisoners at Palawan?

L: No. No. Never.

T: You mentioned bugs. Were bugs a problem there? You had mosquito nets you mentioned.

L: Oh, yes. You had to be careful. Because of malaria, you know. But dengue fever, I did have dengue there. I didn't have malaria. Some people did. Malaria was common, but not too many had the malaria or the dengue. That was odd. Why the whole camp didn't get it, I don't know. The doctor never got it. The captain never got it.

T: How about other things? Lice, scorpions, snakes?

L: No. No. The only thing there was a few bugs in your rice. But no scorpions. No. Because you were in the barracks. I could see scorpions if you were laying on the ground. Yes.

T: You could see them outside.

L: Yes. Those outside. Yes. Or snakes. Yes. You'd see them. You'd have to be careful if you went to look for bananas so you didn't step on one. You'd be cautious. I could run through the jungle and miss them. You got pretty good at it.

T: Did you get used to the jungle?

L: Oh, yes. You liked the jungle. Yes. Because it was like this, nice and sunny and you saw the fruit. That made you feel good. You never got diarrhea from there. All that time there.

T: At Palawan you had regular bowel movements?

L: Yes. Regular. Yes. But never anything like I got later.

T: What you're saying is that your health went downhill after you left Palawan.

L: Yes. After was terrible. We got to Bilibid first and, like I said, they boarded us onto the ship. It was terrible. Yes. Because you laid there thirty-seven days. We sat on the pile of coal. That's because it was just an open hold. There were five hundred men in that hold. Four or five hundred. It had to be five hundred, because we carried 1200 on that.

T: How did you know how many men were on that ship?

L: They told us. Yes. They told us.

T: And there were two holds.

(1, B, 448)

L: Two holds. Yes. So we were safe there. Like I said to them, I mentioned we were lucky. That was lucky. We talked to the British from Malaysia. They were sitting on that ship for six months. In the tropics.

T: Just sitting there.

L: Before they moved them. Six months! We didn't sit in the ship. We moved. But it's still thirty-seven days. I don't know why it took that long to go from Manila to Formosa.

T: And you got off the ship, didn't you?

L: We landed in Taipei. I forget how you spell it. Taipei. That was the capital.

T: And you got off the ship.

L: Yes. We got off. Then they took us to a farm to do a little farm work. Cultivate vegetables.

T: You actually had a period of time where you stayed on Formosa, then.

L: Just a little bit. Yes. Maybe a month or so. Then they boarded us on a ship for Japan. That was twenty-two days going to Japan. Twenty-two days. On a troop ship.

T: Must have been sailing in circles or something.

L: Yes. I don't know why—well, they did hug the China coast. They stayed close to the coast, I suppose, on account of submarines.

T: Yes. When you were at Palawan and you were there until mid-1944 or after, the war started to shift against Japan.

L: Oh, it was. To be sure. Because when we were boarding the ship in Manila we saw the planes, all these planes attacking the ships.

T: You could see American planes attacking...

L: Yes. Yes. We saw dive-bombers. We were topside.

T: You're talking here and on the tape here, it sounds like your mood or your demeanor stayed pretty much the same.

L: Yes.

T: How do you keep yourself from, well, let's face it, getting depressed about your situation?

L: No. No. You never were.

T: Why not?

L: None of the guys that I knew were ever depressed.

T: How did you do that, Mr. Bailen?

L: I don't know why they're depressed here in the States. When they got all this. I don't know. It's just...upbringing maybe. We came from a different generation.

T: Yes.

L: That's the only thing I can explain. We were from a different... Like I said, we were in an orphanage. The food was minimum. There was no McDonalds. People are eating too much.

T: So you think that growing up in what we might say tougher times...

L: Yes. Because officers that I knew, and one was a major in that ship, he died. He was big, fat guy. Army officer. He died. He never had it as tough as we did. So he didn't survive. The ones that had it easy didn't know how to handle it.

(1, B, 478)

T: So that may have helped your mindset too, in that you didn't expect things to be really good.

L: No. No. Never. So we took whatever we got from the Japanese soldier. That's the way it goes. There's nothing you can do about it. Different generation. That's why those guys that landed in Normandy were from our generation and they were able to climb that cliff and capture the Germans on Omaha Beach. God, it was terrible.

T: Let me ask you too, were you a particularly religious person then?

L: Well, yes. Yes. Because—oh, I didn't tell you, at Cabanatuan I... See, now we have to go back. I had a small infection in my wrist. I went to the camp doctor. I didn't know that he saw red and yellow stripes all the way to my elbow. You know what he told me? He says, "You might be dead by morning." And it didn't phase me.

T: Why not?

L: I don't know. It didn't phase me. So I went to bed that night and I prayed. I was religious. I prayed to the Blessed Virgin. Said that a few times and fell into a deep sleep. I woke up the next morning and you know what I did? I looked at my arm and there was nothing there. There was nothing there! The doctor saw red and yellow streaks all the way. Then I told him my dad died of that. He died of blood poisoning. That was it. I told it to him like I tell it to you. And it didn't phase me. A terrible shock. You weren't depressed. I went to bed and actually I prayed. The Blessed Virgin. Just from the stanza I knew. I sang at the orphanage. Repeated that a few times and fell asleep. Never woke up all night. The doctor told me, "You may be dead by morning," but that was a heck of a thing for a doctor to say.

T: Yes, it was.

L: Well, that's the way it was. Because he saw death all around him. Like I saw these guys being executed. Nothing phases you.

T: That was at Cabanatuan you saw that, right?

L: Yes. I saw the Japanese captain fire his coup d'grace—what they call it...

T: His pistol at the guy.

L: They call it coup d'grace. To finish him off.

T: What were those guys executed for?

L: They may have tried to escape, because they did say [if] anybody escaped ten men would be shot. But I know if I just saw ten men there. I saw several. They were at a good 1500 yards away and I could see, we could see. That didn't phase you either.

T: It didn't phase you?

L: Well, they stood in front of a trench when they were shot and they fell into the trench. So then they just covered them.

T: It didn't phase you seeing that?

L: No. That's the good thing about it. Because you see so much of it. Before that too. Like I said, you don't dwell on it. You don't dwell on it. You don't look. See a dead body. You don't stand there and stare at it.

T: How do you not do that? I mean in a sense...

L: Well, we were... Today it would be different. I'd be terrified if my nephew or someone got hurt by a car. Yes. That I couldn't take. A grandchild. But you...

T: Do you think you were a different person in those years?

L: Yes. Yes. Well, like I said, the orphanage had a lot to do with it. Look at the way the nuns treated you. The food you got. We had chickens. I don't think I saw one boiled egg there unless I stole it. I helped milk the cows.

T: You mean at the orphanage?

L: Yes. And once in a while we'd get an egg from the kid that was running the chicken coop.

T: So you weren't overfed.

L: No.

T: And you weren't overfed as a POW either.

L: Yes.

T: Let me shift a little and ask another question about Palawan there. It's kind of an isolated location.

L: Yes. It was pretty. It was called Puerto Princesa, and the Sulu Sea was on one side of the island and the China Sea was on the other. And emerald green of the Sulu Sea. Even in our condition I looked [at] how beautiful that was. Even then. It was pretty. But like I said, when we went to Japan then things...aahhh! Then your mind became a complete blank.

T: Mr. Bailen, was it at all possible to get any kind of news of how the war was going outside of Palawan?

L: No. Except what I saw back in Manila.

T: That was back in Manila, you said before we started taping, in September 1944.

L: Yes. I picked this up, a Stateside paper. That's from Guam (*motions to newspaper in personal papers*).

T: It's dated September 1944. Now without hard news, do you remember rumors working around about what was going on?

L: No. No. Because we never saw any planes fly over Palawan. Only Japanese planes.

T: So it wasn't possible to even...

L: No. Because nobody had a radio. There was nothing.

T: And guys didn't come and go from Palawan.

L: Yes. We knew they were in Australia. That would be a long haul. Because we knew the Japs had all the way down to New Guinea and we knew that it would be island for island. And we were so ill-prepared. Oh!

T: So what you did know when you thought about it was that it would be a long time.

L: Yes. Here's the generation we grew up in.

T: Asking about the ship you took to Japan. In fact from the conversation off tape, you had two ships to Japan. One ship that took you from Manila to Formosa that departed approximately 20 or 21 September 1944. And a second one from Formosa to the port of Moji.

L: Yes.

T: Let me ask you about the first of those ships that took you to Formosa. From your estimate, thirty-seven days it took to go not very long. What can you recall about the conditions on board that ship?

L: We were allowed topside just once for exercise. Just once. Then they put you back in the hold and we sat there. Yes. That was it. You just sat there and the food would be lowered down like a sawed off oil drum. Rice. That's all. Rice. Twice a day. That was it. I don't know how you survived. And some water but not too much. I don't think I had more than a cup of water.

T: How many men were in the hold?

(1, B, 556)

L: Well, the ship carried 1200. There were two holds. So they divided.

T: How closely packed were the men?

L: As close as you could sit together. Or lay. An area like that would have at least four men. From there to there (*motions with hands*). That was it.

T: Small, a six foot by six foot space.

L: It was soft coal on the bottom. That was it.

T: You were on top of coal?

L: Yes. Soft, crushed coal. They didn't clean it all out. It was a coal carrying ship. But this was the dregs.

T: So you were loaded in there with some of the guys from Palawan, but other guys that you didn't know now.

L: Yes. I didn't know very many by name. I don't think I knew more than three.

T: In conditions like that, how do you keep your mind on track?

L: On track? It goes, that's it. You don't think. You don't think and you don't talk. That's it.

T: Sat like a zombie, it sounds like.

L: Yes. Because you go into a stupor. Maybe that's what your body does. Yes.

T: Did you notice that about yourself?

L: Yes. And that's the way you had to be. Otherwise you wouldn't have survived. If you thought, you would have probably went crazy. There was a few that did go crazy. Yes. Berserk. Yes. There was screaming. Right. Some did. So if your mind went into a blank then you survived. If it didn't and you worried, I think that's when you lost it.

T: So you noticed some guys in this hold who just could not sit and do it.

L: They'd scream. Yes. So they went berserk. So they did take some out and threw them overboard.

T: So some guys died on board the ship you were on.

L: Yes. They did. Why we didn't all die of dehydration I don't know.

T: Was the ship that you recall underway attacked by American planes at all?

L: No. No. Never. Never. Like when we pulled into Hong Kong harbor to let us up on deck for a couple hours. No planes. But evidently it was submarine activity. That's why you pulled in overnight. It was safe in the harbor. Then we hugged the China coast all the way to Japan.

T: This was after you left Formosa.

L: Yes.

T: So on neither ship do you remember being attacked by planes, bombs go off or...

L: No. No.

T: And obviously you wouldn't know if a sub just missed you.

L: That's right. There's no way.

T: So on board ship there was, as you recall, minimal food, tightly packed in conditions. Just shutting mentally to keep yourself on track, from going nuts.

L: Yes. You had to. If you got your mind to working and then figured what's going to happen you probably would have gone.

(1, B, 600)

T: What was the most difficult thing for you about the ship journeys that you were on? I mean there were a lot of days in a hold.

L: Yes. I know. It's hard for you not to understand. You were a zombie. You sat there. That's it. That's all I can say. You waited for the food to come down. That would be it.

T: Was the food distributed in an orderly way or was it more anarchy?

L: Well, no. It was an orderly way. One guy had to pass it out. Each one got a—you had your mess kit cup. One cup. And you would put some in there. That was it.

T: So you had to carry your cup with you.

L: Yes. There was no way to wash it either.

T: What is it you have with you? What did you own at this time? Your cup. What else?

L: Just a cup and my canteen. But I don't know what good that does. Because you couldn't fill it up. That's all I owned. Canteen and a cup. And what few clothes you had. Which wasn't much. Most of the guys were in shorts. That's it.

T: Shirt or not?

L: Just shorts. Yes. It's too bad we didn't have pictures. That would have been a sight to see. The guys were naked on account of the heat you know. You couldn't, you didn't have any clothes.

T: So shorts or g-strings of something.

L: Yes. Right. Shorts. Yes.

T: In a small space like that...

L: You're wondering for the bathroom?

T: Yes.

L: You didn't go. I didn't go for thirty-seven days.

T: No kidding?

L: Yes. I told that to the doctor. Well, because...

T: Urinating or defecating?

L: Defecating. Urinating, you didn't do much of that either because you sweat. So what moisture you had went out of your pores. But I know I didn't go for thirty-seven days. It's unreal. Where would you go? They had no toilets. You sat on that coal. So nature evidently took over. We go into a second world. I don't know what it is.

T: But you feel you were there in a world like that?

L: In another. Yes. In another dimension. Yes.

T: You've kept yourself on a mentally pretty even keel.

L: Right. Yes.

T: From Corregidor to Palawan, the ships, Japan, did you ever hit a low point, Mr. Bailen?

(1, A, 646)

L: Never. No. Depression, no. Never. Even when we went to Cabanatuan. We were all like sheep.

T: You feel you never hit a low point as far as your own...

L: No. No. I stayed the same. You didn't worry. You didn't worry about nothing.

T: Was that hard not to worry about some...

L: Never occurred to you. If it did then you would probably would have been nuts. But your mind went into a blank. That's why I could barely write my name. The guy told me to write my name. "Oh, my God!" I said. "I can't write!"

T: When was this?

L: On the plane going back, going from Japan to Guam. He said to write your name. I said, "I can't write!" I couldn't hold the pencil to write my name. Odd. Very odd. But I was able to describe what—I think he was a sergeant. He was sitting next to me. I told him the experiences. I told him about the ship. Some guys were drinking their own urine. Maybe some drank blood even. I don't know.

T: On board the ships to Japan?

L: Yes. Yes. But he told me to write the name. He gave me a pen. I said, "I can't write!" I couldn't even start writing. My memory did go down. I did lose a lot of memory that I couldn't remember. Guys names or anything. Why I don't go into Alzheimer's I don't know. My memory did go back. Yes.

T: Has it returned?

L: A lot of it did, but I was not remembering names. Even after I went to work. Like you told me your name. Two days later I couldn't remember your name. Yes.

T: Was that something that changed for you from before and after being a POW? Did you have that kind of memory before you were a POW?

L: No. No. After.

T: So before you could remember people's names.

L: Oh, yes. I could remember.

T: And afterwards you had trouble with it.

L: Yes. Like I didn't know how to write. I couldn't start to write. My writing right now is terrible, even now.

T: Could you write okay when you were in CC camps for example?

L: Yes. Yes. Oh, I could write a whole letter. I could write a whole letter. Just poured out. Ask me to do that today, I couldn't do it.

T: And it's the actual writing you can't do. The actual picking up the pencil and...

L: The words would flow right out. They would be in your head. It would be on the paper. I can't do that anymore.

T: So now the words are in your head but you can't put them on the paper.

L: Yes. That's right. I can't do it. I can't write.

T: What do you make of that?

(1, B, 689)

L: Nothing you can do about it.

T: Do you use a computer at all?

L: Oh, God, no! That's a different world. I wouldn't even look at it. I wouldn't even buy one!

T: Mr. Bailen, let's move the interview to Japan. You docked at Moji, as most of the ships did. Describe getting off the ship. What kind of an impression did Japan make for you?

L: Oh! I saw the Japanese women and kids all had face masks.

T: Those little white masks.

L: Yes. They all wore those. All of them. And they just stared at us. Naturally. Of course we all had our horse blankets around us. But it was pretty cold. Again you were like a zombie. Walking to the next train.

T: You remember some Japanese civilians there and them actually staring at you though.

L: Yes. Just staring. Civilians. That was it.

T: Do you remember them yelling or throwing anything?

L: No. No. They were polite. They just looked. Yes. They just looked. Because I'm sure they saw other ships before us. Because that's where they all came [to Moji]. That's where they all landed.

T: It's winter. You're dressed for the tropics. Did they give you different clothing?

L: Some old pants. Yes. Nothing warm. Just a shirt, light shirt and a pair of pants. That's all. And their shoes. Japanese shoes with the split toe. We wore them.

T: So you had clothing, but you remember it being not quite right for the weather.

L: Oh, no. That's right. Well, in the mine it was very warm. So, yes.

T: But as far as the cool weather when you got to Japan proper it was not quite enough.

L: Snow on the ground by the camp. Because when I had to wash out the slop buckets, our food, just rinse them out with cold water.

T: Did you go right from Moji to train to the mine?

L: Yes. There was no walking there. I don't know how long the train ride was, because it was really packed in there. It was quite a ways. There again, you were packed in there. You were like sardines. Your mind was gone again. Until you got off. Well, the boxcar was closed too.

(1, B, 735)

T: Boxcars or passenger cars?

L: No. No. They were like boxcars. They shoved you in there. Maybe fifty to a small car.

T: So you remember moving from Moji to Sendai where the mine was in boxcars, not passenger cars.

L: No. No passenger cars. No sitting down. You stood. Or tried to sit down if you could.

T: Would you estimate you were in that car two hours or two days?

L: See the trouble is, I don't know the distance.

T: It's pretty far. It's way up northern Honshu.

L: Yes. So I don't know.

T: Let me ask about when you got there. It looks like you spent from October, November sometime until the end of the war, so eight, nine months. And only one location for you.

L: Yes.

T: You were not anywhere else.

L: No. Just over there.

T: How many of the POWs were at this work location? Can you estimate?

L: Oh. Well, it's hard to say. There was Cambodians, Scottish, English, American, Australian, and they were in different barracks. So we had no way of knowing.

T: It's a polyglot.

L: Yes. So there could have been seventy-five men in our barracks.

T: Americans though in your barracks.

L: No. No. They were mixed. There were some Cambodians. With their hats. Their Cambodian hats. They were mixed. Yes. I don't know. It could have been...

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

T: The barracks there at Sendai. You estimate between fifty and seventy-five guys. What kind of sleeping facilities were there?

L: The same. Tiers again. Two tiers. That's all.

T: Multiple guys to a tier.

L: Yes. And you just sat on the boards. Or I mean laid. With a small pad. Made of straw. That was it. And one blanket. You each got a blanket. Yes.

Then some guys had what was called dry beriberi. Couldn't stand that blanket on them. They would cause severe pain. Like they were burning. I had pellagra and the wet beriberi, where you swell up. Pellagra and beriberi. At least you didn't have the pain. The guys that had the dry beriberi, severe pain. They couldn't even stand the sheet on them. It would hurt them. So they suffered. Some of them didn't make it. The dry beriberi might have killed them because maybe that affected their heart more. They died.

T: So you had guys die up here in Japan.

L: Oh, yes. But you never knew it. They just took them out. You never noticed before he's gone.

T: This is a difference from Palawan, where you didn't see guys dying.

L: No. No. But when they died and they took them out, you never knew it. What they did with them.

T: So they vanished, it sounds like.

L: Yes. What they did with them I don't know.

T: Can you describe the work that you did there at Sendai?

L: Oh, yes. It was up there in the lead and zinc mine.

T: Near Sendai, right?

L: Yes. Yes. I think it was above Sendai. Out of the city. You went, reported down into the tunnel, and then they designated where you were to work. A lot of us had to walk to the designated spot. Then they gave you a pan with a handle on it and a grub hoe, and you'd shovel the coal on there and you'd lift that and dump it into the car. An ore car.

T: You were using some kind of a hand hoe?

L: Yes. Yes.

T: And you had a pan or a basket or something?

L: No. It was like a heavy steel pan, the shovel, like a dustpan only bigger. You shoveled it in there and then you dumped that into the car.

T: Was it a one person [job] to pick up and dump it?

L: Yes. Coolie labor. Regular coolie labor. You'd scoop it onto the pan, lift it, and dump it in there. I was lucky to fill a half a car all day. Then at the end of the day, then I would look up [and] there would be a big hole. Gee, you'd look. That rock could fall on me. You'd see dripping, dripping...dark. Then you'd load that car and the guard would come and tell you it's time to jump on the car. Then you would hang onto the back of the car and the car would feel like it was going thirty miles an hour. All of a sudden he says go and you'd hang onto it. Then all of a sudden it would stop. I don't know how it stopped. I never stopped it.

T: So you had to push these cars away from the coal place where you were working.

L: Yes. Yes.

T: Was it coal you were after here?

L: No. Lead and zinc. Not coal.

T: So some kind of rocks that you were loading into these...

L: Yes. Yes. But they were already dynamited. See they were dynamited into a pile and you were supposed to take from that pile and put it on that car.

T: So the dynamiting was done before you arrived.

L: Oh, yes. Before. Yes.

T: So you guys arrive there in smaller groups doing this. Were you doing much the same work every day?

(2, A, 38)

L: Yes. Always the same. And there was water. You were standing in water sometimes. But it was warm. The mine was the same temperature.

T: That's right. So it was winter outside...

L: You had a lamp. A carbide lamp on your head. You had to keep a helmet, like a cardboard-type helmet. And on there was a carbide lamp. So you could see.

T: Otherwise of course you couldn't see anything.

L: Yes.

T: But it was warmer than outside, you say.

L: Oh, yes. It was the same temperature. Maybe it was sixty degrees. But there was no cold air blowing. So you could be there naked and you wouldn't freeze.

T: So that was a blessing, really, when you think of the weather up top.

L: Yes. It was cold.

T: And you recall this pretty much the same work with pretty much the same people?

L: All the time. Day after day. Yes. Most of the time I worked alone. They'd put you alone. So you were in that hole all day by yourself.

T: A group may have gone down, but they sent them to different individual locations.

L: Yes. Follow the work cars.

T: Did you have Japanese overseers or guards around?

L: Not where you were working. No. But the guys that took you down, yes. They probably were Korean too. Because they did take a lot of Korean laborers. That's what they were. They weren't regular soldiers. They weren't very smart.

T: It sounds like a routine. You were in this barracks and you leave the barracks to go to—how close was the barracks to the mine?

L: You had to kind of go down a hill. Down and down. On the side of a—it might have been half a mountain or a hill. Then you went in.

T: And then down to the actual face of the mine.

L: Yes. Because there it was a deep mine. Probably went down, who knows, two thousand feet? Who knows? It was a deep mine.

T: So it took a while to actually get to where you worked.

L: Yes. We had to walk down to the mine. Then at the entrance of the mine we went in. Then they would count you off and tell you where to go. But they weren't soldiers. Like I said, they were from Korea probably.

T: In your barracks, you remember men of different nationalities.

L: Yes. Yes.

T: How did that work out? Men get along okay?

L: Oh, yes. It was fun to listen to the Scottish. Oh, God! They rolled their words and talked real fast. You couldn't understand him one bit (*chuckles*). Not one word.

T: And they probably felt the same too about you Americans. Did you find yourself hanging around with mostly Americans or with different men?

L: Mostly Americans. Yes.

(2, A, 66)

T: Guys you knew from before?

L: I really didn't know them much. These guys that were there, I didn't know them. No. I didn't. You just talked to them. Didn't even ask them their name.

T: You sound rather detached from the whole situation.

L: Yes. Yes. You really were a zombie there. Yes.

T: So from having guys at Palawan that you knew or talked to by name, here in Japan you're just kind of going through the motions.

L: Yes. Yes. You were dead.

T: You mentioned earlier your health was going downhill.

L: Yes. It did. If we'd have been there much longer I don't think any of us would have made it. War was over 15 August [1945]. We didn't get released until a whole month later. A lot of guys could have died there.

T: Yes.

L: Yes. Because [General] MacArthur was in no hurry to free anybody there. Well, MacArthur, as far as prisoners goes, he couldn't care less. That's the way it was. He was, he wasn't out to release anybody. He figured, well, I'm in Tokyo and I'm the king. So he was in no hurry to send anybody up there quick.

T: And so you stayed a month...

L: A whole month. Yes.

T: Did you lose weight there or just begin to feel physically worse?

L: Oh, yes. It could have gotten worse. Maybe another month, none of us would have made it.

T: So you could tell. At the time you could tell you were getting...

L: I was deteriorating. Your mind is going down faster yet. Lucky that we were released.

T: What kind of food did the Japanese provide there at Sendai?

L: That was the same. We got no meat that I know of at all. Just rice. And millet. It wasn't even rice. A lot of millet was mixed.

T: Grain as opposed to rice.

L: Yes. Because they couldn't afford the rice.

T: And not being in the jungle, you can't go find fruit for yourself anymore.

L: No. Nothing.

T: So now you get what they give you.

L: What they give you. Yes. That was it.

T: That's a big change.

L: Yes. That was terrible. Yes. Like I said, you really went into a blank there. Worse.

T: Did you come into contact with Japanese civilians at all?

L: No. Not up there. Never.

(2, A, 90)

T: Not in the mine or around the camp?

L: No. Only the guards. The Korean...

T: Your daily routine sounds pretty much the same. Food has gone down. Life is more difficult the way you're talking about it.

L: Yes.

T: Were you ever able to see or hear American planes?

L: No. We thought we heard planes one night. That was it. Never saw them. Because it was at night. We thought that was it. Maybe a flyover.

T: But you never saw bombers over Sendai or anything.

L: No. No. Well, planes did drop some, on the last day they did drop some parachutes. Some landed way down below. And we might have recovered something from that.

T: I mean as far as bombs over Sendai, you never saw bombers...

L: No. No. They did drop some food. Once. That was the last day. Just before we were released. The food. But I don't even remember what they got.

T: I'll ask you that in a minute. You don't recall any bombers bombing Sendai or around your camp.

L: No. No. Didn't hear any explosions.

T: Did you have any indication of how the war was going for Japan? Did you figure that out?

L: We could almost tell they were losing. That was it. That was it. And when the end would come, we didn't know. We didn't have any—like when we were in the Philippines we sensed war was coming two weeks before. But here it was different. We didn't know anything.

T: Were there any news or rumors of things?

L: No. No rumors. No scuttlebutt at all. Because nobody knew anything. If anybody did, they never released it. If our camp officer knew, he didn't say anything.

T: Sometimes when people don't know news they fill a gap like that with rumor.

L: Yes. Maybe.

T: Not that you remember.

L: Nothing. No.

T: So when the war actually ended, you were surprised.

L: Yes. We didn't know. Because when they said the war was ended, well, that's it. There was no jubilation. There was nobody screaming and hollering. Again, we were told we would go down and board a train on our way south. And I couldn't even tell you—we just sat on the train. That was it. We watched the world go by. No one was screaming and hollering. Here we were free.

T: So this jubilation we see in some other pictures was not what you recall or remember from Sendai.

L: No. No. We were on the train sitting there and watched the world go by. I couldn't even tell you where we boarded the ship. Yes.

T: Let me back up a minute. You said yourself it was clear the Japanese were probably losing the war.

L: Yes. Right.

T: Did you or men around you worry what would happen to you if they did lose?

L: No. No. We did find out later if the Americans were to land in Japan, invade, they would have killed us all. We knew that. We heard that.

(2, A, 128)

T: Only afterwards you heard that though.

L: Yes. After. But before that we didn't know that. But they would have killed us all. All prisoners would have been killed.

T: But you didn't know that...

L: No.

T: And people didn't talk about that that you remember.

L: No. No. Nobody talked about it. So we didn't worry about it.

T: It's interesting how you were able not to worry about things because it would have been really easy to do, I think.

L: Yes. Well, now for you here it would. But in those days, like I said, your mind became a blank. It was even worse in that lead zinc mine, because you were really going down.

T: You could feel yourself going down physically.

L: Yes. Right. Right. You were a zombie. That's all you were.

T: So when you weren't working you weren't sitting around talking about things.

L: No.

T: What were you doing? Sleeping? When you weren't working.

L: We went back to our barracks. We had a fire in there. They did have some barrels that were called stoves. We just sat there and waited. There was nothing to talk about. There was nothing to talk about, absolutely nothing. You really did go down.

T: Did guys get along fairly well there?

L: Yes.

T: Let me go back even to Cabanatuan, Palawan. Were there conflicts between prisoners?

L: No. No. Not there. Nobody was fighting. Nobody. Nobody got mad at each other. Never. Nobody went crazy.

T: What caused conflicts between prisoners?

L: I didn't see any. I was lucky there. I can't say for all the others but no, for our group, nothing.

T: How much of a problem was theft? People stealing things or food from each other?

L: No. Nobody stole. At Palawan if I had a bunch of bananas where I slept, nobody took any. They knew it was yours.

T: So you could leave it there safely.

L: You could leave it there. Yes. I picked some green bananas and put them by where I slept in that tent. They were still there at night when I came back.

T: So you could safely leave your stuff and not worry that someone was going to take it.

L: Yes. Because they could get their own. Tea. Over there at Palawan they made tea by the oil barrel full. Cheap. Weak tea. That's what we drank. Boiled tea.

T: It sounds like once you got to Japan you realized how, really how good in a sense you had it at Palawan.

L: Yes. Compared to there. Because we were able to get some fruit and a little piece of meat once in a while. Fried. But there we got nothing like that. It was slop out of the bucket.

T: Back to 1945: how did you find out about the end of the war in Japan? Was that news announced, so to speak?

(2, A, 162)

L: No. But the guy, the American officer in charge there, said the war is over. That's it. He said that was it. He announced the war was over now.

T: So the Japanese told him...

L: Yes. And they were gone. We didn't see any. When the war was over the Japanese quietly left the camp.

T: Just like from one day to the next they were gone?

L: Yes. They were gone. Yes. Because I suppose they were told to do that in case there would be a riot and they would kill them or some guys would attack. No. The Japanese just left. The guards had just left. Because the guy in charge of the camp, I don't know his name, never did find out, he just announced. Gathered us all

together and said the war is over. And we didn't see a guard. Because the American soldiers, what few came, I think I saw two, they were to herd us to the train to take us down south.

T: And that was weeks before you left the camp. From when the war was over and when you actually left the camp. It was a number of weeks, right?

L: September 12.

T: So it wasn't until then that you found out the war was over.

L: That's right. That day. We didn't know before that. Oh!

T: Were you still working?

L: Yes. They had us working.

T: In the mine?!

L: The same job. See, as I said, where was MacArthur? He could have sent some men up there in a hurry. We were working that whole month. From August 15 to September 12. The only day we didn't work was the day of 12 September.

T: And this was weeks after the surrender was signed.

L: That's right. That was terrible. That MacArthur couldn't have sent some men up there. Here at least those guys didn't have to work. They could have died. You can thank MacArthur for that. He could have at least sent some men up there so they wouldn't have to work. We worked from August 15 to September 11.

(2, A, 190)

T: So he wasn't on your Christmas card list after the war was he? *(joking tone)*

L: No. No. I know what he did in New Guinea. My brother was in New Guinea. He had those guys march over the mountain when they could have gone the easy way by sea. Oh, my God! New Guinea. It was horrible. Oh, God! He had no use... Well, the soldiers they're going to go the hard way. Over the mountains dragging the artillery. They were climbing the Sandioan Mountains when they could have gone by sea. Easily.

T: Let's move back to your story. Now you said you were flown Japan to Guam.

L: Yes. Right. That's where I got these stateside papers. That's where I read that.

T: And you flew the whole way back to the States then?

L: Then to Wake Island.

T: From Guam to Wake?

L: Yes. I saw Wake Island. We landed. Stayed there a day or so. See, time still isn't in the right perspective. I don't know what, was it a day or how long I stayed in Wake. I know it was overnight. Then we flew to, then we had to fly to Honolulu.

T: So you made a number of stops. Guam. Wake. Hawaii. And then Hawaii to the States?

L: Yes. That's right. Three or four stops. But no ships. The Navy was better that way. Poor Army guys. They weren't treated that good. Because the Army, they never did treat their guys too good.

T: The first hospital you were in for an extended period of time, was that in the States?

L: Yes. Then I went to Oak Knoll and Letterman hospital in San Francisco. I was there. I was at Oak Knoll for six months.

T: Oak Knoll is where?

L: Oakland.

T: So right across the bay then.

L: Yes. Then I went to Letterman. Right. But I was at Oak Knoll six months.

T: When you got to Oak Knoll, here you're checking in. You're an ex-POW. They took care of you physically obviously, like with the worms.

L: Yes. Right.

T: What kind of debriefing did they have? Did somebody from the Navy come in and really ask you about your POW experience?

L: Yes. Yes. A Naval officer did. They had a name for them. G-something.

T: G-3?

L: Something like that. Yes. He into the hospital and he took me aside. Yes. It had to be at the hospital. He took me aside and went into a private room. He debriefed. He asked me all kinds of questions. So I told him. From the capture all the way down.

T: So he asked you to sort of go through the whole story for him.

L: Yes. Right. I don't know. He didn't have a tape though. They didn't have them in those days. I don't know how he did it. Jotted it down maybe. He took notes. They didn't have those (*points at recorder*).

T: Did you spend, would you say, an hour with him or a day with him?

L: Oh, no. Just maybe an hour and a half, ninety or something minutes.

T: Was it easy for you to remember everything?

L: It was easy then. Yes. Then it just flowed. Everything flowed. That's why they got you then, because you were fresh.

T: What kind of things did he ask you?

L: Where I was taken prisoner and how. Food. How I was treated. Where I worked.

T: It sounds similar to what we're doing here today.

L: Yes. Right. Right. But too bad we don't get that tape. That was written down. It was a naval officer.

T: He did come in and they asked you right then and there. Sort of, 'let's take down what you remember.'

L: Yes. Right away. How are the conditions aboard the prison ships? How bad it was. Really.

T: So he really went through all the steps.

L: Yes. They went through. Exactly. See, that was new for them. They were—what were they call it, those guys? I used to know. They were...

T: Did you, at Letterman or at Oak Knoll, have any kind of psychological counseling from a medical professional?

L: Oak Knoll, yes. They sent you to be interviewed by a psychiatrist. To see if you were nuts, I guess. I think the guy I looked at, he was nuttier than me (*chuckles*).

T: Now did he ask you different questions than the naval intelligence guy?

L: Yes. He did.

T: What did he ask you?

L: Oh, God! I don't know. What is your sexual thing, I think. Yes.

T: He wanted to know about that.

L: Yes. I said well, I didn't have any. How could you? You couldn't even get it up. Your food was down. How could you even think of it. Nobody talked about sex.

T: Yes, you've mentioned that already.

L: Yes.

T: But he was curious to know about that.

L: Yes. I said no. There is nothing like that. I couldn't remember what he asked me. He was asking goofy questions and everything. I told him was no, no, no, no.

(2, A, 266)

T: From the Navy intelligence guy or this guy, was it easy for you then to talk about this stuff?

L: Yes. To the Naval officer, but not to that guy.

T: Because you made a distinction. It was easier with one...

L: Yes. Yes.

T: Now when you got back to the States your folks had already long died.

L: Yes. Right. I had nobody.

T: Your brothers and sisters were around, right?

L: Oh, no. Because I was in San Francisco. Like I said, my brother was in the merchant marine and the other one was in Alaska. There was Japanese up there. Sitka and all those Kodiak. He was up there freezing. It was horrible. Poor guy up there.

T: How long was it before you saw your relatives?

L: It was a good eight months later. At least. I went down to Milwaukee to visit my two brothers down there, three brothers.

T: So it was a long time before you saw anybody.

L: Long time before I got down there.

T: After your discharge?

L: Yes. Oh, yes. It was quite a while. Because six months at Oak Knoll. So it was a good eight months to a year maybe before I got down there.

T: When you saw your brothers or your sister, how much did they ask you about your POW experience?

L: They didn't.

T: They didn't ask you at all?

L: No. They didn't. They didn't ask you. Guys didn't talk. We were just happy to be back with family. Nobody had... Well, like I said, my brother was in the merchant marine. He suffered a lot. The one in Alaska had hell up there.

T: Did you find it curious they didn't ask you about it?

L: No. No. Because they were in the same boat. They had it tough. Raised at the orphanage and went through hell. Like I said, the one in Alaska he had the cold and the fog to put up with. And the Army treated him terrible up there. It was terrible. Did you know that the Alaskan Highway—a different breed of men those days—was built in nine months. Nine months!! That was horrible. Today it takes them years now to build anything, from what I see.

T: Now you were married in 1948. Your wife's name is Dorothy. Had you known Dorothy before you went in the service?

L: No.

T: Someone you met when you got back to the States.

L: Yes.

T: When you were dating or married now, how much did your new wife know about your POW experience?

L: Not much. We never talked [about it].

T: Did she know you were a POW?

(2, A, 308)

L: Oh, yes. But never. Just didn't even say. She doesn't know any of this.

T: Even today?

L: Yes. I didn't tell her.

T: Now from your perspective, is that more a case of she didn't ask or you didn't tell?

L: Both. She didn't ask and I didn't tell. We just were busy raising four kids. We had four kids.

T: So it was something that was there, but it didn't come up from either one of you.

L: Yes.

T: Let me ask you this. Kids aren't so subtle sometimes. Sometimes kids ask things.

L: Yes.

T: Did your kids ask you as they were growing up?

L: Well, I just told them that I was a POW and we left it at that. My oldest, he's a senior now already. Fifty-five years old already. So no, they... It was just as good. We didn't dwell on it.

T: Are they curious now as adults?

L: Well, kind of. I showed them these when I was a little bit... But now I'll show them before I die. I'll show them all this and tell them. Because they—for their grandchildren they'd like to know. But to them, it was just another passing.

T: It sounds like the conversation today is more than you've told your kids.

L: That's right. Yes.

T: Or your wife.

L: Yes. She wasn't too interested in it and that was it. All she knew was POW and getting some compensation. That's the main thing.

T: Are you one hundred percent [compensation] now?

L: One hundred. Yes.

T: How long have you been one hundred percent?

L: Just a year or so. Maybe eighteen months.

T: Oh, really? Just recently.

L: Yes.

T: What did you have before that?

L: I had only ten.

T: Only ten percent?

L: Under Truman we were only getting thirty-six dollars a month. First I was getting forty. That was too much according to good old Truman. He cut it down to thirty-six. And Carter was even worse. Carter, I think, was sending all the money to the traffic of wherever he was sending it to.

T: So you got cut again?

(2, A, 347)

L: Yes. We didn't get anything hardly.

T: So your percentage only went up after the '80s?

L: Yes. Way, way. 1990s, yes.

T: Did you rely on the VA for help over the years?

L: Not too much. No. I didn't get much out of the VA. Only just the last six years. That's all. Because the thing was, you figure there were sixteen million, so now two thousand are dying now a day. So they figured they can afford it now.

T: You're a cynic (*both laugh*). I like you Mr. Bailen. Fewer guys to take care of now.

L: Yes. Fewer guys. So many are dying. Now we can afford it.

T: You get one hundred percent now.

L: Yes. But if they get into another war I'll probably get nothing (*laughs*).

T: Beyond family, I wanted to ask about your job. You worked for St. Paul schools, in maintenance.

L: Yes. Custodial maintenance. Custodian engineer.

T: At one school or several?

L: Oh, several. I've been to several. I've been to Central, Gorman, Roosevelt.

T: So you got around to different schools.

L: Yes. They needed custodian engineer. You had to hand shovel the coal. It was some job. Even at Central.

T: That's an older building. Sure.

L: Hand fired. You had to be there four o'clock in the morning to get the heat up. I'd go to Gorman and look at the temperature. Forty-five degrees. And then I'd go home for the weekend and turn on the cold water so the water wouldn't freeze...

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 382.

T: The same time. That was an era when a lot of guys were veterans. Right when you were working. A lot of guys were veterans. If somebody asked you, Louis, were you a veteran? What did you say?

L: Yes. I'd say I was in the Navy. That was all. That's all.

T: Sort of fobbed them off with that.

L: Yes. I'd say Navy. Then that would end the conversation. Nobody asked. Because everybody was a veteran.

T: And you didn't volunteer the POW stuff.

L: Because I'd go visit veteran's camps. Like in Milwaukee. Those guys never talked. They never talked either. They were all veterans.

T: Are you a member of American ex-POWs?

L: No. DAV.

T: DAV, Disabled American Veterans, but not American ex-POWs?

L: No. No. I didn't want to join that. Some guys they like to hash that over. The less you do of that the better. They like to go. They even go at the VA over there [in Minneapolis]. They go once a month or once a week. They go and they all hash over. The less you do of that, the better. Groups. Therapy.

(2, B, 394)

T: That's something that you know about, but you don't want...

L: I know a guy that goes there. I don't know how often he goes. I called him up and, "I'm going to go there tomorrow." I said, "What do you do?" "Well, we talk it over." No. You stay with family. And stay at home. Why hash it over?

T: So you know about that but it's not something you want to do.

L: No. No. Better for your mind.

T: The whole thing with the groups isn't something that you want to participate in.

L: No. No.

T: And the same with American ex-POWs?

L: That's right. Why hash, hash, hash? (*slightly irritated tone*)

T: Let me ask you, how tough was it to say yes to this interview then?

L: I'm doing it for the kids. This way they can show their grandkids and they can see that and see this—I got two like this. I only got two. That's all.

T: Is it, in a way, easier to talk to someone like me than to talk to your kids?

L: Yes. Oh, yes. I don't talk to the kids. They're not interested either. But after I die then they can see that.

T: Mr. Bailen, I have a final couple of questions. One deals with dreams.

L: I don't dream. I don't have any.

T: After the war...

L: That's right. Never had any.

T: Never had any that you remember.

L: That's right. Never woke up screaming.

T: So your whole thing of putting your mind in park, as it were, during the war kept up afterwards too?

L: That's right. Because you hear of people that wake up screaming, well, I don't know. Maybe they want it like that. I don't know. I never. I sleep. Of course now

that I'm eighty-three years old I wake up at two o'clock in the morning. That isn't the best thing either. That's why I stay up until eleven thirty, twelve o'clock.

T: So you can sleep later?

L: Sleep at least until three. But I just lay there.

T: But you don't dream about, and you never had dreamed about it that you remember.

L: No.

T: The last question again is this: how would you describe the most important way that those years as a POW changed you as a person?

L: I don't know. That's hard to say because I just went into the—well, I got a job and started working.

T: Afterwards.

L: Yes. Yes. Different jobs. Until I applied for St. Paul schools. That's what kept you going. Everything else you put in the back burner. I never brought it forward.

(2, B, 420)

T: Personality-wise, was Louis Bailen in 1945 different than Louis Bailen who was captured on Corregidor?

L: I don't know. It's hard to say. It just seemed to flow the same way. It's really hard to say if there was a big difference. Personally, no. I thought the same. Looked the same. Acted the same. Yes.

T: You mentioned earlier you had initially some difficulty writing and remembering names and stuff?

L: Oh, yes. That. That even today. Yes. I don't remember names.

T: And that's different from before you were a POW.

L: Oh, yes, that part. Yes. Right. You're right. That way I didn't remember. I could write. I could write a whole letter if I wrote to my brothers. But I couldn't do that after the war. I could never write a letter.

T: Has that come back?

L: No. No. I can't write a letter anymore.

T: And remembering names too is harder?

L: That's right. Yes. If you told me your name...

T: That's why I give you a card (*chuckles*).

L: That's right. I'd never know.

T: You know I've done all the questioning. Anything else you want to add before we conclude?

L: I think you covered it all. Very good.

T: On the record then, I'll thank you very much for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW