

**William Hart
Veteran**

**Kyle Pratt
Interviewer**

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Hudson Falls, New York**

Q: What is your date of birth?

WH: May 10, 1923.

Q: You said you were born in Brooklyn? What was it like growing up there?

WH: Yes. I have relatively little memory of it, simply because I was ten when I left. But I do remember roller skating there. I could roller skate on the streets in Brooklyn at that time. The streets were very easy to roller skate on.

Q: Now during that time, the Great Depression was going on. How was that to cope with?

WH: Well, the Depressions was just starting to hit when we moved from Brooklyn up to Ulster County, to the town of Ellenville, and we moved there because living was less expensive.

Q: What did your family consist of? Did you have any brothers or sisters?

WH: I had two brothers and a sister. They are younger than I am.

Q: You said you went to Ellenville High School. Where did you go to college?

WH: MIT.

Q: What was your major?

WH: Chemical Engineering.

Q: When did you start thinking about military and the service?

WH: We had no choice. As soon as you went to the school, the first semester, you were indoctrinated into ROTC, Reserved Officer Training Corps, which was a program for my school. Everyone had to take it the first two years. Now I happened to be in that program when Pearl Harbor occurred. Actually, I was visiting some friends in Leominster, Massachusetts, and we just got back from church and the news hit on the radio. The rest of the day we had nothing else to think about. We knew there was going to be war.

Q: Did that set you up to go to war?

WH: No, I didn't have to, because in a sense I was not called up in the draft because I was going to an Engineering school, and also I was taking ROTC. But then in the second year of school, the officers who were running the ROTC persuaded the bulk of the class, probably 80% of us, to join the Army as Enlisted Reserve. We sort of blithely assumed that we would finish school. Well that didn't happen. By the end of the second year, the whole group of people were called up to the Army and we were sent to basic training.

Q: And what branch did you serve in?

WH: Well I started out as just a recruit going to basic training, which everybody gets when they go in the Army. As an interesting sidelight, after this happened and we knew we were going, I thought I might join the Marines. I still hadn't really gotten my orders to go up to the Army yet, so I went to a Marine recruiting station and had a chance to talk with people and it sounded good. They asked me to take a physical. Well I learned that I had four teeth missing and I was not eligible to be an officer. So I had to cancel that, and I went on to basic training at Camp Hood in Texas.

Q: How was this experience for you at the training camp?

WH: Awful. We had just gone through a Northern winter, and Texas in the summertime is hot. We were in a battalion of about a thousand men, and out of the thousand, there were probably twenty that had heat exhaustion. I spent seven days in the hospital because of it. Temperatures would get up to 105 or over.

Q: What were you trained to do? What was your position?

WH: Basic training is just the basics of infantry work, that's all. At the end, I found that I had the option of going elsewhere. Most of these people, I would have to say probably 99% of them, went into a program that the Army had for people with a little more education than the average. They were training for various technical types of work within the Army. There were three of us that went elsewhere. One fellow actually volunteered to go to West Point, and you knew right away you had a long road ahead of you if you went to West Point. No one was really interested in that. But two of us volunteered for the Air Force. I wanted to be a navigator, and I was accepted. So after basic, where the rest of the guys all went off to the Army Specialized Training Program, I went to a camp and would sit there for a couple of months until the program that they put me into got started. It was a schooling called pre-pre-flight. This would be in the latter part of '43, which is when I went in.

Q: How did you feel about Hitler's rising power at that time? Did you not really know about it?

WH: Everybody knew about it. We knew by then, of course. The war was on two years. He had the power. Everyone was interested in somehow finishing him off, but it was a long road from that particular time.

Q: How did you feel about Germans in general?

WH: I really had no personal animosity, but a little later I'll tell you a little more of the story. I went to this pre-pre-flight, which was conducted at Butler University in Indianapolis. Basically it was schooling to catch up some people who didn't have enough education. Part of it actually included ten hours of flight instruction, and I had ten hours of dual flight instruction in a Piper Cub. I actually have pictures I can show you. Would you like to see some of them, or later?

Q: Probably later.

WH: And then lo and behold, at the end of pre-pre-flight, which was currently in '44, the powers that be decided that there were enough recruits coming in to the Air Force and that they needed more people in the Army. So they cut out all the people like myself and sent us back to the infantry. I was sent back to a brand new division that was just being formed. They had some officers, but mostly it was people right off the street, largely people who had been drafted. I went into there, this was in the spring of '44, and for the next eight nine months, we trained as infantry people. Livingston, Louisiana was where we were sent first, and then we were sent to California for amphibious training. This would be then late in '44, and we had a well-groomed infantry division. I was in what was known as E Company of a battalion. E Company had the light weapons, including machine guns and mortars. I was on the mortar squad. Still nothing more than a PFC; there was just no chance for advancement. So I accepted that--I had no other choice. Toward the end of the year, do you recall the Battle of the Bulge? You've heard of it? When the Battle of the Bulge occurred, the powers that be decided that they needed an extra division in Europe. Our division, which was out in California training for this amphibious invasion, was picked up and in one month's time were on board ship in January of '45 headed for France.

Q: Now where were you stationed over in France?

WH: Well, we landed at Le Havre and were sort of put in to an area as a group not too far from the city, until they could provide transportation, and then we were transported into Germany. By that time, the forces had been pushed back to the Rhine River. We were actually carried up by the old-fashioned so-called "forty and eight", little freight cars that could either fit forty men or eight horses. We got

in to the beginning of Germany and were brought to Cologne, to sort of be organized. We took the place of the 82nd Division who were at the river's edge, ready to cross, and we waited there. That was actually April 1st of '45, which also happened to be Easter that year. Coincidentally, that was when the invasion of Okinawa occurred. We didn't learn until later that our Division had been geared for Okinawa. We were very, very lucky. It was just a matter of chance. From that point on, once the crossing of the Rhine had been made, we moved into the main part of Germany and our Division was used to mop up a group of Germans that held out on just the other side of the river from Cologne. Sort of like a pincer formation, we came up one side and somebody else came down the other, but by that time the resistance within Germany was really almost negligible. From there we marched across Germany by foot and reached the Austrian border by the end of May.

Q: Now while we are talking about France, let's go back a little bit.

WH: I saw very little of France. Just a little bit near Le Havre. We didn't get passes back then, so we were just waiting there to be told what to do. Until they put us aboard these little trains we just had nothing to do.

Q: What was the notification of D-Day like? Hearing about it, what was the experience?

WH: I think the people in this country, even the service people who were on leave on D-Day, they had the delight that occurred, because people saw them. We were where one is expected to be within an Army organization. It was just a relief to know that the war was over and there wouldn't be any more fighting, at least in Europe.

Q: Now how did you feel about FDR?

WH: I am not too politically oriented, so I can't say that I ever was especially fond of him or against him. Not one way or the other.

Q: Do you remember anything when the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan?

WH: Well, you're moving ahead. After we reached the Austrian border, we were shuttled back to the city of Karlsruhe and we were just billeted there. They tried to keep us busy. I remember one nice thing that happened. Our company had a drilling contest, you know, just to keep us busy, and our squad won it. And we got the privilege of going to the city of Baden-Baden, which was one of the few places in Germany that was not touched by the war. There was no reason to bomb it. It was a city that was just exactly what you would expect from what you read about the country. It was interesting. That was in what they call the French Zone. Germany was broken up into the Russian Zone, the French Zone, the British

Zone, and the American Zone. That happened to be in the French Zone. Of course, there was animosity between the French and Germans. I guess the Germans didn't enjoy being under the thumb, as it were, of the French garrisons. I had interesting conversations with adults on that score. They wanted to know when the Americans were coming for real. On the other hand, young people, people your age or a little older, they didn't want to have anything to do with the soldiers, nothing at all. They still had animosity. But that was not unsurprising because they were educated to it.

Going on though, we got moved back to the States. We had a very nice furlough, but the war in the Pacific was still on, and our Division was primed for going to the Pacific to fight. The whole division was restaffed, reorganized, and we were put on boats and we were actually sailing out of San Francisco harbor on V-Jay day. So in terms of the atomic bomb being dropped, I don't think we knew much about it until well after the fact. If you read about it today, there is a lot more known. The government didn't put out too much information in the beginning. It wasn't really until after the war was over that you learned much about it.

Q: Did you see any combat going into the Pacific?

WH: No. The war was over literally when we were sailing away from the Country. The only engagement that I saw was that short period in Germany. Really, there was only one battle our Division was involved in. There couldn't have been more than a couple of casualties and no deaths. So really, a very, very lucky group of people.

Q: After you said you were sailing out when it was ending, what happened at that point?

WH: We were brought over to the Philippines, and we were put on sort of guard duty. There was a pipeline that ran from the main Air Force base called Clark Field, it was about 50 kilometers north of Manila, and there was a pipeline that carried gasoline from Manila Harbor up to the Air Force base. Our duty was to guard the pipeline. There was hostility amongst some of the natives, and there were people knowing there was gasoline there who wanted to tap it and steal it. So we were on guard duty, that's all.

Q: Did the atomic bomb happen before you went over?

WH: Yes. It was in August, I believe.

Q: After you knew what happened, how did you feel?

WH: Well we knew that that was enough to stop the war, and from our point of view we were happy. We can't say a yes or no about the Japanese because when

you stop and think about it, how the Japanese fought and died on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, you didn't really want to meet them.

Q: A lot different than what the Germans had, right?

WH: I would think so, yes.

Q: After you were on guard in the Philippines, were you sent back to the U.S.?

WH: Then I was almost ready for . . . they had a point system and because I had been in a little bit longer than most of the rest of the people I was with, I was able to leave in March of '46. They probably didn't leave until about July.

Q: Were you eligible for the GI Bill when you came home?

WH: Yes, right after.

Q: What was that like?

WH: It was very, very fortunate. It certainly made it easy on my family because I could support myself in going to school.

Q: You finished your schooling when you came home?

WH: Yes, I had two more years. I finished them up and then went out into the big world.

Q: What was like after transferring back into civilian life after being in the war so long?

WH: I learned I had to work to earn money. [Laughter] As a matter of fact, I got a job on a golf course for the time period. I got back in March of '46 and couldn't go to school until September, so I had to find something to fill up my wallet and to put a little something aside for school too. I worked on a golf course.

Q: How has it been in the continuing years since the war? Has it been good?

WH: Well I think the fact that I went to MIT made it a little easier to find employment, and to be respected. I feel that I've had a good life. I went to a company, you've heard of Imperial Hercules Ciba Geigy? A wonderful place to work, and Glens Falls is a wonderful place to bring a family up. We had six children. They all were born here, they all went to Glens Falls High. Unfortunately, none of them live here now.

Q: Is there anything you want some students to remember about World War II? Something very important to you?

WH: Not specifically World War II. Any kind of war--try to solve it without war. War is not the way to solve problems. I am not in favor of war.

Q: Do you say that because you were involved in it?

WH: I think so, yes.

Q: Well thank you for your time. I really appreciate you interviewing with me. We have something for you.

(Hands envelope to WH and he opens)

WH: (Shares picture) Now I told you about the pre-pre-flight. There's me standing alongside a Piper Cub that I had ten hours of flight instruction in. I have no pictures from the basic.

(Shares picture) This is what I ended up with. I was in the Air Force for a short period of time, then I was bounced back to the Infantry and this is what I looked like during training for the Infantry. That, of course, carried me through a period in Louisiana, and then out to California, and then we got bounced back to the East Coast and put on boats. We were very fortunate. By that time there were virtually no German submarines. For the most part that trip across the Atlantic was a cold trip as it was in the wintertime. There was concern as we heard many stories about ships being torpedoed. There were no lights on the ships during the nighttime.

(Shares picture) And I told you about going to Baden-Baden on a sightseeing tour. Here is me with one of my fellow soldiers at one of the statues in the city there.

(Hands picture to interviewer) And here actually is the group that represented. . . you open it up. I have their names and numbers on the picture itself of all the members of my platoon. You can see that they were from all over the country.

Q: Did you have any of your friends at all with you?

WH: No, remember I went into the Air Force and then got bounced back. It was certainly a random process. Those were all really young people, almost a year or so younger than I. I made friends, but it was really not lasting. We weren't together that long. But open it up and you'll see what a platoon looks like, actually a company. That's what a company looks like. You see numbers on them. That was my individual platoon. I've never seen any of those fellows since simply because none of them lived close by to where I was, and I since I came back earlier than most of them, there was not much reason to follow-up.

(Shares picture) Here's one other little picture. Not a very good one, you can just barely tell it's me. That was taken in the Philippines. I am not very photogenic so that's why we don't have very many pictures. [Laughter]

So you see I was lucky. But I had no control over it. It was pure chance what happened.

Q: Thank you very much for doing this interview.

WH: I hope that you make the most of it. Now I brought with me a book here. Take a look at it. You can borrow it if you want. Its pictures taken during World War II. If you need any background information, it's full of it.

(Shake hands)