

**Harold K. Bauer
Veteran**

**June Hunter
Ken Hunter
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on
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Interviewee's Home**

JH: Please tell us your full name and when and where you were born.

HB: My name is Harold Karl Bauer and I was born in Albany, New York, 10-23-24.

JH: And, what did you do before you went into the service?

HB: Oh, I was, working to get myself out of high school. I did graduate from Albany High, had part time jobs before I went into the service.

JH: Were you drafted, or did you enlist?

HB: I was drafted.

JH: When was that draft notice received and how did you feel about it?

HB: I think it came about June-July, right after I graduated from high school. And I just got it. That was it. I had to go. No, you know, never thought about it other than that.

KH: Where did you report for, indoctrination?

HB: Down to the armory¹ in Albany, down on Washington Ave.

KH: That's the one they now use for Basketball games?

HB: That's the one, yup.

KH: And then what happened when you were there?

HB: Uh, they kind of moved us around and told us about different things, about getting drafted. And you had a choice of the kind of service and I do remember though, that, most of my friends were going in or wanted to go in or were in the Navy. So I wanted to go in the Navy, they wanted me to go in the Armory. And I gave them a real sad story about friendships and all that stuff. Eventually they relented, and I went in the Navy. The one thing that I do remember was the fellow told me the only reason that they were gonna keep me out of the Navy was that I had an overbite! Now what that had to do with me staying out of the Navy I do know.

¹ Washington Avenue Armory Sports and Convention Arena in Albany, New York

JH: So you went into the Navy and it didn't cause you any trouble?

HB: Nope.

KH: When did they send you for basic training and how did you arrive there?

HB: I went by train to Sampson², Geneva, New York. And with a whole bunch of other friends from Christian Brothers Academy, Albany Academy, Albany High School, Skyler, and then some other folk from different other parts of the state.

KH: Did they give you the traditional shaving of your head?

HB: The first day I was, the old story, I was in line, got my shaved head and sat there as I got at least three vaccinations and about four shots. All I do remember was all these big guys around me falling flat on their face. [Laughter]

KH: What was barracks like?

HB: Barracks were barracks. I really don't remember, I mean I was there, that's long ago. It's long ago.

KH: Can you remember what kind of training they put you through in boot camp?

HB: We had the basics of marching, going to movies, about this, that, and everything, discipline. I do remember that my chief petty officer was Chief Petty Officer Banta. And being a good ol' Baptist from a family that never swore, in one hour I heard more swearing than I heard all my life. This man didn't know how to speak English, looking back now. But he was a great guy, we were very fortunate to have people like I said from Christian Brothers Academy, from Albany Academy, even Vincentian who had a military unit at that time. When he found that out, he divided us into small groups. We had our marching pretty good and in order within a week. Except for four fellows from Tennessee, who were the Gomer Pyles of the world; they ended up staying at Sampson because they could neither read nor write. I remember those four gentlemen really good, one kind of got to be a friend while we were there, nice people. It was just interesting the different people that you ran into. Swimming, I remember people panicking going up on the twenty-foot diving board and having to jump off with your life preserver and stuff like that. Other than that, that's all.

KH: Did they put you through training or how to use the pieces of your uniform as flotation gear?

HB: Oh, yes.

KH: What was that like? What did you use?

HB: Yes, you jumped off in your t-shirt. And the idea was to take your t-shirt off and tie a knot in the two—

² Sampson Air Force basic training base in Geneva, New York. Now closed.

KH: Sleeves.

HB: Sleeves then jump up to get air in it. And that made a floatation. I do remember that, my goodness.

JH: Did you know how to swim well before you went in?

HB: Yes.

JH: So, you had a little advantage over some of them?

HB: It was interesting to see what happened with some of these people who could not swim and still had to jump off even with a life preserver.

JH: What happened to some of them? Were they gasping for air, choking to death?

HB: Well, they just got scared and some had to get pushed off even with a life preserver.

KH: What kind of food did they serve you? Was there any special meal that you remember?

HB: Not really, what they put in front of me I ate. I've never been a fussy eater. As long as it was good, and I didn't have to eat certain vegetables I was fine. I didn't starve I assure you.

JH: Did they make you clean your plate no matter what, you had to eat everything on your plate?

HB: No, I don't remember that.

JH: Hmm, because many of the service men said they had to.

HB: Nope, I don't remember that.

KH: Did you have to do kitchen police duties?

HB: No, I did not. I worked on a truck, delivering stuff out of Sampson and going down to the railroad, picking up supplies. That was due mostly to the fact that we had our marching stuff in place weeks before the other units.

KH: Did you have a graduation ceremony there?

HB: Yeah.

KH: A formal parade?

HB: Yup, we had the parade on the grounds there.

KH: What about the opportunities to have liberty?

HB: None.

KH: None whatsoever. You were kept at the base the entire time.

HB: We were at the base. I was fortunate that I could get off the base because I was helping on the truck.

JH: How long were you at that base before you moved onward?

HB: I think basic training was six weeks maybe.

JH: Six to eight.

HB: That's, long ago.

KH: When you finished basic training, did they give you a short leave to be able to come home?

HB: Yes, I came home for probably a week. Then from there I had to report to Memphis, Tennessee at Aviation Ordinance School.

KH: What were those duties like at aviation ordinance school?

HB: Like any other thing, except this is was all ordinance stuff. I never handled any guns, it was a new world to me because I had all these machine guns and twenty milli-meters. I remember being able to take rifles apart blind-folded and put it back together. Stuff like that. I also remember my first trip of synchronizing guns through a propeller. At which point, I blew my first propeller apart. [All laugh] Because I didn't do the job to good. The second time around was okay.

JH: Did you find it difficult to learn this new type of learning with ammunition?

HB: No. No, I kind of enjoyed it. The only downside at Memphis, I came up with swollen glands about a week before I was supposed to leave. I remember I wrote home and my mother sent a spray from one of these old-fashioned things down. By the time it got time to move out, I was okay to move. I ended up from there up to Aviation Mineschool, Arial Mineschool at Yorktown, Virginia.

JH: Can you explain what that means?

HB: Well, there were mines. These were the ones they would drop into the harbors and we learned how to detonate them; we learned how to load them, mostly how to load and fuse them when putting them into the planes. That was our main job, to do that.

KH: Did they just drop them into the water?

HB: Yes. That's all. They go around and drop these mines into different harbors. How they worked I have no idea. And I never had to do it. It was part of an operation that I never got involved in.

KH: I would assume that as you had these new duties and new duty stations that you had opportunities to get off base and see what is was like in town and what the mood and the people was like.

HB: Not too much, all I remember was at the Ariel Mineschool, there were maybe thirty enlisted men and over one hundred officers. This was a highly technical thing. I sat in most classes next to this colonel. He did my work for me because I had no idea what they were talking about. I mean you literally had to be a college person to understand. But that wasn't the reason I was there. I was there to learn how to arm them, put them together, and drop them. I did get out for leave a couple of times and in fact I had a cousin in Washington, D.C. I went and visited him one time. That's the gentlemen, who later on I will tell you about, I met him when I was in the Pacific.

JH: How long were you in Memphis?

HB: I was in Memphis, I think three months and Ariel Mineschool for maybe a month. That was an excellent duty because of all the officers. We ate really well.

JH: You ate with them?

HB: Yes. We ate really well, they were very good.

KH: From there, where did they move you to?

HB: From there I went home for one week. Then headed by train to San Francisco. At which point, I stayed there for two days, flew to Hawaii, from Hawaii to Vajaro Island. Vajaro now was one of the islands that was not basically bombed you might say. And Vajaro now is a huge vacation spot for Japanese and Australians. It had a beautiful harbor. It's also where I saw Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Dennis Day. All the—

KH: USO shows.

HB: —USO shows.

JH: You got to see quite a few well-known people at the time.

HB: Oh, yes. Wonderful people, those people are a little different than where we're living today. I'm sure they're out there, you just don't hear about them.

KH: Now mail call, did you get a chance to receive lots of mail while you were there? Or was it always having to wait and having it catch up to you?

HB: It was a catch-up thing with mail. And most of my mail just came from my mom. Maybe a couple other relatives. Other than that, I didn't receive that much mail.

KH: Did you receive packages from home? And I imagine that everybody lined-up.

HB: Once in a while the cookies came through, you know, everybody line-up behind you.

JH: What were the favorite cookies?

HB: I don't know I can't remember.

JH: Chocolate chip, brownies?

HB: They were cookies, they were favorites.

JH: Tell us a little more about where you stationed now and what you did—

KH: After you left from Hawaii to Vajaro.

HB: Vajaro, I was there, and I can't help you at all time wise. But I was probably there from two or three months. We moved up the chain as each island was being taken. We moved up to, I can't remember which is first, either Kwajalein or Eniwetok. Eventually, I ended up on Guam. That's where I eventually was stationed until I was sent home.

JH: Now you must have had work to do at these places, it wasn't for vacation. Tell us about it.

HB: Oh, it's not too good up here. But my basic job was when the newer plans came in, they have this sealer stuff they had on the guns, they called it Perakitan. Looking back now, we used to just take these guns and dip them into a half barrel of one hundred octane gasoline and clean them up. Now today, I don't know how that'd go over cleaning in one hundred octane with your bare hands and whatever. I don't know maybe it brought me longer life for all I know. But it was putting the guns back in, getting them board sided, making sure they were working properly and making sure all the bomb releases were working properly. Every once in a while, when there was a carrier coming in, we would load the ammo and load the bombs. Although, most times when planes were going out into active duty, they flew out to the carriers with no ammo...and no bombs. The last thing you would want to have is a plane coming in with bombs on it and miss the arresting wire there. Then everybody would suffer. It was basically that type of work all the time. Like is say, it's been so long.

KH: You mentioned earlier when we were talking before we started the interview, your first introduction to driving and moving bombs.

HB: Yeah, that was interesting. We were on Vajaro servicing a bunch of planes who were going on a bombing mission and going from there to a carrier. We were loading up one hundred or two hundred pound bombs. I'm not quite sure what. My chief petty officer told me to get into the truck and drive them back down over the cross-way to the airstrip. I told him I didn't know how to drive. He says, "Do you know how to shift?" I said, "I have basics, but I wasn't quite sure." "Well," he says, "there's no time like the present." My first driving lesson was pulling about twenty live bombs, well they weren't live, that's not true. They were yet to have their detonators put in them. But here I was coming down, pulling all these bombs. I felt pretty proud of myself. That was my first driver's license or driver's...

JH: You had a smooth ride?

HB: Oh yes. No problems whatsoever.

JH: When you came back home, it a lot easier to get a regular driving license I assume.

HB: I went in one day to the motor vehicle which was then on Central Avenue [in Albany, New York], signed my thing, took the test the next day, and two days later I had my driver's license. The real fun thing was that after I got out of service I bounced from several different jobs. One of them happened to be working for motor vehicle. I looked up my license one day and of course it still had attached the report of my test. I guess you could lose ten points and I lost nine. I made three wrong left hand turns or stops. I never made a left hand turn all the time I was in the car. The guy was just putting something down and gave me my license. So anyway.

KH: Back to when you were in the service before resuming civilian life, did you have opportunities to hear how the progress of the war was going on? Did you have anything to read like the Stars and Stripes?

HB: We had some information but not a lot. To be very truthful, when I was on Guam, they were starting to fly in the B-29s. Afterwards, I found out that the, what was it...Norma Gay?

KH: The Enola Gay.

HB: Right, that dropped the atomic bombs. Both were at Guam and used that base there as practice. After they were ready, they moved them up to Sai Pan which was closer. That's were they went to do their bombings. Other than that, we really didn't realize how much bombing was going on...of Japan itself. Because we were that far back. If you look at your map, it's a pretty long distance between Guam, Japan, Sai Pan and some of those other islands out there. But we used to love to go down to the marine base because they fed everybody good. I had to go pick supplies up sometimes. Two things I do remember, one was where somebody made a terrible landing on Eniwetok and smashed into a bunch of planes. It was probably the closest I came to actual war because we had guns going off and bombs blowing up and everything else [since] they were ready to take off on a mission. Probably, the saddest thing is that one day we were on Guam and I was working on the airstrip, working on plans. And this army plane, Thunderbolt took off. The next thing you know, his engine stopped. He flopped right smack down. Fortunately, he was fine; the plane did not catch fire. But you know you got to bring a little uebert into these things. And the uebert was went right smack into the middle of our beer. We lost all our beer. Well, when you got only one ration, it was pretty dry for a number of weeks. Other than that, as I was telling you before, my work was always a little bit behind. I was very fortunate.

KH: When you moved from island to island what was the general description; what did it look like after having gone through all this battle activity, was there a lot of damage?

HB: The one thing that I noticed, like I said Vajaro, which was where I started, was basically untouched. It was a typical Pacific island, very nice palm trees in all, beautiful harbor. But once you got up to Eniwetok, there wasn't a tree left on Eniwetok nor on Kwajalein. Guam, although the fighting was heavy there, where I was based, the Orote Peninsula, was not that bad. The other end of the island. But that was very nice as things went on, it was very good. Of course, they were still looking for people. There were still some hold outs. If you remember the story about the gentlemen who lived in the cave for twenty years on that island. Before he came out of hiding, we one night had movies and the lights all went on with a whole bunch of marines came running in. Don't think the Japs didn't surrender because we had three of them sitting in the front row watching the movie. Which was really, really crazy—

JH: They were brave.

HB: Absolutely, they had had it. All these different things happen. I consider myself very fortunate. One thing, if I could digress just a minute, was the fact that when I was in the sixth grade, they decided that Harold needed a little more time for spelling and reading. So I stayed back. If I had not stayed back, I would have been in the war a year earlier. If you remember, that's the invasions over Europe and everything else so who knows, you know. This is what life's all about. Things happen, and you don't question them.

KH: Were there occasions when the Japanese would send aircraft to the islands where you were at to let them know they were still there?

HB: Only, I can't remember whether it was Kwajalein or Eniwetok, but we what they called in those days... Machine Charley or something. Anyway, they would send planes over, but they wouldn't do anything. But it was enough to get the sirens going and everything else. Probably always at a time in the night; it rubbed at your sleep a little bit.

KH: Were there occasions when your heard messages from Tokyo Rose³ trying to influence the troops to surrender?

HB: No, we never heard anything about that. I heard about who she was and stuff like that.

KH: For morale purposes, did they furnish you with movies to show you what was going on, were the movies a lot of patriotic movies, or strictly entertainment or was it a mix?

HB: I can remember them all, mostly it was entertainment. I do remember the old news things they used to have. I vaguely remember some of those being

³ Tokyo Rose – a Japanese radio propaganda station that tried to sap the morale of American GIs

shown about Europe and what was going on over there. Other than that, it was strictly a case of entertainment. There was always the USO people that came around.

KH: They had quite a few USO shows?

HB: Well, I could say I was fortunate. As I mentioned earlier, I had Hope, Jack Benny and who was the one? We had one that came when I was on Guam, Dennis Day and Jack Cooper. All guys and they put on one of the best shows that you'll ever watch. They were really a fun group of people. I can remember them, they used to eat with us and go around, shake hands, and stuff like that. Course the one nice thing was the war was winding down, everybody else might have gotten upset about the atomic bomb but it was a happy day because we realized, especially when the war ended, I was still on Guam when that happened. That was a happy day for everybody there.

KH: I assume that you received news that the war in Europe had ended? What was the general mood like then?

HB: Yeah. Well, the mood was that we were going to get more help over here. That was good side, the bad side was we kept hearing these terrible things about what we would have to go through; this whole business with the Japanese not wanting to surrender and all that. The atomic bombs were terrible, absolutely devastating but that's war. That's war.

JH: Did you have little celebrations when you heard about it or people almost not able to work because they were on cloud nine?

HB: I don't think so, I don't remember that much; probably had a beer or something.

KH: After you heard about the dropping of the bombs, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, what the general feeling like then, were people anticipating this war was going to be over soon?

HB: Oh yes. Definitely, everybody had a feeling and it wasn't too long after that that word came of the surrender. When that happened, that's where your service time became very important. The more combat you had seen, which is the way it should've been, gave you more points. If your over there and you went through two or three battles, through Iwo and Sai Pan, those fellows were the first ones that got brought back. I got back too, eventually. I came back in Seattle, went in to Puget Sound [Washington State harbor] in the middle of a big storm. I was wrong, I did have another time on the ship, we flew into Hawaii and we got bounced. They put us on an AKG to send us back to Seattle where we stayed at the University of Washington; that was a big receiving center then. Anyway, all I can remember was going up on deck and seeing this darn ship almost tip over and I went back down stairs. I've heard stories about the bad weather, that was bad weather. I got back to Seattle and you had two choices: you could wait an

extra week or so to go home and you could go home by pullman⁴. Or go home right away, they used to have these cars where they could pack in thirty guys to go home cross country. I opted for the pullman. I don't think my mother liked it because all my other friends decided to go home early, but I got home for Christmas. As another humorous side to the end of my duties to the United States Navy, I was stationed down in Brooklyn waiting to get my release. It happened to be on a holiday, I was home for Christmas as mentioned earlier. I had a lady friend up here in Albany and I wanted to go...out with her. We had fire watch down in Brooklyn, you put a pillow underneath your arm and walked to one of these high rises to be on fire watch. Except, I just walked right straight down to the subway, went home, had a wonderful time, came back, and no problem. About a week later, everybody was looking on the bulletin board, "oh yeah my name's here", a lot of them I knew from Albany. There were going to Brooklyn, Floyd Bennett, Boston, Rhode Island, Quonset Point. I couldn't find my name. This chief came over to me, he said, "Your Bauer." I said, "That's me." He said, "What's the matter can't find your thing?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, look over there." I went over and looked at this other board and there it was: "Harold Bauer, Aviation Ordnanceman, Third Class: (unclear) California." I got sent back to California. He said, "I saw that you like to travel Harold." [All laughing] Well, I got to see the country more. I went out by pullman; came back by pullman. While I was out there, I helped run the theater and the snooker room. [All laughing] Which is a form of the billiards or something like that. There were good times also when I was out there. I was probably that close to resigning. I kind of liked the Navy. I was in San Diego one day, one Sunday I believe, when next thing I know I'm in a bus being shuttled off to the hoosegow⁵. I had a court martial and a captain's mast⁶ for having my hat on the top of my head improperly. It was at that point where I told the fellow, "You know those papers that I filled out," I needed to sign them, I said, "Rip them up." And so ended my life in the United States Navy. Although, I did stay in the reserve for a few years when I got back. That's, you know. I'm sure there are more exciting stories out there.

JH: You came back to Albany.

HB: I came back to Albany, met my good wife. This past Friday was sixty years. I went several jobs. I was on-the-job training at John B. Huff, a big furniture store in those days. In fact, John and I sang together in the Mendelssohn Club⁷, of which I am still a member. I worked for (unclear) uncle; went over to (unclear) where my father-in-law got me a job. That all fell apart with the kind of (unclear) and whatever. I ended up as a substitute at the Rensselaer [NY] post office and retired in '88 after 40 years of service.

⁴ The Pullman Car Company – a large rail road manufacturing company that many trains used

⁵ A slang word for prison.

⁶ A Navy term for Non-Judicial Punishment (NJP)

⁷ A nation-wide club of singing men choruses that have different branches in each state.

JH: Now, you said you had been a member, are you a member of the American Legion⁸?

HB: Yes, I have been a member of the American Legion, Blanchard post out in Delmar [NY], for twenty years maybe now.

KH: Have you been able to par-take of any reunions?

HB: No. You know, I had this group, couple of guys that I walk with. They are, not so much anymore, very involved in the Sampson. Course they had their own organization, they used to have these reunions. In fact, I understand that's going to close. There just closing up that whole thing up there...the one building will be a memorial or a historical. Basically, that whole thing is changing. If I remember correctly.

KH: How were you treated when you came back after being released from the service?

HB: Fine. Fine, I had no problems at all. Like I say, looking at all my friends, we talked very little about what went on. Some of them went through hell next to what I did, but to this day even...my son-in-law, one of my daughters over in Connecticut, his father went to the Battle of the Bulge. We talked, he's got the purple heart and all that stuff. We talked maybe, in our association since the kids have been married, over what, thirty years now, if we talked ten minutes about it, we were lucky. And that's the difference on it now, they don't let you forget. They like to bring up all the nasties and that what they think are nasties.

⁸ The American Legion is an organization comprised of US war veterans that meets annually in Indianapolis, Indiana.