

John A. Bailey
New York State Military Museum
Saratoga Springs, New York
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Interviewer Wayne Clark (WC)
Interviewer Mike Russert (MR)

MR: This is an interview at the New York State Military Museum, Saratoga Springs, New York. It is the 5th of July, 2006, approximately 12:30 p.m. Interviewers are Wayne Clark and Mike Russert. Would you give me your full name, your date of birth, and place of birth, please?

JB: John A. Bailey. I was born October 15, 1917 in Kaimesha Lake, NY [Mr. Bailey spells out Kaimesha].

MR: Okay. Knew I would have trouble with that one, huh?

JB: Well, that means pleasant, calm. But they changed it from Pleasant Lake to Kaimesha Lake.

MR: Okay. What was your education prior to entering service?

JB: One-room school house in Kaimesha, and then I had about 2 years of high school, Monticello High School. Then I went to, spent one year in the Bronx. Bronx Vocational Trade School. That was it.

MR: What was your, ah... Did you receive any additional education during your time in the service?

JB: No.

MR: What was your employment before you entered service?

JB: I worked for an ice plant. A.T. Reynolds Ice Plant, Kaimesha.

MR: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

JB: Actually, I was drafted. On the clipping it said I volunteered, but it was never recognized in my, in my number. So I figured I was drafted. I resented it.

MR: And that was in February of...

JB: February 4th, 1941.

MR: Okay. What unit were you, uh, where did you go for your

JB: Fort Dix. Well, I went to, the physical, I guess and all, was in New York City.

MR: And what did you do at Dix? That was your induction center?

JB: That was the induction center. And as soon as that was over, then they shipped us right to Ft. Dix.

MR: And where did you go from Dix?

JB: Went right to McClellan. Within a week we was in Alabama. Ft. McClellan, Alabama.

MR: Okay. And what were you assigned to? What unit, you were assigned to the 27th at that time?

JB: Yes sir. Whatever. I was assigned to the anti-tank company of the 106th Infantry. The anti-tank company come out of Catskill, NY.

MR: Okay. Now when you were down there, what kind of weapons were you assigned?

JB: 37¹. The old pea-shooter.

MR: Did you ever, were you trained on the M-1903 model rifle?

JB: Yes. I was made corporal, I don't know, four months I think.

MR: Uh-huh. How long were you in McClellan? At McClellan?

JB: War was declared on December 7. We shipped out within 2 weeks after war was declared. I stayed at McClellan right till the war was declared. Then we shipped out for California. We wound up out in the field... What was the name? Corona, I think it was Corona, California. March Field. We were separated from the regiment. We were special. We never saw the rest of the regiment until about... Later on we joined them at Fort Ord. Then the whole regiment and the whole division was put together.

WC: Do you know why they separated you? Were you getting some sort of specialized training?

JB: Ah, they were special units, I guess, the anti-tank. The regular regiment you had your machine gun. You had your .30 and your .50. Evidently the anti-tank was like an attached unit. We weren't really with the regiment. Even in Ft. McClellan, we weren't in the same area as uh... I had a buddy in G Company, 106th, from home. I'd go see him in Ft. McClellan. He's passed on now.

MR: Now when you were at McClellan, how were the guns towed?

JB: Prime mover. What did they call them? A weapons carrier. 4 X 4, I think it was.

MR: Was any unit still using horses at all? Did you see any units still using horses?

JB: Nope, not any.

MR: Okay. I was just curious. I know we've had some that were in early and they [cut off]

JB: That was in the cavalry, mostly. No, we had our guns. Yep.

¹ Possible reference to M3 37mm anti-tank gun as these weapons were in use by this unit at this time.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/37_mm_Gun_M3#US_Army

MR: Now, how many men were in your...

JB: Squad?

MR: The whole company that you were, you said you were with an anti-tank company.

JB: Well, there were three platoons. There were three platoons. Boy, you got me. There was either three guns or four guns per platoon, I think we were four guns. There was the first squad, second squad, third squad, fourth squad. Three platoons.

WC: Uh-huh. What was your actual job?

JB: I became corporal. I become gun commander, you might as well say.

WC: Okay. So you were in charge of the gun.

JB: I was in charge of the gun and four men. That was the squad.

MR: Okay. I'm going to go back a little bit. When you were still at McClellan, how did you hear about the attack at Pearl Harbor?

JB: I was corporal of the guard. I was corporal of the guard that night, when the news come in. Then everything moved real fast. A couple of inspections, then there was all the guns loaded up. We was on, we was on a rail within 10 days.

MR: So it took 10 days, the entire division.

JB: The entire division within, well, let's see... The 7th and 10 would be the 17th. Well, I know we was in California before Christmas. So it wasn't too darned long. Yep. We, outside of Corona, Ca. Then we went in to Ft. Ord. That's where we had our last inspections, got brought up to strength, we got new recruits to fill up our company, you know. Quite a few of them come in.

WC: How did you spend that Christmas?

JB: Out in the field.

WC: Uh-huh. It was just another day?

JB: Just another day. Yep, yep. We was all alone. And we, in my scrapbook you got pictures of our area, in California. You'll never, company street, as I call it. Company street. We was all alone. Then there's other pictures of when we got together in Ft. Ord, after we was getting ready for P of E, getting ready to set up. Well, that was a P of E, Port of Embarkation. We went from Ft. Ord, up to 'Frisco, to get on a boat. I think that was in March. I should have wrote my [unclear], you can look at the history, but I think it was March that we got on a ship.

MR: Now you said you were on a, it was a former cruise ship?

JB: Yeah, it was still a liner. I mean all carpeting. I mean you had your bunks made up, but it was still a luxury liner. As far as carpeting and everything. We were lucky.

MR: What was the name of the ship? You told me before.

JB: Lurline. The Lurline. Yep.

MR: Now tell me what happened with all your guns. You were telling me about that before too.

JB: The .50 caliber machine guns and the 37(mm) anti-tank guns was mounted on top deck. Yep. And of course that gave us prime billeting. We was in a smoking lounge. Tiers, about four tiers. So we was well above the waterline. We used to train on the smoke stack of the other liner with live ammunition. I couldn't believe it, but...

MR: You fired at it?

JB: No. I said we trained.

MR: Oh, you trained. You went through the whole motions of...

JB: That's right. It was loaded and all. It's crazy. [garbled] happy [garbled] trigger man...

MR: So, you'd load it up and then you'd just eject the shell without firing it?

JB: Yes, that's right. It was... when you look at it now, it was dumb.

MR: Now how long were you on the liner?

JB: We was about five days. Five days we was in Hawaii. We pulled right into Hilo, HI on the big island.

WC: Could you still see the smoke and everything from Pearl Harbor?

JB: No. You're too far away.

WC: Too far away?

JB: Yeah. And this is, well, December, January, February... This is four months already. We didn't get to Oahu... Sometime in '43. They moved us over. That's when the 27th was going into amphibious training and all that for landing.

WC: Uh-huh.

JB: But...

MR: While you were in Hawaii, what did you do there?

JB: We had gun emplacements along the cliffs. Most of it's cliffs, down, well you got a couple seaports, you know, but most of it's cliffs. You'd spend a month out, two months in, I think. There's always one platoon, there's three platoons in a anti-tank. There was two platoons out, on outpost with the guns, and one was back in reserve. Kept rotating.

MR: So you were basically operating as a coastal defense unit with the 37s

JB: That's right. Wasn't our gun, but one of the guns fired at a ship. Got too close. We weren't notified of it. But basically we just, a war of nerves. That's all it was. And then, believe it was February '43, you'd have to get your own records,

MR: Uh-huh.

JB: When the 27th was all, because I think the 105th was on a different island. The 106th was on Hawaii. Maui, maybe, the 105th, unit, the other division (sic). We was all called together on Oahu in early '43. But like usual, we was on Waikiki beach, two blocks off of Waikiki beach. We got pictures of our billeting area where the Japanese school. We was separated from the regiment. I mean, we did patrols on roads and all. We took our amphibious training in a pool, municipal pool right in Waikiki beach. Where we took our amphibious, swimming and all. That's all in the scrapbook. Japanese school, swimming pool. I went back, '89 I think, I went back. The school was there, the pool was all closed up. Got all deteriorated. But the school was still there, and being used. We come back, boy I just saw it in the papers too. USS, hmm... I'll go home and I'll get the name of that ship. It was just a small ship coming back to the United States for repairs, that we come back on.

MR: Now, when was that?

JB: We got back in '43.

MR: So was that just your anti-tank unit that came back in '43?

JB: Far as I know, it was only the anti-tank. There might've been other cadres because they pulled cadres from the whole 27th Division as far as I know. But I know our anti-tank cadre was on, wasn't a big ship, it was a small... I wouldn't even guess at the name. I'd rather give it to you. I got the paper...

MR: Uh-huh. So while you were in Hawaii you acted basically as coastal defense. You did some...

JB: Well, the roadblocks and all.

MR: Yeah, yeah. And you did some amphibious training?

JB: Yeah. We had to do our swimming. You had the full pack. They wouldn't bother with a rifle, they gave you an angle-iron. That weighed the same as the '03. Gave you an angle-iron you strapped on your shoulder. That's all in the scrapbook. Pictures. Yep.

MR: Why were you sent back to the States?

JB: They come out with a request for a cadre, and everyone, every non-com in the anti-tank company accepted. My gun, because I was the sergeant then, but my gunner become sergeant of the gun. My gunner did. I was just looking through the papers I gave to my daughter. I never thought of it, would've brought all that. But ah...

WC: But they sent everybody back? No one stayed behind, from that...

JB: No. No non-com stayed behind, no. Right from first sergeant right down to our cooks. And we all come back and we sat in Camp Cooke, CA. We sat there um, I don't know... maybe a month or two. Then finally they found a home for us. We went to the 10th Mountain Division. That's Camp Hale, Colorado. We spent about a month there and they said, "Well, you're gonna become infantrymen". But someone, I don't know who, and at the end of the month we got orders. All the .50 calibers and all the anti-tank companies were moving out. We didn't stay with the 10th long. We were transferred to the 80th Infantry, Camp Phillips, Kansas.

WC: What was the mood of the group?

JB: Oh, they was glad to get out of the, because you carry everything. I mean, it'd be a big difference. We'd been riding in the weapons carrier. We didn't do too much walking. Certain times they'd make us walk, but basically we always rode. We weren't ready to go to a rifle company.

MR: Now how long were you with the 10th Mountain?

JB: I'd say about a month. About a month. I think the 10th Mountain is out of New York State now.

MR and WC: Yes.

WC: Yes it is. Fort Drum.

JB: I was gonna say, Ft. Drum. Yeah.

MR: Now when you were assigned to the 80th, you were assigned as an anti-tank unit?

JB: We were replacements for the, course it hurt them. Hurt them bad. Because we were all non-coms. I mean we lost [cut off]

MR: Now did they still have the 37s or did they have the bigger...

JB: No, the 57s. We had the 57s then. Yeah. No, there was a lot of hard feelings because of, they're all sergeants coming in. People looking for promotions. We weren't in Camp Phillips very long. Because we brought 'em up to war-time status and we went to Arizona. Out in the desert. For maneuvers. We... was that '44? Unless it was late '43 that we went out there, '44 when we left, maybe. So we wound up in Ft. Dix in June or July of forty, no. Can't be, because we shipped out in '44. In July. We had to get in there around March. We had to be in Camp Phillips in '43, we went out to Arizona, we spent Christmas out there. We, and then when we were after maneuvers, in Arizona, then we came back. We came to Ft. Dix early in '44, March, had to be March '44.

MR: Now when you shipped out from Ft. Dix, from Ft. Dix to where?

JB: Well, we had to land in Scotland. We went over on the Queen Mary.

MR: Oh, okay. Boy, you got to travel on all the cruise ships, huh?

JB: Yeah, but it wasn't a cruise ship. In '44 it wasn't a cruise ship. I'm gonna try and see...

MR: How long were you in the British Isles?

JB: We missed D Day, because we didn't ship out of Ft. Dix until July 4th. Hey, that was yesterday. Yep. Queen Mary. We shipped out on the Fourth of July. We come into Scotland. That's the only place that the Queen Mary would land. We were right on a train and went to southern England. Can't even tell you what part of England we was. East of London, I know that. Not too far from Southampton. We weren't too far off of that.

WC: Then where did you go next?

JB: Well, the D Day had come already. They had to unload England before they could bring more troops in. Let's see... they went in June 6th.

MR: Yes.

WC: Yes. Right. '44.

JB: '44. I think we landed, they didn't break through yet. We got into the break through, I think we landed August 12th. My memory. August 12th we landed.

MR: You landed in Normandy?

JB: Yep.

MR: What was it like there at that time? The beaches must've been pretty clear [both men talking at once, transcriber unsure about the word "clear"]

JB: Lotta, lots of junk when we got off the ship. I mean uh, they hadn't broken out of St. Lo yet. We got involved into that. That was our first battle, really. We was in the battle of St. Lo. Then we broke out of that. Right after that was the [2-3 words garbled/sounds like Argentine Fularski]. That was when we got all the tanks. They were trying to move their tanks back, we got into that. Yeah. After that it was pretty quiet, all the way through, going up to Mosel. Then we went up to the Bulge. That's when the whole picture changed. Far as we concerned, I mean...

MR: In what way?

JB: Well, my biggest memory, there was no lines. Because I mean the second day we was there they ceased all the artillery. Sent out a smoke shell, because we was getting fire from our own guns. I mean to find out which one wasn't zeroed in right. Because there was no lines or nothing, they knew where nothing was. But it was rough. It was damn rough.

WC: Did you have winter gear and equipment?

JB: Oh yeah! I don't know about the equipment, I know it was darn cold. Snow.

WC: Did you have overshoes or boots?

JB: Yeah. We had overshoes. Overcoats. I know I had my overcoat.

MR: Did you carry a weapon at all?

JB: Sidearm. Plus a carbine. I mean issue was a sidearm. Yeah. I mean gun commander you had a pistol, they didn't anything else. No, I picked up a carbine real quick. In fact I think I had a carbine almost all the way through.

MR: Now was your unit ever credited with knocking out German tanks?

JB: Ah... not that I know of. I know we got the Presidential Citation, that's the 2nd Battalion of the 106th. We got the Presidential Citation for making the first contact with the 101st Airborne. We sent a patrol in during the night and made contact with them, and then the next morning they went in with the tanks, you know. I couldn't give you the dates. I mean they might be on my papers I've got at home. I know we got the Presidential Citation. Just the second battalion of the 106th got that.

MR: Now with your anti-tank unit, again, did you have any number at all? Any numerical designation at all? We you just...

JB: Well, I just, it's something I'm not too familiar with. I mean you can get it in your history. We left from France. We was down there in Metz, France when they called us for the Bulge. Somewheres in that area, the anti-tank company was done away with. They was dispersed. My company commander, he went to one of the line companies. I mean all the officers, most of them went to the line companies. And uh, I kept the gun. I don't know why. I went to the 2nd battalion. When they broke up the anti-tank company, our platoon, the 2nd platoon, was transferred to protect 2nd battalion. The way it worked the 1st platoon had the 1st battalion, 2nd platoon had the 2nd battalion and 3rd platoon had the 3rd battalion. But most of them went to a line company. How I saved the gun, I don't ask. I stayed with the gun. And we saw action.

MR: Now how big was your crew then? You had what? A carrier...

JB: I was, my address was the 2nd battalion. See? My address was changed and all. It wasn't the anti-tank anymore. We was part of the 2nd battalion.

MR: This is the 106th? Or...

JB: Yeah, the 106th. 2nd battalion, 106th. Yeah. I went through the Bulge, alright. I got mine in February, I got mine. They moved me out at night. Put me on the forward slope of the hill. Right outside of the, wasn't too far from the CP [command post] of the 2nd battalion. When daylight come and I found out where I was, it wasn't where I wanted to be. That's for sure. But I couldn't move without orders. I mean they put me there in the night. They sent a tank out. We was right on the road. 2nd battalion was maybe, oh, 5-600 yards to my left and there's the tank coming out... We could see the enemy. No artillery range. We could see the Germans dug in on the hillside. So when that tank got oh, within 200 feet of me, they put 'em out. Knocked 'em out. They turned on us, but we... I don't know. I always thought you saved your men. I know if they got that tank within 200 feet of me, we're next. I didn't know where it was coming from. I just said, "Hit the dirt!", and that's when we got it. I mean, no one was killed, but me and my gunner was wounded and I think there was four of us altogether was wounded.

WC: Where were you wounded?

JB: I got a shrapnel in my back. But we was in a hole. Foxhole. But I knew we was going to get it when that tank... That close got it, they had us zeroed in too. So when daylight come they had us zeroed in 'cause he's right on a, right forward. Right out in the open. I mean but the lieutenant put me there. No, I spent a month. I got a month back in Paris. Yeah.

But then by that time, things was pretty well over. We moved fast. We went into Austria. It was all over. I got some duty on troop trains, in Austria. Standing guard on the troop trains. But uh...

MR: Were you aware, at all, of the concentration camps?

JB: One. I didn't get into it, but we was outside of it. We saw, I saw 'em taking 'em out on hay wagons. You know what hay wagons is?

MR WC: Uh-huh.

JB: Just a skeleton. Bones.

WC: Was it Dachau? Was that the camp?

JB: Oh boy. I can show you the pictures. They'd be my 80s, you wouldn't have them. I got them yet. All my 80th pictures. I could send you pictures and information, but uh... I got pictures outside of the concentration camp. One place where there was nothing but a wall, where they dug into the mountain. That was one of them too. But I can't tell you dates. But I know the anti-tank of the 80th was reorganized. They was all pulled back and was made part of the company. Did I tell you 10th? Can't be the 106th. No, I'm sorry. That was the 318th Infantry. I'm sorry.

MR: That's okay.

JB: Yes, that was the 318th Infantry, but when it was dispersed, I have no idea. I mean, I look back on the letters I wrote home, and I see, "Yep. I was with the 2nd battalion". And because, when I went to my first reunion for the 80th they wanted to know more about that break up. But I knew very little. But when I got out of the hospital, I went back to 2nd battalion, and they gave me a .50 caliber machinegun. No weapons. I mean, no vehicle. They put together a crew. I was in charge of the crew, but uh, I lost a gunner on that. Well, I can't say I lost him. Because I got him back off of the gun we had, there was a big dugout there. And I got a hold of an aid man to take care of the gunner. He got the... incoming shells. He got... That was crossing, boy I don't know. One of the rivers. We was on the way, we was moving fast there, after the Bulge. I got papers and all, I guess, on to it. But that was all the 80th. That was not with the 27th.

No, I wound up in Austria. And after that we come back to Germany. The whole company was put back together. But I had time. So I only stayed... Once I went back to the company, I don't believe I was with them a week. Because I had points. I had enough points. And I come back with a tank destroyer outfit. That's even on my discharge, tank destroyer outfit. I

don't know how. It should've been from the 80th, but see I got transferred to the tank destroyer outfit because they was scheduled to come back.

I got back in the United States... September... We come into Boston. Didn't come into New York, New Jersey. Come into Boston about the 27th of September. 26th, 27th of September. They railroaded, by rail we went back to Ft. Dix and I got discharged the 28th, I think it was. The 28th of September. My wife was waiting.

MR: You were married then. When were you married? Before you went in the service?

JB: Yes, in '44. She came to Ft. Dix. She was with me then.

MR: You were married a long time.

JB: 62 years.

MR: Wow.

WC: How many children do you have?

JB: I've got two. My daughter's with me. My son lives in Florida now. He was in the Air Force. I've got a great grandson who's in the Navy. He's in the AWAC of the Navy. He's never been on a ship.

WC: That's nice.

JB: That's spy plane. And now he joined elite, like the Navy Seals? He's in an elite unit of the AWAC. In other words, he's all by himself. He used to go out for a month and come back for six months. When I left home, he was out. I mean he's on patrol, 10-12 hours. He was out three weeks, I talked to his wife just before I come up north, he said he's coming home. But he's gone. No, he's pretty safe, as far as that goes. But he's got 13 or 14 years in already. He's a career.

MR: Now, after you left the service, did you use the GI Bill at all?

JB: No.

MR: Didn't buy a home or anything?

JB: Went to work for myself. Worked for myself all of my life.

MR: Did you ever use the 52-20 club at all?

JB: Oh yeah.

MR: See you used, you didn't work all the time then.

JB: Well...

MR: How long did you use that?

JB: Whatever they give me.

MR: 52-20 club was \$20 a week for 52 weeks. So...

JB: See, I got out in September, so I went home in the winter.

MR: Yeah.

WC: What kind of business did you got into?

JB: Well, my dad had a private lake. We had 350 acres, 50 of it underwater. And he was waiting for me to come home before he'd do anything with it. So when I come home, yeah, I come home in '45. In '46 we formed a partnership and we developed the lake for campsites, and like that. Yeah. But we had other businesses. I had sanitation routes, ski hills, anything that worked. I worked for myself. I never worked for someone else till I retired. I retired and come to Sarasota, Florida, I worked for Scotty's for 10 years. I can't sit still. No. I still volunteer.

WC: Now, you're 89 years old now?

JB: 88.

MR WC: 88.

JB: 89 in October. I gotta wait.

MR: Now did you ever get to see any USO shows while you were in the service?

JB: Ah, in Camp Cooke we did. In Camp Cooke, rations and duties. In other words, we weren't too far from Hollywood. We'd take three day passes, come back and get three more days. But we had to go to the bulletin board. Watching for when we was gonna pull out. And we spent a lot of time, we saw a few shows there. Saw 'em over in Germany too. Saw some shows.

MR: Now, did you join any veterans' organizations at all?

JB: I belong to the American Legion and the VFW. Lifetime now, the VFW. I went lifetime.

MR: Did you ever stay in contact with anyone that was in service with you?

JB: You're talking the 27th Division?

MR: Anytime.

JB: Oh yeah.

MR: 106th or 27th.

JB: Yeah, we held the anti-tank, the 318th reunion right up till last year. We're down to now... I think it's four men.

MR: So you have gone to reunions too.

JB: Oh yeah. We talk, we talk. There's some men that don't care to come. I mean... But we started out, our first, the 318th, that's with the 80th now, not the 27th, of course I still belong to the 27th, I mean, uh, I haven't been to a re... I went to the two reunions they had in Ft. McClellan, that's in my scrapbook. The two reunions that they held, I think they held one

and then ten years later they had another one. I attended both of them. And they held one reunion in Orlando, I attended. I got the ribbons, or whatever you call 'em. That's all in the book.

MR: Okay.

JB: The wife didn't attend them though. She didn't come to the one in Orlando. I went myself, Orlando. But the one in Alabama, she attended both of them.

MR: How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect on your life?

JB: I think it was very good to me. I'm here. I'm here. I mean eh, especially those of the 27th Division, those that stayed... I don't know. There was some that come back to Catskill after the war. But most of them I know from Catskill come back from cadre. Now Nick went to the 80th, but he went to the 317th. He would have a lot of history, Nick would.

MR: Now where does he live, did you say?

WC: Catskill, I think.

JB: He lives in Catskill. I'm gonna try to see if he... I missed contact with him two years ago. I mean, for some reason we didn't send Christmas cards. But as far as I know, he should be alive, I don't know. But on the way back, I've got to go back to Norton [unsure] so I'll take the throughway and get off at Catskill. I'm gonna go in and see if I can find him.

MR: Okay. Alright. Well, thank you very much for the interview.

JB: Well I hope it helps somebody.

MR WC: Oh yes.

JB: Now, some way if you can contact Nick and let him know this is here.

MR: Okay.

JB: I mean, he can tell you who's alive yet.