

William Claude Baldwin Interview

Company E, 317th Inf Reg

(Library of Congress: Veterans History Project; interviewed by Tabatha Betts)

(MS Word Audio Transcript [NOT edited, just transcribed])

00:00:04 Speaker 1

What's your name? Yes.

00:00:06 Speaker 2

Name.

00:00:07 Speaker 2

You have to talk a little louder.

00:00:09 Speaker 1

OK.

00:00:12

OK.

00:00:13 Speaker 2

My name is William C Baldwin.

00:00:16 Speaker 1

When is your birthday?

00:00:17 Speaker 2

Birthday January the 1st.

00:00:20 Speaker 1

Where were you born? Where were you born?

00:00:21 Speaker 2

When was it?

00:00:24 Speaker 2

Born Cedarbrook, Virginia.

00:00:26 Speaker 1

OK. Do you have any brothers or sisters? Do you have any brothers or sisters?

00:00:32 Speaker 2

Your wife?

00:00:32 Speaker 1

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

00:00:38 Speaker 1

Do you have any brothers or sisters? How many?

00:00:40 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:00:41 Speaker 2

I have one brother living, two brothers dead and two sisters dead. I was an infantry.

00:00:49 Speaker 1

What branch of service were you?

00:00:50 Speaker 1

In.

00:00:57 Speaker 1

Were you drafted? Yeah.

00:01:01 Speaker 2

As Grace in January the 31st, 1942 got out of service October the 15th, 1945.

00:01:06 Speaker 1

OK.

00:01:15 Speaker 1

What? What did you think when you were drafted? What did you think when you were drafted?

00:01:18 Speaker 2

What say?

00:01:21 Speaker 2

Well, I will. There's no that's going to have to go, so.

00:01:28 Speaker 1

Were you scared?

00:01:29 Speaker 2

No, no. Well, I was. I forgot overseas. Yeah.

00:01:35 Speaker 1

Were you married when you went into?

00:01:36 Speaker 1

The war? No.

00:01:43 Speaker 1

How old were you when you went?

00:01:44 Speaker 1

To the war.

00:01:46 Speaker 2

22 what, 23? When I went in combat, but at 22, when I went in service?

00:01:56 Speaker 1

Where did you?

00:01:57 Speaker 1

Go for training.

00:01:58 Speaker 2

Where is it deducted from?

00:02:00 Speaker 1

Yeah. Where did? Where did you train? Like what city? And what state or whatever.

00:02:06 Speaker 2

Lived in Virginia.

00:02:08 Speaker 1

Is that where you were trained for the?

00:02:09 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:02:09 Speaker 1

War.

00:02:11 Speaker 1

How much training did you have before you had to?

00:02:13 Speaker 1

Go fight.

00:02:15 Speaker 2

How many children?

00:02:16 Speaker 1

How?

00:02:16 Speaker 1

Training. Did you have to have before you went to fight?

00:02:21 Speaker 1

A lot of training or not that much before.

00:02:22 Speaker 2

No, I still didn't understand.

00:02:23 Speaker 1

You go.

00:02:25

Do you think?

00:02:26 Speaker 1

How much training did you have before you went to fight? Like did you have a lot of training before you went to?

00:02:32

OK.

00:02:34 Speaker 1

Fight or only a little before.

00:02:35 Speaker 1

You had to go fight, yeah.

00:02:37 Speaker 2

I still laid.

00:02:39 Speaker 2

And figured it out. I just came here with a nick.

00:02:45 Speaker 1

Did you have a lot of training before you went to fight or a little bit of training before you had to go fight? Yeah.

00:02:51 Speaker 2

Training. Oh yeah. We had a military training, yeah.

00:02:55 Speaker 1

Yet it is skinny.

00:02:59 Speaker 1

How many years were you in the?

00:03:01 Speaker 1

War.

00:03:02 Speaker 2

I was.

00:03:05 Speaker 2

Let's see, in the war I was in service three-year, two months and 15 days.

00:03:13 Speaker 1

What was your rank?

00:03:14 Speaker 2

Staff Sergeant.

00:03:18 Speaker 1

Did you have a lot of people to write to?

00:03:20 Speaker 1

While you were.

00:03:21 Speaker 1

In the war.

00:03:22

Not why?

00:03:22 Speaker 1

Did you have a lot of people to write to back home?

00:03:24 Speaker 1

When you.

00:03:25 Speaker 1

Were in the war OK?

00:03:25 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:03:29 Speaker 1

Was it hard to send letters and get mail on the war?

00:03:32 Speaker 2

Yes.

00:03:34

OK.

00:03:36 Speaker 1

What were your duties when you were in?

00:03:38 Speaker 1

The war.

00:03:40 Speaker 2

What did I?

00:03:41 Speaker 1

Do what was your duties? Yeah. What did you do?

00:03:45 Speaker 2

Well, I was a it was a squad leader.

00:03:50

OK.

00:03:54 Speaker 1

Where did you fight?

00:03:55 Speaker 1

World War 2.

00:03:56 Speaker 2

In the France and Germany and Austria.

00:04:01 Speaker 1

What was the weather like?

00:04:03 Speaker 2

The weather was it was hot when we went in, but it got all awful cold during the winter. Snow was about knee deep.

00:04:15 Speaker 1

Did it rain?

00:04:17 Speaker 2

No, it didn't rain. It snowed.

00:04:21 Speaker 1

What was the temperature? Most of the time in the winter?

00:04:23 Speaker 2

Well, there I couldn't see, but it was blue blue freezing.

00:04:30 Speaker 1

Did you have clothes to?

00:04:31 Speaker 1

Keep you warm and dry.

00:04:32 Speaker 2

No, we didn't get no real winter close until after winter was over. We didn't get no snow packs, snowshoes or anything like that until it quit snowing. Then we got them.

00:04:49 Speaker 1

OK, what did you do if you?

00:04:53 Speaker 1

Were wet or cold.

00:04:55 Speaker 1

Like what did you? What did you do if you were?

00:04:57 Speaker 1

Cold. Did you?

00:04:57 Speaker 1

Just have to suffer or.

00:04:59 Speaker 2

Everyone.

00:05:00 Speaker 1

What did you what did you do? If you were wet or cold? Did?

00:05:03 Speaker 1

You have to suffer.

00:05:03 Speaker 2

What we and we just treat them back again. They bring other clothes out and they issue us and take the others back.

00:05:13 Speaker 1

Did you, Sir, with anyone you knew?

00:05:16 Speaker 2

Did I share with anyone I?

00:05:17 Speaker 2

Know. Yeah, my brother, OK.

00:05:20 Speaker 2

We're right side by side.

00:05:23 Speaker 1

How was serving with your brother in battle?

00:05:27 Speaker 2

It's good only in combat.

00:05:31 Speaker 2

Because you got too to worry about.

00:05:37 Speaker 1

What memories of the world do you have that you would?

00:05:39 Speaker 1

Want to share with us?

00:05:40 Speaker 2

Oh I have.

00:05:43 Speaker 2

Some good ones and some bad ones. Yeah. The first time I got wounded.

00:05:46 Speaker 1

Is there any way that you want to share?

00:05:50 Speaker 2

We was making a river crossing off the Moselle river in France and it was on February the 12th, 1944.

00:06:00

Sure.

00:06:01 Speaker 2

Well, we started it and they got across the river in salt boats and the is foreign on us dust flying up all around me. That's a crawling on the ground. And I looked up and I seen the road.

00:06:21 Speaker 2

Here, had a bank embankment.

00:06:24 Speaker 2

And I'm just trying to make it in behind that.

00:06:28 Speaker 2

And I'd be safe, but I didn't do it. I got hit in the groin that time. Well.

00:06:36 Speaker 2

It went old. I went into hospital, went back to England and I was there from September the 12th.

00:06:47 Speaker 2

Till January the 2nd.

00:06:52 Speaker 2

45 January 2nd, 45. Then I went back to the outfit.

00:06:58 Speaker 2

I went back into heck. I can't think of that Luxembourg.

00:07:06 Speaker 2

And so I got hit again. Well, I've spent one night in the hospital, went back up to the outfit, and it was all about.

00:07:22 Speaker 2

Couple of weeks or so after that I got hit again.

00:07:27 Speaker 2

Well, I had. I didn't even go to hospital that time. It was just more or less a scratchy calling.

00:07:38 Speaker 2

And then.

00:07:40 Speaker 2

That was in.

00:07:44 Speaker 2

March, no February, February. And then I didn't get wounded anymore and we fought on up until the war ended in May the 7th. Well, may the 8th.

00:08:03 Speaker 1

OK.

00:08:04 Speaker 2

1945.

00:08:07 Speaker 1

Can you tell us what a river crossing?

00:08:08 Speaker 1

Is.

00:08:10 Speaker 1

What is a river crossing? What is a river crossing?

00:08:19 Speaker 1

What is a river crossing?

00:08:22 Speaker 2

Another.

00:08:25 Speaker 1

What's a river crossing like? What is it? How do you what do you do when you make a river crossing?

00:08:32 Speaker 1

What's a river crossing? That what? What is a river crossing?

00:08:39 Speaker 2

A caution.

00:08:40 Speaker 1

What is a river crossing?

00:08:42 Speaker 2

Ohh, a river crossing and get that one. It's where you cross the river. Go cross the river and the salt boots.

00:08:47 Speaker 1

OK.

00:08:50 Speaker 1

And how did you?

00:08:51 Speaker 1

You just run across the river.

00:08:52 Speaker 2

Take paddles and roll yourself.

00:08:56 Speaker 1

OK.

00:09:01 Speaker 1

What's a foxhole?

00:09:02 Speaker 2

Pops Hole is a hole in the ground that you dig.

00:09:05 Speaker 1

Did you ever have to dig any foxholes?

00:09:08 Speaker 2

I was glad to dig them.

00:09:12 Speaker 2

I tell you what I I was just digging one one time.

00:09:18 Speaker 2

Well, it's four. We when we was trying to make that river crossing where I got wounded and.

00:09:28 Speaker 2

We went down one more. We're about 3:00 in the morning, going up beside the river. Somebody over on the other side said, who would stop, who goes there and.

00:09:43 Speaker 2

So we hit the ground and where is it? Big Canal way back over.

00:09:50 Speaker 2

Where their boats could go around and we crawled away back next to that man, my brother, and we finally jumped up and run back to the canal. Well, they just kept on shelling us and the shells are hitting in the water right across from us.

00:10:10 Speaker 2

And we finally got the chance to sneak out.

00:10:14 Speaker 2

Well, all of it.

00:10:16 Speaker 2

And my brother, I don't know. He went one way and I went another. I went up on this hill. A whole bunch of us facing the enemy over here behind us. And I was digging my foxhole and I got down about that four under the ground. And I heard the shell was coming.

00:10:36 Speaker 2

Well, I had set my rifle up where I could just reach and get.

00:10:41 Speaker 2

And I heard that shell are coming and I fell on that hole, which is just barely under the ground and that shell hit me rifle tore it all 2 pieces. And there's a piece of shrapnel went in right on my hip.

00:10:59 Speaker 2

And come out up here.

00:11:01 Speaker 2

It just burned the red streak up the back didn't bring no blood or nothing.

00:11:11 Speaker 1

Did you have problems digging foxholes when it was when the ground was frozen?

00:11:16 Speaker 2

The only problem you would have is the dodging shells.

00:11:20 Speaker 1

OK.

00:11:22 Speaker 1

What did you eat during World War 2?

00:11:25 Speaker 2

What we.

00:11:25 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:11:26 Speaker 2

We had key rations.

00:11:28 Speaker 1

And what were those?

00:11:30 Speaker 2

It was eggs and bacon and oh, you had beans and canned beans. You know these little cans.

00:11:37 Speaker 2

And the tunaley too, had a lot of stuff like that.

00:11:41 Speaker 1

Was it good?

00:11:42 Speaker 2

Yeah. Anything was good back then.

00:11:47 Speaker 1

Did you miss any food like when you were in the war? Any food?

00:11:50

No.

00:11:51 Speaker 1

That you had at home, OK?

00:11:51 Speaker 2

Ah.

00:11:54 Speaker 1

What was the first thing that you ate?

00:11:56 Speaker 1

When you got back.

00:11:56 Speaker 1

Home. Do you remember?

00:12:00 Speaker 2

The first thing I.

00:12:01 Speaker 1

Ate when you.

00:12:02 Speaker 2

Got. I know is.

00:12:02 Speaker 1

Back home.

00:12:04 Speaker 2

Is your dinner.

00:12:05 Speaker 2

But I couldn't tell you what it was.

00:12:08 Speaker 2

It means I suppose there's one thing beans and potatoes I would say.

00:12:14 Speaker 1

OK.

00:12:15 Speaker 1

Did you receive any awards from the war? Did you receive any awards from the war, any medals or anything?

00:12:19 Speaker 2

Good way.

00:12:24 Speaker 2

No.

00:12:26 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:12:30 Speaker 1

Do you have? You don't have any metals or anything? Any. OK.

00:12:41 Speaker 2

Two bonds.

00:12:43

OK.

00:12:46 Speaker 2

I got 2 Bronze Stars, 3 Purple Hearts certificate and married.

00:12:52 Speaker 2

And with the Hicks here there.

00:12:56 Speaker 2

Nothing for being crazy. I don't know what.

00:13:01 Speaker 2

It's just a little piece of paper.

00:13:03 Speaker 1

OK.

00:13:06 Speaker 1

Did you ever see a concentration camp?

00:13:09 Speaker 2

Yeah, yeah, but what?

00:13:10 Speaker 1

Did you ever see a concentration camp?

00:13:14 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:13:15 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:13:18 Speaker 2

You've heard of boogum roll, haven't you?

00:13:20 Speaker 1

Yes.

00:13:23 Speaker 2

I think it's on the other side.

00:13:42 Speaker 2

I think it was your home.

00:14:15 Speaker 2

Now that they asked what she said the.

00:14:15 Speaker 1

Ethan.

00:14:21 Speaker 2

Concentration camp.

00:14:23 Speaker 1

OK.

00:14:23 Speaker 2

And we captured that and that pass.

00:14:25 Speaker 1

OK.

00:14:28 Speaker 2

That's our overlay of the cane, OK.

00:14:33 Speaker 2

At that pace, belonged to a guy.

00:14:37 Speaker 2

That you're supposed to have died. You see in there. They killed him. They come up. You had a number and I thought his numbers on there. But it's not. They had this number. And has that number.

00:14:56 Speaker 2

Emma. They killed him. Well, his number come up three days before we got there. Well, he had heard.

00:15:05 Speaker 2

That we was on the way.

00:15:08 Speaker 2

So he wore glasses and had a mustache, and he shaved it all off, though the glasses away and used another one of them streets. They had a certain street. They had to stay home when he went on another St.

00:15:28 Speaker 2

And he lived.

00:15:30 Speaker 2

He's the one that had this pace.

00:15:41 Speaker 1

Did you meet anyone else living in the concentration camp? Did you meet anyone in the concentration camp?

00:15:44 Speaker 2

Yeah, boy.

00:15:56 Speaker 1

What was the concentration camp like?

00:15:59 Speaker 2

Well, it was just.

00:16:02 Speaker 2

Just a big ruler building.

00:16:06 Speaker 2

And it had boxes in them. Some of them had mattress on them, some had nothing.

00:16:13 Speaker 2

It was.

00:16:15 Speaker 2

It was awful.

00:16:17 Speaker 2

You just couldn't hardly explain what it was like.

00:16:29 Speaker 1

When did the war end?

00:16:31 Speaker 2

The war ended on.

00:16:34 Speaker 2

May the 8th, 19 and 45.

00:16:38 Speaker 1

Where were you when the war ended?

00:16:39 Speaker 2

Where I was in Austria.

00:16:42 Speaker 1

Were you glad to go home?

00:16:44 Speaker 2

Yep.

00:16:47 Speaker 1

Do you think?

00:16:47 Speaker 1

About the war often now.

00:16:50 Speaker 2

Your way.

00:16:50 Speaker 1

Do you think about the war now?

00:16:52 Speaker 2

Oh yeah, you always. Something will pop up.

00:16:57 Speaker 1

Would you go again if you had to? Would you go to the war again if you had to?

00:17:00 Speaker 2

You.

00:17:03 Speaker 2

If I had two.

00:17:07 Speaker 1

Do you have any stories you want to tell us about the war?

00:17:09 Speaker 1

Any other stories?

00:17:10 Speaker 2

Anyway.

00:17:11 Speaker 1

Any stories you want to?

00:17:12 Speaker 2

Tell us.

00:17:13 Speaker 2

No, I didn't have any to. I wanted to tell. OK.

00:17:26 Speaker 1

OK. Can you tell us all the?

00:17:27 Speaker 1

What all that means?

00:17:30 Speaker 2

And I got it.

00:17:32 Speaker 2

A map, and they're all giddy.

00:17:34

OK.

00:17:40 Speaker 1

So what all what is all that?

00:17:42 Speaker 1

But can you? Can you tell us what everything on there is?

00:17:45 Speaker 2

OK, I'll look. I'll get that map.

00:17:48

OK.

00:17:49

Pause.

00:17:50 Speaker 2

It we get straightened out here. Ohh yeah.

00:17:58 Speaker 2

This is where we see this is angle.

00:18:02 Speaker 2

And this is is.

00:18:05 Speaker 2

The channel.

00:18:08 Speaker 2

Brochure.

00:18:09 Speaker 1

OK.

00:18:10 Speaker 2

And that's where we landed in France.

00:18:13 Speaker 2

And we went before it, now we we didn't ride. We walked. And that's the way we went right down.

00:18:23 Speaker 2

Down here and here we come back. We got to ride when we would come back. So we got to ride back there and then we come on back down here.

00:18:41 Speaker 2

And walked on.

00:18:46 Speaker 2

Here's the river.

00:18:48 Speaker 2

Where I got wounded. Right down here. Right in there.

00:18:50

OK.

00:18:53 Speaker 2

And we come up.

00:18:56 Speaker 2

When I went in the hospital and when I.