

Harry Bailey Interview

Company B, 317th Infantry Regiment

(Library of Congress: Veterans History Project; interviewed by Tom Dimiero)

(MS Word Audio Transcript)

00:00:13 Speaker 1

And your service.

00:00:16 Speaker 2

Army.

00:00:18

OK.

00:00:19 Speaker 1

And were you drafted or enlisted?

00:00:22 Speaker 2

Drafted.

00:00:26 Speaker 1

How old are you? When you were drafted them?

00:00:30 Speaker 2

I don't know 23.

00:00:34 Speaker 1

Do you remember where you were?

00:00:36 Speaker 1

When you found out where you were drafted into the army.

00:00:41 Speaker 2

Well, yes, I remembered. I don't know if you at that time we lived. Sea Breeze, Point pleasant, Rhonda. Quite I don't.

00:00:53 Speaker 1

How did you feel when you were drafted?

00:00:57 Speaker 2

Lousy. Awful. Because at that time there was number really no reason that there there was no. They were just thinking war and that it wasn't later on when the war was on. You knew what was going on, right?

00:01:13

OK.

00:01:16 Speaker 1

So what was it like when you first got into the army.

00:01:23 Speaker 2

Well, I don't know how detailed, but I was I was drafted in Rondy Point. I don't know why, but we went from Rondy Point which is we went to Syracuse. Then we went back to Fort Niagara. And then we went to Fort Eustis, VA.

What was it? What? When did you go over? What was it like when they said you guys are getting shipped out.

00:01:57 Speaker 2

Well, in one sense it wasn't us guys. My whole Army life was I took basic training in Virginia. And practically, the whole crew shipped out except a handful. We stayed there. Another week that two weeks went by, we went back to basic. That was on the 30 caliber machine gun.

Few weeks went by and boy, you're getting getting ready to move. We moved down the street and I started training again on a Searchlight which was before the days of radar and all that stuff.

I finally ended up the West End right on the tip of Long Island in New York Harbor there. When we was there and as we were drafted for one year, supposedly.

And so at this time, my brother, he was the Navy. He and I were in Times Square the day of Pearl Harbor.

Well, at that time I was drafted for I figured boy, I got nine months and I got three months to go well and Pearl Harbor, come along and that was the end of that.

00:03:31 Speaker 1

What was the city like when Pearl Harbor happened?

00:03:36 Speaker 2

Nobody kind of believed it and of course, as they were, they just just didn't believe.

That was at Pearl Harbor. Yeah, of course. Then they were saying. So we you better get back to your base. Begin. And we might need you and all that stuff. So anyhow then after that I mean this was December the 7th.

Well and by. By February of 42 and on mind you, this, this censorship and all that stuff was, I can't believe this thing today where.

Something happens over there this morning, you know about in the afternoon or they send pictures.

And anyhow it we were. February of 42. I say I couldn't never. My army career was.

Somebody would take off and I would be left behind.

After at February of 42, they were sent in at an advanced detail someplace, and though. Well, they picked out 20 names. And at that time, they did not believe in separating any family members.

They picked out 20 names and one of them was one of the twins that was in our outfit.

We picked out. We'll take one, one more name out. And if it's the other twin, they'll both go. And if it's on, I was there somebody else.

So then well 20 and this advanced detail going to who knows where.

Well, as in February. kind of late in February, we took off in a convoy N Atlantic. And it was so, so rough. We were in a converted freighter. We got out. I don't know. Newfoundland or Nova Scotia. The weather was so bad we had a Put in there and wait for him. Still not knowing anything.

Finally, take off and man it was rough. In a convoy and you didn't know whether the submarines were going to. And all of a sudden it was so rough and crashed and we had all my God, the submarines got us. But here the more it was so rough that the waves was crashing on top of the Hatch, where we were under and The only water came down. It was come down the air vents and stuff, but we didn't.

Well then I Got to Iceland finally. Early on that we had to climb down the cargo Nets to get into the. Onto the shore. Still not sure where we're at. One week. So the turn out we were taking over, the British had been there before we were. And the object of being there was to kind of take Iceland and protect the sea route for the convoys and stuff.

We were taking over from the British. We had to learn all our equipment and search lights with at that time were. They were set up on Seacoast studio in. Though we I we lived with the British for about 3 months ate their food. Put up with their drinking their tea and everything.

We figured out the hell with this. We had to March by our walk at about 3/4 of a mile or so from the encampment to the gun site and everything. Finally, I said. You guys have your tea. I'll wait here. Oh, we and I say we're there and they took over.

And I was a Searchlight commander, and our search light generators supplied all the power for our camp. So I had a I was supplying, so I had to make sure the power to the camp was on, so nothing else. Then some of the duties, and I had a then they had a operate the film projector because I was more or less the electrician in the place.

And we get these old movies on the projector and I'd start to project her up and I'd jump out the window and go back to my barracks. And now I hear people screaming and howling. I know the movie projector was jumping there. Skip them. And then other time then I had a they say we took over all this stuff from the British. And we we had to haul water from town and there. Oh, nothing else happened.

You you go get take that truck and go get a load of water. Of her driving like the British on the wrong side of the road and manual shift British truck. Coming out of Reykjavik and Hart and Halford or whatever We had a haul that's water and a tanker truck.

These trucks were not too well equipped. There was number hatches coming out of town and reels. Oh, my God. What do I do? You got to shift with the wrong feet and shift with the wrong hand. Going up this hill. And then load of water shifted when right you would come right up over the cab and drowned at me.

But and as we were there and I don't like ice and a lot of people say, oh, that's pretty bad. But where we were was in the South end and I kind of felt that the more appropriate name would be windland for that because at the South end of the island, it gets washed by the Gulf Stream, and that was.

Windy, windy. But they said Nice on God's name when they. And the Swedes in the region come across and found it. They came across and they landed on the North Shore and that's where they.

00:09:58 Speaker 1

Where did you guys go after Iceland?

00:10:02 Speaker 2

Here again, it ain't us guys. It was a few of us. Everything I did was.

00:10:08 Speaker 2

Well, we thought we were going home. But we didn't. We ended up in England and Scotland. And I guess maybe a, but I was a staff Sergeant in a considered a available. But nobody wanted me there because I was a staff Sergeant and they if they want to fill up their unit. They had their own rating number ratings for each unit and they were going to use their own people to fill their rating.

So I kicked around England from one end to the other for the better part of the year and.

Then the invasion time. Come on. I was at that time. I had gone from the north of from Scotland to the South of England in Plymouth there.

Still not knowing what's going on. Well then come time for the invasion. We knew something was our Neptune because the planes. I don't know if planes on and everything all had the all the time they come up had these white stripes painted on them and knew something.

Well, and I went from that ship. I know I wasn't D-Day. I was six days plus, minus whatever you want after D-Day before they broke out.

Still holding my staff sergeants rating. Nobody wanted nothing to do with me. So I did everything coming and going to driving a red ball convoy truck. Anything, anything was on to do, I'd move along, move along.

Well, we moved up through France and Luxembourg and whatever.

The battle at the Battle of Bulge and things was tough, they didn't care what rating I had. They all of a sudden, they says, Here's a rifle. You're in the infantry now, man. Here's the rifle.

First night in combat, that damn rifle didn't work. Well, I cleaned that rifle and hurried the next morning when.

And that's when they and they said you're in the infantry. I'm going to tell you, don't make too many close friends. Because you don't know where which one's going to be gone next.

And they say I got that stuff and the car hasn't. But we, worked our And unlike the today's no armored vehicles, no nothing. 6 by 6 trucks with with a machine gun mounted up on the up over the front seat.

And then and for a good measure, we'd they'd give us a ride on a top of a tank.

And if you ever rode the top of the tank, and got seasick. Which, and you're riding it and you're hanging on for dear life and you're leaving room. And that track is going around. Oh, my God. What a feeling.

So I went and we went across the Rhine and not luckily the the Navy sent trucked a few of their small landing craft up there and took us across the Rhine. One town to another town or whatever.

We were going hellbent for Berlin. We weren't too far from Berlin.

Whoa. Oh, Patton, what the hell do you mean? Whoa.

Well.

The powers to be made a decision that the Russians were going to take Berlin. You guys can't go no further.

So then we turned around again. We ended up down in Austria.

Well then, with all this, I was. I was fortunate I never got caught in the woods. A few times. When you don't know whether it's trapping or trees, that's flying. I never got nothing real bad. I got hit in the arm with a hunk of shrapnel and spun me around and kept going. You dive into a ditch and something goes splat, and here's a piece of shrapnel right off the end of your nose.

But then we got that far still, still no aircraft still know nothing to travel with trucks our way all the way down to Austria. Damn near into Germany or damn near into Italy. And that's when the war come to a halt.

Well, this outfit I was in the infantry with was fresh out of the States and I had all that time in England and that's where those point systems build up.

When they when they found out I had so many points there and they say these regular army guys look down their nose at your draftees. When they come out and they said, Sergeant Bailey, you're going home. They had regular army go. What the hell do you mean?

He says, well, he's got points. Right up to the nose.

And at that time, they wanted me to go to Officers candidate school. And I says, no, I don't think so. You go to officers candidate school and you make it there. You don't know what you're going to do. I don't think so.

Why don't you want to go? I says I got points built up to here.

And even the The lieutenants think, captain. What do you mean at that point up to there?

Well, yes, we don't blame you for not wanting to go to off their school.

So we ended up in as they say in Austria, there again still no planes. Still no nothing. Wait. Almost any Italian border.

And then we start. We're down there and. Things really. And that's when we started to get into regular army routine. Going to starting close order drill and all that sort of stuff.

The first day we went out there, we're on the drill field and charge of quarters comes tearing out of the office and Sergeant Bailey. Sergeant Bailey, where are you? You're going home.

And all these regular army peoples, what do you mean he's going home? We've been here longer than him. Well, and they. Oh, no, you ain't. He's been here so long. Well, then I they loaded me on a Jeep and I don't quite know the proper sequence, but still no airplanes, mind you.

I went and started off from the Jeep someplace along the line we are in the 6 by 6 trucks. And then another play. We're in these 40 and 8 cattle cars going up over the mountains. In one place we had such a load that we had to get out of the car and walk over the top of the mountain so the train could get over the mountain.

And then eventually, steel bought trucks and whatever ended up in Laharve. Got back on a troop ship there. That was about the first time ever seen the military do what they said they were. So many days you'll be back in New York.

I had a stand. Shore patrol on the officers quarters. But I didn't mind then because at least we were going back to New York. And then we get back to New York and I pretty much what they said.

Went to Fort Dix, NJ, and they all run now. If you're a certain spec number, you might not get discharged.

And then, of course, that everybody says, well, why didn't you do that? Why didn't I didn't keep my insurance? I didn't. I just Get Me Out of this damn place. I don't want nothing to do with nothing.

So well, I got my discharge from Fort Dix. And unlike these people today, flying back and forth and having receptions in there I was in Fort Dix and he says well, here's an allowance. You can go home now. Get a bus, get a train to.

When I would go about it when I was going to France, my girlfriend that she'd been waiting for me all this time. She says.

I said, well, I guess we're coming home now. I ended up in England. So my girlfriend says, well, how would that she went and joined the Navy. So she was in Washington, so I got my discharge from Fort Dix. And I went down to Washington to meet up with her.

Well. And so just so happened that. I was discharged. And she could get in if we got married, she could get an immediate discharge.

Didn't have much too much bearing on the case, but anyhow. That was, I don't know, June something.

But July 12th. We had got married, she was back and she got her discharge.

And so we got back to we got our dish, we had our wedding with our about the only pictures I got them myself we had wedding was no formal pictures, no nothing.