

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DAVID G. BRENZEL
Power House Engineer, 59th Coast Artillery, WWII
1995

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Brenzel, David G., (1916-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 80 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Recordings: 1 sound cassette (ca. 80 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Brenzel, a Milwaukee, Wis. native, discusses his military service as a Power House Engineer with the 59th Coast Artillery serving on Corregidor until the island fell in 1942; he was a prisoner of war held by the Japanese until the war's end in 1945. He talks about enlisting in the service so he would only have to serve for two years, listing his religion as Muslim to get more holidays, lack of military training, and preparing to go overseas from Angel Island (California), composition of the army prior to the war, and learning of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Stationed on Corregidor, he discusses recreation activities including the local "spiff bar," passes to Manila, interactions with Filipinos, drinking, and prostitution. He comments on the changes at Clark Field at the Japanese approached, the declining popularity of General MacArthur, destroying the large guns, surrender to the Japanese, and assignment to clear bodies from foxholes. He and the other POWs were taken to Cabantuan prison, he comments on the lack of food, the way American prisoners were used to guard one another, volunteering for work detail for extra food, and transfer to first Taiwan and then Japan. As a forced laborer in Japan, Brenzel describes the Japanese war industry, interactions with civilians, learning of Roosevelt's death, and the war's end. He touches upon ways American prisoners sabotaged Japanese equipment, liberation, and debriefing by the war crimes unit. Brenzel describes attending the Marquette University on the GI Bill, medical problems as a result of his treatment as a POW, service related nightmares, and helping to form the Badger Chapter of Ex-Pows.

Biographical Sketch

Brenzel (1916-) entered the military in 1940 hoping to serve two years, he was held as a Japanese prisoner of war until 1945. After the war he returned to Milwaukee and eventually settled in Oregon.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by Jackie Mulhurn, 2003.

Interview Transcript

- Mark: --General questions I hope to go through. Today's date is April 18, 1995. This is Mark VanElls, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. David Brenzel originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Pacific Theater in World War II. Good morning. Thanks for coming in.
- Brenzel: Good morning.
- Mark: This rainy morning; it's probably kind of slippery out there on the roads. I like to start the interviews by having you tell me a little about where you were born and where you were raised and what you were doing prior to your entry into the Army in 1940.
- Brenzel: I was born and raised in Milwaukee. In my late teens I--those were the Depression '30s--and I hitchhiked and rode the rails to California and got a job in California making paper bags in Los Angeles. Of course before I went out there, I went to Milwaukee Vocational School for a couple of years. I picked up whatever I could that the high school wouldn't give me. I learned how to repair electric motors and how to hot-wire cars which was the first thing the mechanic taught me at vocational school in Milwaukee. He said, "You're going to ask me how to do it so I'll show you first," and how to operate a lathe. And general mechanics, machine stuff. So I had that background when I got into making paper bags in LA and then along came the draft. The draft was coming up and I was IA and no dependents, I didn't have a defense job or didn't have an essential job. So I knew I was going to get in the service come hell or high water so I decided where I was going to go. So I went to the recruiting office and I, I heard that if you take foreign service you'd get out in two years, and I was a cinch for the draft anyhow for two years so I insisted that I wanted to go to the Philippines Islands for a hitch and they said, oh, that was impossible, that I couldn't get in.
- Mark: Too old?
- Brenzel: Too old. They told me that I couldn't do it, that there were no openings. So I just got up and walked out. A guy stopped me at the door. He said, "Oh, we've got one opening." The old sales talk. And immediately I went and quit my job and sold my motorcycle. In about two months I was in the Philippine Islands.
- Mark: Two months?
- Brenzel: About two months.
- Mark: And in that span you had your basic training and all that sort of thing?
- Brenzel: In those days, there was no basic training.
- Mark: I see.
- Brenzel: My basic training was one walk around Angel Island which happens to be the place where you leave from in San Francisco, in the bay at San Francisco. I had one walk around the island. That was my basic training. When I got to the

Philippines, I didn't know where I was going in the Philippines, and I guess out on the deck, the pier when we hit Manila, they just assigned me to Fort Mills which happened to be Corregidor Island. And the CO or somebody there read what was on my service record. I had heard that the Army is pretty lenient about giving you holidays, if you have a queer religion, so I told them I was a Muslim. And that went on my service record.

Mark: Wasn't true though.

Brenzel: No. But that's what's on my service record. I figured you're going to go whole hog here. My service record showed some of my schooling and the recruiter had put me down as a machinist instead of just a machine operator. And I had the electrician's training on it. So I, that was on my record. So instead of being put in a barracks to march back and forth and parade all the time, they shipped me right out to the battery as a battery guard. I was a gun mechanic and two twelve inch disappearing guns. These are these things that the barrel is 36 feet long. And you tripped the gun and the gun comes out of the hole and goes up in the air and then when you fire it the recoil puts it, hides it, it comes back and goes right down in the hole so it's out of sight. Which was very good when you didn't have any airplanes, which is one of those guns were put in the islands.

Mark: I'd like to go back a minute to your actual entry into the military. You described your, your basic training you said was one lap around Angel Island. After the recruiting office you signed on the dotted line and where did you go from there? Did you get on a bus and go up to San Francisco?

Brenzel: At the recruiting office I signed on the dotted line and, this was in downtown LA, and then I got four or five days to clean up my affairs as though I would die in there. And then I went to, this was at Fort MacArthur, which is just south, which is between Long Beach and LA, it's on a peninsula there. And there, I was there for, oh, maybe two weeks. That's where I was signed in. That's where I got my exam and that's where everybody ran around barefoot and bare butt.

Mark: You got your uniform?

Brenzel: Got no uniform. I didn't get a uniform until I got to Angel Island up in San Francisco.

Mark: How about the haircut and all that stuff?

Brenzel: No haircut. No nothing. They just wanted to get a busload and then when they got a busload we went to Angel Island in San Francisco to wait for a boat.

Mark: And that was it?

Brenzel: And that was it.

Mark: So, there was no weapons training?

Brenzel: No weapons training.

- Mark: You didn't fire a gun before you went to the Philippines?
- Brenzel: Well, I was familiar with a gun.
- Mark: I mean in the military-sense.
- Brenzel: In the military-sense. No, I--once I got to the Battery, maybe I fired a rifle a dozen times. Incidentally, it's an older rifle than they show in your exhibit here.
- Mark: Is that right?
- Brenzel: Yeah.
- Mark: Like a Springfield or something?
- Brenzel: Yeah. And I fired a .30 caliber machine-gun maybe half a belt at a toad target to see how good we were at that. I was a lousy shot at the, with the rifle as far as fixed targets went. Rapid fire. I was the best man in the outfit. Because I had done lots of rifle firing, rifle hunting before I went out west.
- Mark: And so, you're at Fort Mills in 1940. What's going on there? What are your daily duties and describe a typical day for me.
- Brenzel: A typical day for me was, I was battery guard. There were five guys in a battery guard; four privates and a corporal, and we were out there permanently. The first thing we did in the morning was shake our boots to be sure there were no scorpions in our boots before we put our boots on. Then we had to sweep everything, sweep out the whole damn battery. This gun emplacement was, oh, maybe 100 yards wide and a gun on each side of the emplacement. And the whole thing was in, sort of into a hill; there's a big hill behind us. Inside that hill there were actually thousands of gallons of gasoline because part of the battery included three electric generators. I was the gun mechanic. Polished the brass on the great big gun and just swept up, they used to keep things wiped down. And the guy who was the power plant operator when I got there, he didn't know a circuit breaker from a fuse box, but he was in the Army and he knew regulations. When they found out that I knew something about electricity I became the power house engineer and that's where I was when, until the surrender. The rest of the outfit, that when they were on, they were on the equivalent of maneuvers when Pearl Harbor took place. Most of the time the men were in barracks a half a mile away. The topside barracks was maybe a half a mile long. The men from different types of artillery units and antiaircraft.
- Mark: What sort of guys were in the Army at this time? I mean, were there a lot of guys like you, sort of pressured by the draft?
- Brenzel: No, no. Over there most of them were guys who were out for, looking for a square meal or want to get away from the farm. I mean, one of my buddies out there, another gun mechanic, he said "every day in the Army is like Sunday on the farm."
- Mark: So it was an easier life for him?

Brenzel: Oh, for them it was just wonderful, yeah. I mean, I had more education than most of them and I had a few bucks in the bank. I was a refugee. I wasn't looking for a square meal; I thought I was a soldier of fortune. Beating the draft and I'd be out in two years. So when Pearl Harbor came, well yeah, every six months or so the battery had to leave the barracks and come out and live at the gun emplacement as though there were war conditions on. They'd have their cots there and everything there; everything was cooked there and it was home for a training period. So that's, they were living under those conditions when Pearl Harbor happened. I can hear them shouting at night that the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. It was dark. I don't know, it's 5,000 miles from Hawaii to Manila but, oh, it's much better than that.

Mark: It's a long way.

Brenzel: It was, so when we heard about it it was the middle of the night.

Mark: So were you surprised? I mean, you had been in east Asia now for awhile, I'm interested in what you knew of, the Japanese had advanced past the Philippines into Indonesia and all these sorts of things; did you--

Brenzel: Oh, there were rumors and rumors and rumors. And strange planes had gone overhead. Not that we could have done anything about it. Because our 12-inch disappearing guns couldn't traverse 360 degrees. They could just swing a little more than halfway, a little more than 180 degrees, so anything that, anybody want to sneak in the back door, we couldn't stop them. And that's the situation we were in. We had guns that were set up to repel anything that we could see; we could drop a projectile that weighed about a ton, we could drop it on a blanket a couple of miles out. See, when you figured your range on those things they, the path of the projectile was so high that you had to take in the amount of, how far the earth was going to spin while that projectile was up there and you had to adjust your range accordingly. So it was way out in this direction. Well, you're going to have to add maybe 100 yards to this direction. No not quite that far. And, well, you learned a little about, your trigonometry came in handy, your geometry. You had base line, you had an observer out there to your left and you had your battery commander stationed right in the middle, between the two guns. You'd get your angle with your telescope from the baseline, at the battery commander's station at the baseline. You had an observer out there with another telescope and he would site the target and get his angle. And then you got a great big plotting table there and they'd set this angle and this angle and where it intersect, bingo, that's your range and let them have it.

Mark: And so the attack did come as a surprise to you and the others you were serving with at the time?

Brenzel: Yes, it was a surprise because we had such a low regard for the Japanese. We knew what was happening. I had a short-wave radio that I used to listen to Don McNeil's Breakfast Club in San Francisco almost every night. See being a battery guard there was no lights out for us. When it was meal time there was no mess call for us; we'd just, had to make sure we had a shirt and tie on. That was necessary. Most of the time we were just running around in shorts and with nothing, with what they called "go aheads." I mean--

Mark: What are "go aheads?"

Brenzel: We called them skivvies, too. But in the Navy, skivvies are underwear. In the Army over there, skivvies are these slippers that you just slip on like sandals over your toes.

Mark: I see.

Brenzel: Yeah. That was funny. We called those skivvies and the Navy called, your underwear was skivvies [laughs]. We envied the Navy their underwear. We had, we didn't like ours. And then we had those lovely T-shirts. The GIs went down to the commissary whenever they could and bought the Navy T-shirts and wore them. Of course, they weren't regulation. When it was inspection you had to be wearing something else. Just as with our inspection you had to wear a shirt and tie, beautiful tie. Well, you know what a tie is. But you had to wear it, it had to be tied, but then you had to tuck it in so you could only see about 20 percent of your tie. That annoyed me.

Mark: It just didn't seem right, huh?

Brenzel: No, it didn't seem right. Have to wear it at all and then you're going to hide 80 percent of it. I didn't get any close order drill. We did have one short session on gasses. They had a tent out on the parade ground and we had to go in there and, walk in there and spend about 15 seconds in there and come out. It was, the only gas we tested was tear gas or chloral. It was supposed to smell like new mown hay, you're supposed to be in there long enough to smell it. Which reminded me of our firstair raid, one of our firstair raids. When there was an air raid we had to get down into the power rooms where we stored, well, there might have been three feet of concrete over the powder rooms, and one of the guys had, was quite shook up by the air raid and he'd let out a stinking fart and smelled like hell and we got an old sergeant in there-- he'd been around for 10-15 years --he hollered, "Gas, gas. Put on your gas masks." and one of the privates said, "Does it smell like new mown hay?" [hearty laugh]. Well, that guy, that old sergeant, god he could drink beer.

Mark: I was going to ask. What did you do for fun while you were on Corregidor? Was there a lot of beer drinking? Did you get into, is there a town to go into?

Brenzel: We had a "spiff bar," a beer bar that was open every day. There was time before lights out that they closed it up but you get, oh, good Milwaukee beers for 10 cents a bottle if it was that much. I think 10 centavos, maybe. You'd get a very good Filipino beer for half that price. The ceiling in this "spiff bar" was just one solid mass of beer labels. We drank it out of bottles and they'd pull it out of ice containers so the labels were always loose and you'd take the label and you'd peel it off and you'd put it on your wallet and with a spin you'd push it up at the roof and the paste from the label would stick to the ceiling. I guess once a year they had to peel all the labels off the ceiling. But there'd be the Pabst Blue Ribbon, Blatz, I forget what else. The Blue Ribbon was the most popular beer on Corregidor. In those days they had the little blue ribbon, actually a little blue ribbon on the bottle.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Brenzel: Oh, the guys would save those ribbons and when your monthly inspection came around, the CO would come around and check everybody's footlocker, some of

the footlockers had a ring of blue ribbons hanging from the inside. A very nice display.

Mark: Probably not regulation, though.

Brenzel: No. Regulation was for, dirty stuff was taken care of. Every man had what they called a "ditty box." It was about, oh, maybe, a foot square and 8-10 inches high. It had a lid on it. And all the stuff like messy shoe polish and brass polish and stuff like that, dirty rags, you could put in your "ditty box" and that was sacred. Nobody ever looked in your "ditty box." If there was an inspection, the "ditty box" was under the bed but it was never looked at.

Mark: Did you get into town much? I mean, was there a town on Corregidor? Did you have to, did you get to Manila?

Brenzel: There was a barrio at bottom-side, had a lot of little shops and a couple of places - -no, I guess there was only one place for beer. Beer was the only drink allowed on the island. Of course, if you went anywhere you could always buy a peck of gin for a peso or a couple of pesos. A peck of gin is about one-fifth; it's a square bottle about 10 inches high. Pretty close to a quart, I think. You could get passes to Manila about once a month, a weekend pass, and you could pile up your furlough time. But, in those days, the privates got \$21 a day, once a month, and there wasn't much rank on the island, no. My outfit, I would say there was about 100 men. You've got your commanding officer, a lieutenant, I mean the commanding officer was a captain, then you had a lieutenant, then there was this firstsergeant, then there was a technical sergeant. That was the big rank. And then you'd have maybe eight buck sergeants and a dozen corporals and the rest were privates. There wasn't much brass or rank.

Mark: Did you get much contact with the Filipinos themselves when you went into town?

Brenzel: Well, there wasn't much. The enlisted man, nobody did much on the "rock." The Filipinos, you paid I forget, it cost about \$2-3 a month, see we were paid in pesos so the first payday at \$21, in pesos it looked like a hell of a lot of money. But the American soldiers, they didn't make their beds, they didn't sweep the floor, they didn't to any KP. That was all done by Filipinos for \$2 a month. And your laundry was only a couple of pesos a month. And the movies, the equivalent of first-run movies, and those cost a nickel. Cigarettes were a nickel a pack. You could go to Manila, in fact the trip, I think, oh, I think it took about an hour to get from Corregidor to Manila. And then things were pretty wild in Manila. The booze would be, the rum was cheap, the scotch was cheap, the girls were cheap. You get off the boat and the little kids would be lining, the little, I don't know, I don't think they were pimps but maybe they were, "Sister. Did you want to see my sister?" and that sort of stuff. And it was, "You could see my sister for ten pesos, five pesos, two pesos." They were businessmen. They looked like the same little kids who were diving for coins when you docked at Honolulu the first time. But what a difference in language.

Mark: That's the reputation the Philippines had when I was in the military, too. So, after the attack on Pearl Harbor it took how long until you came under attack there in Corregidor? A couple days, a week?

Brenzel: Just a couple of days. I could see the old timers out there in the middle of the parade ground shoot their 45s at Jap bombers --and they're up there 17,000 feet. And the anti-aircraft guys would try to reach them and they couldn't. And everybody hollered, see our AA [unintelligible] those automatically became paratroops, Japanese paratroopers, paratroopers are coming. And everybody's going [laughs] --oh. Actually, some of that stuff was ridiculous. Our guns, we couldn't bring our guns to bear on the enemy, at least my outfit. The anti-aircraft guns did not have fuses enough to let the gun reach as far as the Jap bombers. For a couple of months they could just bomb with impunity; they could come down and bomb what they wanted to bomb. And they started that a couple of days after Pearl Harbor. I guess you know that they wiped out a bunch of, all our B-17s right in the middle of the field at Clark Field.

Mark: At Clark Field.

Brenzel: At Clark Field, yeah. They bunched them in the middle so the saboteurs couldn't get them but they could easily be wind up. [Laughs]

Mark: Wind up and ready to go.

Brenzel: Yeah.

Mark: So, as the Japanese then invaded the Philippines, did this change things for you on Corregidor? As the Japanese got closer, as more enemy forces came into the area, did the bombarding get a little more intense for example?

Brenzel: Well, we got a couple of .50 caliber machine-guns and we had to dig holes for them up there on the edge of our gun emplacement. Can't really help us. They would just drop the stuff on us and we couldn't reach them. But after awhile we found out when they moved down Bataan they could really shoot at us, reach us with their artillery from Bataan as well as from the airplanes. I set up, we had a couple of ping-pong tables set up down in the gully, the gun emplacement, the guns are pointed towards the ocean and back there at Bataan and here's a great big hill with the gasoline in it. Nobody knew there was gasoline in there. I did because I was in charge of the power plant that used that gasoline. They would, the guys would play ping-pong and one of the observers would yell, shot on the way and they could see the gun flashes on Bataan and the guys knew how many times they could hit that ping-pong ball before the echo'd hit and head for the gun emplacement. Then maybe they shot one that was going to land in our neck of the woods but you'd have to be sure.

Mark: As the Japanese advanced and the Americans retreated were there more American forces on the island? Did the island get crowded after awhile?

Brenzel: Well, Pearl Harbor was in December and Corregidor wasn't captured for five months and for four months the Japs moved in that direction. They took Bataan in April; December to April. And then the next month we were the only target left. Then they took Corregidor in May. In April when they took Bataan we got a lot of, a lot of refugees made it over to Corregidor so maybe there were 20,000 men on the island by when the Japs took it.

Mark: Including General Wainwright--

- Brenzel: Yeah, including Wainwright. Doug MacArthur made it once up to top side where my guns were.
- Mark: Is that right?
- Brenzel: In fact, I saw the hat, I was busy down in my engine room running a crap game, his, MacArthur's chauffeur was down there and he, while MacArthur is up there looking at things his chauffeur was down there shooting craps. When Mac left his chauffeur left with his helmet packed with money. [Loud laugh]
- Mark: You called him "Dug out Doug." That's interesting. Marines call him that all the time and the Marines always think they're better than the Army. What was the perception of MacArthur among the troops there? Did you get the impression that he was just, that he was taking off! He's a controversial figure.
- Brenzel: We didn't know he was taking off 'till he was gone.
- Mark: I see.
- Brenzel: Nobody knew he was taking off 'till he was gone. He was not popular. Everybody else had to wear helmets and this wise ass running around, posturing --we didn't use that word in those days, it's a word I learned since I got back in the States. No, Mac wasn't too popular.
- Mark: So, as--
- Brenzel: Well, you see, we knew we were being lied to. Every couple of days there was a new communiqué' on the bulletin board about the thousands of men and hundreds of ships and thousands of planes that were coming down and were on their way to relieve us. It was good for morale.
- Mark: Did people believe it?
- Brenzel: I think they believed it. We were sure that this was going to be a short war. Even when the Japs captured the island. What was maddening to me was, about a month before, well, about the time of the fall of Bataan, I went to the topside library --they had a pretty good library up at the barracks --and I looked for stuff to read. Maybe look for stuff that I could take and salvage and maybe take home with me when the war was over. And there was one section there, Japanese books and how to speak Japanese, Japanese/English dictionaries. I looked at it, tossed it aside. I'll never be able to use anything like that. Oh, was I sorry in a few months. Those would have been worth their weight in diamonds.
- Mark: I'm sure. And so the island fell in May.
- Brenzel: In May
- Mark: Describe for me if you would, the process of, your experience in the surrender and being taken prisoner.
- Brenzel: Well, I was talking about how little basic training those guys got. Well, everybody had a rifle. I was an ex-gun mechanic and power plant operator, the power plant

was used sometimes by the signal corps and Colonel [unintelligible] used it for a damn radio and so when the surrender came, about 24 hours before the surrender, the whole outfit was pulled out except me. They just gave 'em bandoleers, munitions and the rifles and they had to go down, beach defense. They were infantrymen, just like, they had all these artillery men that didn't know one end of the rifle from another most of the time. I was left topside with a few Filipinos, a couple of cooks. So that was, that was the last time I saw my buddy Joe King, the guy I heard is in Texas now, the other day he's in Texas. I was topside at the surrender. I wasn't down at the beach defense. I was keeping the power plant going and I got orders to destroy the guns. These great big--

Mark: One guy to destroy these guns?

Brenzel: Well, the guns got to be destroyed. I, one of them I took the plugs out, the oil plugs, out of the recoil cylinders and drained them. Then I tripped the gun. You trip it, you had it up in the firing position but without any oil in the recoil cylinders kept right on going. It jumped out of its place where it's supposed to be. It was useless as far as being able, it would take a tremendous amount of machinery to lift it up and get it back into any suitable use. The other gun I had the Filipinos come and help. We took the training projectile, you have a gun that's it's a dummy that they ram into the gun just to practice loading and put the powder behind it, or the dummy powder, but I had the Filipinos help me put this dummy projectile on the thing and ram it into there. And then we put a full charge of power behind it. And the fuse and the cap through the hole, the firing hole and back. Light it up and we disappeared. We got down below and then when that went off we took it and when it fired we were down in the cook shack drinking pineapple juice. That projectile is a little bit bigger than, that dummy projectile is bigger than a normal one and it would tear the rifling right out of the gun. It's a good thing I was the gun mechanic. So that put the guns out of action.

Mark: I see.

Brenzel: It was funny. I went back to Corregidor in 1983 and I went up there and the guns were gone but I ran into a guy there who told me how he had destroyed the guns. I let it go. Hell, his was a good story. He told a better story than I did. [Loud laugh] And then the word came through on the phones, the phones were still working, the island belongs to the Japanese at noon. You got to come down and surrender. So there was me and our, a couple of guys were bandaged up. You see we also had a, up there we had a what amounted to a firstaid station. Some of the guys had been banged up. So I and three or four guys, when the time came we loaded up what we could - -cigarettes and canned goods, whatever we thought we might need, a blanket used that bag headed for bottom-side. We got to bottom-side and we ran into the enemy for the firsttime. And there were, it must have been 20 of them, sitting there grinning, resting. Bayonets on the guns. We didn't know what the hell to do. One of them does like this to me and I thought he was telling me to get the hell out. So I moved back and I, one was behind me, he just gave me a jolt and the guy who was standing next to the guy, just put his bayonet out like that and got me in the arm. But I learned what this means quick.

Mark: What does it mean?

- Brenzel: This does not, when we do this we want you to go away. Damn, it means "come." Everything is backwards. [Laughing]
- Mark: I see.
- Brenzel: Learned that one the hard way. Well, anyhow, we got down to bottom-side, there the men are by the thousands, on the hills and waiting for stuff to happen. I was, we bunked out or laid out in a burned out restaurant in the barrio and they separated, I noticed they had, the officers were separated from the men. There were machine guns pointed at us and there was a couple of small tanks. Everything seemed to be pointed at us. Everything seemed to be pointed right at ME! But we were at least one night there and then they marched us all down the island a mile or so to the tail end of the, it was shaped like a tadpole, and all the guns with the action were on topside, the big guns, and the tadpole end was where they had made their landing, made their, milinta (??) tunnel it's in the middle of the island and the head's on one side the milinta (??) tunnel and the tail is on the other side and there's a small airplane field on the tail and the so-called garage, I forget what the name of the garage was. But then we were, I don't know, a week or two, it must have been two weeks we were sequestered on the tail at the garage. Drinking water was rare. There were no, there was a ditch and the dysentery began quick. The garage area, we called that MacArthur Park or else we called it "Shit City," one of the two, see. No matter how you wanted to call it. From time to time they'd turn us loose to go back into the tunnels and hills and where ever they want to scrounge for food and supplies, whatever we wanted because they weren't, the Japs weren't ready to feed us. Back and forth, you had to go by the foxholes and the dead men piled over and the corpses and the stink and the, when they're dead awhile they swell, bloated bodies. And the Japs were burning bodies. I don't know if they were burning our bodies or their own so they could send some ashes home. Yeah, there were dead men all over on the island.
- Mark: All dead Americans. Starved to death or--
- Brenzel: Both.
- Mark: Japanese, too?
- Brenzel: Yeah, the tail there were lots of dead Japs, more dead Japs on the tail where we were. That's what they were burning.
- Mark: What were they dying from? Was it lack of supplies or disease?
- Brenzel: No, they had died in the final attack.
- Mark: Oh, in the battle.
- Brenzel: They came in lots of little boats and they fought up the tail of the, of Corregidor towards milinta tunnels.
- Mark: They weren't feeding you terribly well.
- Brenzel: There was no attempt to feed us.

Mark: I was wondering if they had enough supplies.

Brenzel: They seemed to have enough supplies. Yeah. And everything they carried in fishnets. Everything. They packed the damn stuff in fishnets. You always knew what a Jap had because there was his fishnet thing. And I'm talking about the Japanese soldiers. They seemed to spend as much time re-wrapping their leggings, anything else, they spent more time re-wrapping their leggings, the Japs.

Mark: So, it was about two weeks before you left the island?

Brenzel: Well, it seems wherever we were, we were there forever. They assembled, I don't know how many boats but I was on a like a "duck," the landing barge where the fronts go down. I gathered my stuff and we got a boat load, a landing barge load of something or other and then we went to Manila. It took a long time and it was a hell of a ride. And then when we got there it was south of the city, they beached us, only it was this far, it didn't get. When the front of that boat went down we got chased out, the water was this deep and we had a long ways to go to get to the beach. And Dewey Boulevard had been a beautiful, palm tree lined, great, gorgeous palm trees, and where we landed they had cut them all off, leveled it down and it was an air strip. Beautiful palm trees. And that was, I don't know how many thousands of us there were on these islands. They had big ships, small ships but we all hit the beach about the same time at Dewey Boulevard. And then, I don't know how many miles it was to town, but they marched us all through town, four abreast to Bilibid Prison in the heart of old Manila. Along the way the Filipinos were gathered just as though it was a parade but it was a very sympathetic parade. They tried to throw food to us and run out with something to drink and stuff like that. They were very worried about doing it though because the Japs were back and forth at the time. Spent the night at Bilibid Prison. The next day, I don't know how many hundreds of us, or thousands of us, were put on, marched to the railroad, put in freight cars and rammed into those freight cars. There wasn't no room to sit down. And I don't know how many hours it took to get up to Cabatuan, there was no stop, no opening, no nothing. And I don't know how many dead men there were in each, when we got to Cabatuan. Cabatuan was a city and we stopped, the railroad stopped at that city, and we spent the night in the city. At least one contingent, the one I was with, we spent the night in a school. And it was raining like hell. That rain was gorgeous. We just took everything off and got under the eaves naked as the day we were born. The Japs enjoyed watching that show. And the Filipinos enjoyed watching that show. And we didn't give a damn. Oh, that water was good. And then there was a couple miles, I don't know how many miles to walk, the force walk, there wasn't much patience anymore in the force walk to Cabatuan, the camp, behind the barbed wire. I know we got, had an object lesson on the way because the camp had been open awhile, the guys tied to posts outside the gate when we went in.

Mark: This was a form of punishment of some kind?

Brenzel: Yeah, I don't, nobody told us what was going on or what happened. But we did get a lecture about what would happen if we tried to escape. We were put in, in

grass shacks, there were ten men to a squad and we had about, well, I suppose less than three feet per man and we're on platforms about a foot and a half off the ground. If any man of that squad disappeared the other nine guys were going to get killed. So we had ten guys watching each other. And we had to do guard duty at night. We had to walk around the perimeter. I don't know, I forgot who assigned the job.

Mark: And what were you guarding? The other Americans?

Brenzel: The Japs were guarding us but we were guarding ourselves too.

Mark: So if someone escaped then there would be more people responsible.

Brenzel: Yeah.

Mark: I see.

Brenzel: Across the road from our camp was the Japanese camp. One of those bastards had an American flag He'd come out every morning, shake it out like this. He used it for a blanket and he'd hand it on the fence so that we could see it. They weren't all, I mean, once in awhile there was a kind one. They skinned a pig and threw us the pigs kin one time. We cooked that. That was great. All that grease was good.

Mark: Nice and fat.

Brenzel: I drank a canteen full of the grease off the rendered lard and it didn't hurt, didn't bother me a bit. I was so, see about all we had to eat was rice gruel just cooked so it was sloppy. Sometimes onions cooked with it. And every couple of weeks they'd get a hold of a caribou someplace, water buffalo, and strangely enough it had to be inspected. One of our doctors inspected, when they killed it, they'd always have to check it over to see if there were any flukes in the liver and stuff like that. Not that it would have made any difference to us. And then the whole damn thing was chopped up and cooked. I don't know how many thousand men would eat it.

Mark: And so you were served this caribou?

Brenzel: That's a lot. You never know how much. But it was cooked. But men were dying, dying, dying. And occasionally people, work details would leave and those were prizes because when you went out on work detail with the Japs there was always plenty of food and you could get some cigarettes now and then. It was great.

Mark: What sort of work details would you go on?

Brenzel: Tearing down buildings and salvaging the nails and stuff like that. Or go out and get wood for the, chop lumber or wood for their cooking. Out in the jungle cut stuff and bring it back.

Mark: And these sorts of opportunities arose frequently? Infrequently?

Brenzel: Infrequently. They were rare. You didn't need much of that stuff and they had thousands of men to draw on for the work detail. But I was, well you might, sucking up to their medical staff because I wanted to get, I, the men were dying, dying, dying and I wanted any work detail that would get me out of there. So, the first work detail, the first massive work detail there was I volunteered. I didn't feel so good but I said I'd never felt better in my life. It was, I don't know, 300, 400 men that were going, leaving the camp and going someplace and it happened to be where we were going we went to Taiwan on the Lima Maru--I've never seen a record of the Lima Maru anyplace. It took us weeks to get there and it was less than a thousand miles but it took us weeks to get there. Ziggling and zagging and dying and Lima Maru, and when we got to Taiwan or Formosa, in those days it was Formosa. We landed at Taucha (??) which was a beautiful harbor, circular and it was full of ships. And they unloaded, I guess it was 300 of us, lined us up in a column of four, everything was in a column of four. We hadn't gotten into the role call, in number, what they called "bangol", you lined up in "bongol" and you'd count off in Japanese. We didn't, we weren't trained in that yet. We didn't know Japanese. But we were lined up in four and some strange looking military guys on horses were riding back and forth, herding us and one guy leaned down to these and he says, "Yanks." I said, "Yup." But that was the last they said to us. They marched us through town and the populous looked us over. There were little kids in their school uniforms. They marched us and they noticed the sun was changing, they marched us in a circle so the whole town could see us. [Laughs] We were at a railroad station that was just right near the deck and put us on a train that took us, well, hours, I think it was all night, up the island to another railroad station, another parade, and then we got on the narrow-gauge railroad up into the mountains to, I never knew the name of the place, where we, it was so new that, I mean it looked good. They had nice cabins, or equivalent to cabins, for us to live in and each cabin had electric cigarette lighters hanging from the ceilings, and tables down the middle to sit at to eat, and everybody got a loaf of bread and some rice and we thought this was really going to be living. And the next day we were each given a shovel and we had to go out and level the parade ground. We were going to have our parade ground. We had to surrender all our shoes, were barefoot. The next day, I didn't tell you about Tanglefoot. Tanglefoot was the Japanese interpreter. We also called him Boris because he looked like Karloff. And he was a tall guy and he was no chicken. He had been a schoolmaster and his command of English was rather difficult. But he showed us how to do a goose-step. We were supposed to do a goose-step when we walked past the guard shack and he fell off the damn platform while he was showing us how to do the goose-step. They took our shoes away. And in a couple of days they came with baskets [long pause]--but I had to go barefoot. I mean I had some "go aheads," I had some "go aheads" but those, the equivalent to tennis shoes, were just too small for me. So I, the second day we were exposed to the work, or the third day. We had to walk into the sun, right to the rising sun. A mile or so, I don't know, to a railroad track where they were widening, they were moving a railroad track. And there was, next to a river. And our job was to take, we had baskets, we had to fill the baskets with gravel and haul the gravel to a railroad gondola or something like that and then pushed it half a mile down the track and then spilled it where they were going to put the new track or widen it. Each guy was given a yeyhole (??) pole and two baskets and they were supposed to carry that. Well, we just weren't capable of that --one way or the other, mentally or physically, I don't know --but

we convinced the Japs that we couldn't do it. By the second day, no matter how much they beat these guys, they just couldn't do it. By the second day, it was one basket, two men --two men carried the baskets. Another guy stayed behind and load the baskets. That way we cut their labor force by, well, 75 percent immediately. [Laughs] And that's the way it was for years. I mean, I won't say for years because this was just the staging area this railroad thing. In a couple of months, without any warning, we just packed up, gave us our shoes back, our GI shoes, and on the little train again, down to the dock and we thought, boy, the rumor was the war is over. That's that Swedish ship, the [unintelligible] the hospital ship, that's going to take us home.

Mark: Not the case?

Brenzel: No, it was the Die Itshe Maru (sp??). It was the same size and just as rusty.

Mark: And where'd they take you? Back to the Philippines?

Brenzel: No, no, no. There were already passengers on it. There were, as we started to go down the gangplank or whatever you call it, we heard some strange accents--British accents --and some guy trying to say "son of a bitch" and the British can't say "son of a bitch" for, they don't know how, they can't put the proper word on it-

Mark: Accent?

Brenzel: Accent. So there were us 300 Americans and already aboard ship was 200, they were British, Australian, Canadian, South African. There were Dutch, there were Japanese. They had picked them up some place along the way in the Die Itsche Maru (??) and stopped to pick us up. And then, I don't know 10-11 days later we were in Japan at Shimonoseki. That's just a few miles from Nagasaki. Then there was, some of these British were officers and, hell, I don't know, they had tennis rackets, golf clubs, luggage galore. When we got to Japan the Japs tried to make us Yanks carry this, all this equipment at Shimonoseki. Then there was a ferry ride across to Honshu, the main island. So when we took that ferry ride the golf clubs they made me carry, over the side. [Loud laugh] All that fancy officer equipment disappeared that way and their luggage, well, their luggage was definitely gone over and anything that looked good in the luggage --one guy got a beautiful pair of long-johns. I don't know where the hell that British officer got the long- johns [laughs].

Mark: Or why he had them.

Brenzel: Then at the south end of Honshu, then it was, accommodations were completely different then. We were on the mainland proper. We were in a passenger car, windows, plush seats, and we rode the whole, well, half the length of Honshu to Yokohama, went through Kosaka. No, not Kosaka, Osaka. We didn't hit Kobe, that's further, that's in a different direction. Several of those big cities. It was Thanksgiving Day 1942 when I saw Fujiyama for the first time. And that same day we landed, we got off the train at Yokohama. I don't know if Frank Lloyd Wright built that station or not but it, I think he might have designed it --the

railroad station at Yokohama. By that time I had learned a few Japanese words and I see this sign in the lobby, "WC" so I asked the Japanese guard if I could go to the men's room. I wanted to see what their version of it, what the Japanese version of a "WC" was. It was nicely, I mean, the tile was nice but the amenities were just a hole in the wall, in the floor with a little hood over the front so you don't spray all over. But so I found out what a "WC" is in Yokohama. From the railroad station it was a walk to these, we walked through town to the waterfront. We were put in, not a "go down," they didn't call them a "go down", just a warehouse on the waterfront. That's what our headquarters were for, well, two and a half years. That was our headquarters. We worked out of there. We walked another couple of miles through town to the Mitsubishi shipyard where I worked as a welder. It was just the luck of the cards that I got to be a welder. It had nothing to do with my electrical background.

Mark: As you got to Japan and you became more involved in their war industry, did your food get better? Did your accommodations get better? Did you get healthier?

Brenzel: No, the accommodations were no better. And the food did not get any better. It stayed at, we continually lost weight. But the monotony and the lack of salt was terrible and rice was actually a luxury. We got more barley than rice. You got a little handful of barley for breakfast and a cup of thin soup. Then we had like a cigar box, they called it a "bento," our lunch box. You had a good sized handful of cooked barley in that, barley ball that we carried to the shipyard and had the equivalent of a locker to put it in there. We get plenty of tea with our barley ball and that's lunch. And then at night it was another cup of soup and barley and maybe beans. Just rarely rice. And then there'd be some grease on the rice, we called it fried rice. It was wonderful. And they'd cook up a pig now and then, somebody cooked a pig because we got pork about once a week.

Mark: Now, in terms of physical abuse, did this change as time went on?

Brenzel: Did what?

Mark: Physical abuse. Beatings from the guards --as you got to Japan did that get less? Was it worse than the Philippines than it was in Japan? Or did it stay pretty constant?

Brenzel: It stayed pretty constant. There were, the Japan civilian, to me, was a good egg. You put a uniform on them and they're sons of bitches. I got along well with the civilians. As a welder I would work with teams going around ship, they—the—would set up certain parts, they would line up some part, something attached to a bolt and my job was to spot weld it in place and then they would move to another part of the ship and they'd duplicate that step--

[INTERCOM INTERRUPTION]

Mark: I'm sorry.

Brenzel: Where was I?

Mark: We're talking about your treatment by the Japanese guards.

- Brenzel: Oh yeah. Well, as I say, I got along well with the civilians. There was always a Japanese guard lurking to be sure that I worked --we would parade a couple of miles through town every day, back and forth, and we could see the change in civilian life. The automobiles got scarcer. Those that were, that we would see would operate on charcoal. I don't know how it worked but they would burn coal and then the fumes or something from the charcoal would operate the engine. But those got scarcer. And the air raid shelters got more prominent and deeper and bigger. There were so many air raid shelters we saw.
- Mark: And did the air raids pick up?
- Brenzel: Oh, and the air raids picked up. There were newspapers around in the shipyard. We'd get discarded newspapers now and then. And we could see the maps. And by that time we could read the konokono (sp??) [perhaps referring to kanji] the phonetic Japanese; we could read that. And we could see that maps, the islands showing on the maps were getting closer to Japan.
- Mark: I just put a note here. What sort of inkling did you have of the progress of the war while you were in prison? I'm sure they kept information from you. But you found ways of finding things out.
- Brenzel: Well, yes, yes. There were dry-docks there. German vessels would put in now and then, in the dry dock. The German crew members were inclined to be friendly with us Caucasians and they would tell us what was going on. They were never, these were, they weren't naval ships. They were freighters.
- Mark: Merchant marine type things?
- Brenzel: Yup, merchant marine. So they kept us pretty well informed of what was going on. In fact, some of the Japs would say if you want to know what's going on, ask a prisoner of war. [Loud laugh]
- Mark: And so for example, the Invasion of Normandy, did you have any idea that the Americans had invaded the continent of Europe?
- Brenzel: No. Well, no, no, no. We didn't know it. We weren't interested in that. We wanted to know what the hell was going on in the Philippines, in the Pacific.
- Mark: So when MacArthur returned to the Philippines, did you know that had happened?
- Brenzel: No, no. But there is no Japanese, the word picture for B-29, so in the newspaper B-29 would be B-29. So the newspaper's all Japanese but we'd see B-29 show up here and there on the front pages. And onetime I was welding in a tanker and everything got quiet. Well, actually I had been goofing off; I was asleep, and everything got quiet and I woke up and I thought I'm really going to catch hell. The works over and they're all home and I'm going to be shot for trying to escape or something like that and I'm tearing up to the deck. There was an air raid on. And there right up ahead is a B-29. And what I'm working on is an aircraft carrier. [Loud laugh]
- Mark: A prime target, shall we say?
- Brenzel: But he wasn't after, they weren't after --I don't know what he was after. He wasn't after anything. I just, something in sight. But the air raids got more frequent. We

got chased into our air raid shelter, it was just a trench we got chased into night after night. We could see the towns, Tokyo in flames to the north of us.

Mark: Did this affect morale at all?

Brenzel: It didn't seem to bother them.

Mark: No, I mean you at all? As prisoners. Were you thinking "yea, here they come?" Or "Holy Christ, they're going to kill us?"

Brenzel: Well, yeah, but then we were pretty sure that they must know where we are because they never --I guess it wasn't a military target. There were other things that were more important that were on the waterfront. In April or May of '45, it was the last year of the war, of course right after Roosevelt died, I knew it in a hurry. The Jap I was working with was just dancing around and he wrote what he thought was Roosevelt in chalk on the wall and the way he wrote it and translated it it came out [unintelligible]. I knew what he was talking about; Roosevelt was dead. And he said, "Senso War Ty." "the war is over." They figured that Roosevelt was the only reason there was a war. That with Roosevelt dead the war was going to be over in a hurry. As I said, I got along well with the civilians. And my command of, we communicate pretty well. Of course, after I retired I went to the university here and took a course in Japanese to see how much I knew and the Japanese I learned in the shipyard was definitely not Jap --

Mark: Wasn't standard Japanese

Brenzel: No siree.

Mark: Now, in your work, did you have opportunity for sabotage of any kind? Did you do it consciously or unconsciously? Did it hinder the Japanese war effort?

Brenzel: Well, yeah. Actually I worked with, pretty regularly with Japanese kids who were good welders. Kids *of* all kinds.

Mark: These kids being what? Twelve years old or something?

Brenzel: Yeah. They were too young to draft but they were old enough to weld. They taught me how to do some --make a bad weld look good. You want to weld a couple of plates together there's a slant put together, you've got a "v" shaped trough that you've got to fill in. And you'd be assigned so much to do and these kids taught me how to put scraps of metal, fill the bottom of that thing and then just put a thin layer of weld over the top of it and it looks like a perfectly good weld from the top but it's not going to stand much punishment if you go to pick up that sheet and move it around.

Mark: What was their motivation to do that? Was it just laziness? They wanted the war over?

Brenzel: They just wanted to show that they had done the work, they weren't gung-ho in any war effort.

Mark: And there was no quality control.

Brenzel: No. Nothing, I mean there was no x-ray. In fact, one of the ways I was able to sabotage stuff I saw one of the Jap riveters do it --they'd have old guys go around with a hammer and tap every rivet to see if it sounds right and if it doesn't sound right, they'd take their white paint and put a circle around it and then the riveters got to drill that damn rivet out and put it back again. And the riveter borrowed my welding electrode and he, it didn't sound right so he just took the electrode and hit it, hit that rivet and it welded a little bit of the rivet in so that when the inspector hit it with a hammer it sounded normal instead of loose, the loose rattle. And ever after that when I came to a rivet with a circle around it I knew it was a bad rivet and somebody was supposed to replace it so I would just hit it with my rod and the, well, the fireball, the spark, would not only stop the noise it also burned the circle away so that anybody going by wouldn't know there was a defective rivet there. That was good. I had license to roam from ship back to headquarters to pick up materials and I'd always pick up more material than I needed and on the way back to the ship half of it would disappear. And maybe on the way from the materials shop to the ship I would find a pile of parts that had numbers on them, a hole drilled here and there, and I knew they were important. It took work to get those pieces in there. I managed to take a piece and put it in my parts box and walk with it and maybe drop it in someplace a hundred yards away and I knew I had fouled up something.

And another way to foul things up was to, somebody would be welding down in the bowels of the ship and their rheostat that controlled their power is outside the ship and you'd go by and just give the wheel a little spin and the power way down in there is fouled up somehow or another. Somebody's got to stop doing something or has to correct something. Another gimmick was to take these cables and move them a little bit so when these gantries, the big cranes would have to come along on those rails to move something, that that gantry wheel is just going to cut a cable. There's lots of ways. You'd see a tool, pick it up and put it where nobody's going to find it. When you, you're supposed to burn your electrodes down to the bitter end, well, you bend them about half way and then you -or maybe drop a bundle into Tokyo, a whole bundle into Tokyo Bay and go back and get a fresh load. Lots of ways but you had to be careful.

Mark: If you got caught

Brenzel: Yeah, if you got caught, you got it.

Mark: So, when the Japanese finally surrendered you were in Yokohama?

Brenzel: No, no, no.

Mark: I'm missing something here then.

Brenzel: After the big fire raids, after Roosevelt died, there was a general exodus to the mountains. But the crew, our crew from the shipyard was put on the train and moved about 400 miles north into the mountains to Kosaka, a copper mining town. And some of the guys were working down in the hole. Here I hit it rich again. I was the welder in the repair shop. I didn't go down in the hole. Well, I did a couple of times to do some repair work down there. That's where we wound up. In fact I didn't get out of there until September 14 which was a year after the surrender. Or a month after the surrender.

- Mark: Yeah. So when did you hear the news that the Japanese had surrendered? What impact did it have on your particular workplace?
- Brenzel: All the Japs, just about anybody who had any connection with prisoners disappeared. I mean, anybody in uniform. So, there we were. There was no work, no nothing. We had the camp to ourselves. A few days later a couple of Navy planes came over and dropped us a message, "You look hungry. We'll gather some stuff up." and they came back in a couple of hours and dropped off some bags of magazines and cigarettes and stuff like that just to let us know that they knew we were there. The next day the big planes came over dropping supply parachutes.
- Mark: And what's the mood in the camp at this time? Are you joyous? Or are you stunned beyond belief? Were you numb by your experiences?
- Brenzel: I don't know. I guess it was anti-climax. We had been expecting that for so long. In my case, 40 months.
- Mark: So when did allies, I suppose Americans, actually come to the camp?
- Brenzel: Never did.
- Mark: So how did you get out of Japan?
- Brenzel: A train came up to the, to Kosaka. We never saw any Americans. We got on the train and the train took us down to Sendai in northern Japan and there we got on a British destroyer. So damn many things happening then. Spent some time on a British destroyer, then a troop ship, then some sort of a hospital ship to Okinawa. I mean, it wasn't a hospital ship, it just got us to Okinawa. And then they started the "Mickey mouse" stuff on Okinawa. Line up and wait. You don't know what the hell you're waiting for. I spent three hours on Okinawa. I said the hell with this noise. The war's over. I'm a civilian so I don't give a damn. And I went to the airport and I thumbed a ride on a DC-3. There were only two seats, the pilot and co-pilot, and the rest was cargo. I thumbed a ride to Manila. There was a POW rehab camp there. That was it.
- Mark: And what happened at this camp? This POW rehab camp? Did they stuff you full of good food, debrief you?
- Brenzel: Yes, we had plenty of interviews for the war crime boys. The cooks had orders to feed us anything we wanted, any time of the day or night. We were rationed at two cans of beer a day though; that was a bitch. And it was, everything had a green label. I mean, there was no shiny cans.
- Mark: Lots of Army stuff, huh? You spent how long here?
- Brenzel: Uh, I really don't know. I wasn't keeping a diary anymore or anything like that. It was only, well, let's put it this way, the camp I was in was one of the last ones liberated, field camps, liberated in the --so things were pretty well washed out in Manila by that time. I didn't get back to the States, I don't know, it was to the day, it was five years I was overseas --from the day I left. Here I was going to do two years and beat the draft. Two years overseas and I did five.

- Mark: Didn't quite work out like that. So, when you returned you went back to Milwaukee? Or did you go back to Los Angeles?
- Brenzel: I went back to Milwaukee. My, I lived in LA for three years before the war but I went back to Milwaukee. I wanted to go to Marquette University and I did. But before I went to Marquette I went to AO Smith and applied for a job as a welder. I wanted to see how good I was. I stepped right in. I got a welding job at AO Smith and worked on beer tanks, I think it was. That was before they made these Harvestors. We were working on the glass line beer tanks. I was welding the seams, making the core, I mean making the metal before they put the glass core on.
- Mark: And so you went to Marquette on the GI Bill? What did you study then?
- Brenzel: I majored in philosophy and journalism. I got a major in these, two majors. And I wasn't going to fool around. I got it in three years.
- Mark: Were there lots of GIs on campus? I mean, I've spoken to a lot of vets who went to the UW here, I think maybe one went to Marquette. I'm interested in --
- Brenzel: Yeah, there were a lot of them.
- Mark: Would you say perhaps the majority of the students even?
- Brenzel: I think it, I don't know, about half the guys in the "j" school were GIs.
- Mark: And did the GI Bill cover all your expenses? Did it cover your rent and your books and that sort of thing? Did you have to work? Did you need some money from the outside?
- Brenzel: Well, my mother lived in Milwaukee. My family was there. I stayed with my mother while was in school most of the time. I got married before I left Marquette.
- Mark: Which I suppose raised your allowances a little bit.
- Brenzel: No. That didn't affect it. I was in grad school when I got married.
- Mark: I see. So you went on to grad school. So you spent quite a bit of time there at Marquette?
- Brenzel: No. Three and a half years, three years until I got my undergraduate degree and I was at grad school and I got recruited out of grad school for work in Madison.
- Mark: To do what?
- Brenzel: I was—
- Mark: In journalism?
- Brenzel: I was the editor of the Wisconsin Tax News, working for the Public Expenditure Survey for 35 years. I fought excess government spending and taxes. And just like

my work in the Philippines, it was a holding action. I haven't--35 years of holding action against excess taxes.

Mark: And so finding work for you after college wasn't a problem? Some veterans had trouble finding work.

Brenzel: Well, yeah. I had my welding experience to draw on immediately and it worked.

Mark: Yeah. There were other parts to the GI Bill as well. There wasn't just the educational part. There was housing loans, for example. Did you use any of these other kinds of benefits?

Brenzel: No, I got none of that. In fact, these former prisoners of war were sort of an embarrassment to the Veterans Administration.

Mark: Why is that?

Brenzel: It was three years after I was discharged, a good three years after I was discharged. My wife was a nurse and periodically she has to have x-rays and just for the hell of it we got x-rayed at the home show where it would count for what she had to do for her, to keep her license or something like that. So I was x-rayed along with her. Low and behold we're getting back from our honeymoon and there's a notice in the mailbox that I got TB. The VA refused to recognize it as service-connected.

Mark: I was going to ask if you had medical problems as a result of your captivity. You did.

Brenzel: I had pyorrhea, all my teeth were loose. Well, during captivity I had dysentery, berry-berry. The ordinary, the standard diseases, Guam ulcers.

Mark: And from what I gathered the VA wasn't terribly helpful in getting you healthy again.

Brenzel: If I needed, I had to establish service-connection for every tooth in my head. And if I, what were my teeth like before the war? And how much of what you're teeth are like now can --but they got religion about ten years ago and decided that former prisoners of war should, anything is service-connected.

Mark: But this wasn't the case immediately after the war. And so if you had a medical problem and you needed to get it taken care of, how did you do it?

Brenzel: Had to prove it was service-connected.

Mark: And were you able to do that in many cases? Were you unsuccessful a lot of times?

Brenzel: After the war most of my problems were, besides my mental problems, could be solved with plenty of food, rest, recreation.

Mark: Yeah. 'Cause you seem a very healthy, fit gentleman today.

Brenzel: It's 50 years to get -- I married a nurse; she kept good care of me.

- Mark: That's true. You mentioned psychological problems. What sort of –
- Brenzel: Oh, the dreams, the nightmares.
- Mark: And these lasted for how long?
- Brenzel: Oh, actually, I still get them. I mean I dream I'm a prisoner of war. But there not, until about ten years ago I would get them weekly, maybe more often. Wake up in a cold sweat. It was, it's a good thing that I had the job that I had. It kept me pretty busy.
- Mark: Did they get less intense as time went on?
- Brenzel: Oh, yeah
- Mark: Were there parts in your life that were worse than others?
- Brenzel: You'd have other things to occupy you. Had other things to worry about.
- Mark: And did you get treatment for them? Were you diagnosed with something? Were you able to go to counseling or whatever?
- Brenzel: They're still telling me, I mean, it's available if you want support groups. We can get together and talk about things like that. None of the local crew has anything, any experience to compare with mine, see. There's one other guy whose, I think he's in Bear Creek or something like that, he was with me through the whole affair. I didn't find that out until a few years ago. We formed a POW organization and got up to tell where we were and I got up and told where I was and he got up and, hell, we slept head to head for years on Yokohama.
- Mark: And had no idea.
- Brenzel: Yeah. We were in Taiwan together.
- Mark: Because the Vietnam veterans came home, a lot of the psychological effects of the war became public knowledge. After World War II a lot of people didn't realize these sorts of things. I'm interested in if there was a change in the pre-Vietnam and post-Vietnam years as far as awareness is concerned. Explaining it to people who don't know, perhaps. Did you find you got sort of treatment before, you know, like in the late '40s or '50s. Did people understand?
- Brenzel: No, there was none of that. We were a lost cause to start with.
- Mark: I've just got one last area I want to cover. Oh, I've got plenty of tape here yet. And that involves veterans organizations; veterans' reunions and those kinds of things. Did you ever join any groups, any of the major veterans' groups like the Legion, the VFW, that sort of thing? If so, when and why.
- Brenzel: Well, under, the name Conty comes to mind, some guy with the *Milwaukee Journal* named Conty years ago, but back in '45, '46, '47, mid-40's, I don't know, suggested the prisoners of war get together and we had a meeting in Milwaukee, those who could get together, and we formed the VFW post, the Barbwire Post. I was the senior vice-commander. We met someplace, I guess they tore down the Plankinton -or something, someplace on West Wisconsin Avenue. The meetings

always started slow. Everybody was full of beer by the time the meeting started. As senior vice-commander I had to stand and salute every guy who left the meeting. And, hell, everybody's full of beer and everybody's running back and forth. This is a veterans' post? Stand up and salute every guy whose got weak kidneys, what the hell.

Mark: I get the impression you didn't stay very active in this very long.

Brenzel: That was the last veterans' group I had anything to do with. The first and only and last. I mean, the American Legion was letting everybody in on it. I have a brother-in-law who was never in the service, for some reason or another he's, he was in the American Legion. I don't know if they made him an honorary member because he was a good golfer or something like that.

Mark: Or a good drinker. So your activities then were late '40s, early '50s for a couple of years and you dropped out and that was it.

Brenzel: I don't think I was with the VFW for more than a year. And I had nothing to do with any veterans' groups until we formed the American Ex-Prisoner of War group in Madison, the Badger Chapter of the Ex-POWs.

Mark: And when was this?

Brenzel: Ten, twelve years ago. I never had any office in that. I mean, it took me 40 years to get my elementary. Had it in working order and I didn't want to have any responsibilities as far as veterans were concerned.

Mark: Right. And, so when the Badger unit did form then, how did you get in touch with these guys? Did they get in touch with you? Just explain the process of how you got organized.

Brenzel: Well, by that--that was through the VA. By that time the VA had recognized the paws. They had what they call the protocol, had protocol examination, then they decided that you don't have to document everything that happened to you. You don't have to have your commanding officer say this happened and that happened and that happened. The story you told went down on the record and they had to accept it.

Mark: And so to this day do you attend any meetings? Do you stay in touch with some of the people in that organization?

Brenzel: Oh, yeah. The Badger group. I'm the only guy in it now who was in the Pacific Theater. Well, there is another guy but I haven't seen him for over a year. He shows up now and then. I haven't seen him in over a year. He's the guy I said that was head to head with me for years. He's mostly alone now. I know he had cancer. Maybe he's gone. I don't know.

Mark: You've exhausted my line of questioning. I don't think I've forgotten anything. Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything you'd like to say before we wrap it up?

Brenzel: Well, I'll tell you one day I enjoyed in Yokohama. It was after Roosevelt died. You know the Japs are avid golfers.

Mark: No, didn't know that. I know they play baseball.

Brenzel: They're avid golfers. I didn't realize how firmly they want to hang onto it. They were damn hungry and they weren't eating much more than the POWs were. But just before some of the last big fire raids they took us away from the shipyard one day and marched us back to a golf course, gave us shovels, and we had to tear up the fairway. They were going to use it for a garden. After the years of fighting the war and that beautiful stuff there in the middle of the city, they protect their golf course. On the porch, the 19th hold porch, I see a case, Lynch bottled scotch, I suppose it was empty but there it was. So that course had seen service, something had seen service there until the last year of the war.

Mark: I didn't know that actually, no.

Brenzel: We had an air raid, there was an air raid while we were tearing up that golf course. The guards made us get into the sand trap, mind you. We see a couple of our planes, our fighters and a couple of their fighters and our fighter just clobbered them. Just like in the movies, you know. [Loud laughter]

Mark: Interesting. Well, thanks for stopping in. I really appreciate it.

[End of Interview]