

**Herbert Bambury, Jr.**  
**Narrator**

**Brian Beagle**  
**Phil Boardman**  
**Rome Free Academy**  
**Interviewers**

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**Rome Free Academy High School**  
**Rome, New York**

Herbert Bambury, Jr. **HB**  
Brian Beagle **BB**  
Phil Boardman **PB**

**PB:** You entered the Army in February 1943. Did you enlist?

**HB:** Yes.

**PB:** It says here that you had a tenth grade education at the time you entered the service?

**HB:** Yes, second year of high school.

**PB:** Does this mean you quit school to join the military?

**HB:** Well, yes. You either joined or you were going to go anyway, in those days.

**PB:** So you were of legal age to get in?

**HB:** Yes, eighteen.

**PB:** What did you train for in the Army, and where?

**HB:** Well, I was trained in Camp Gordon first, down in Georgia. And then when they cross-trained us, they sent us over to Daniel Field, that was the Air Force, they sent us over there for training. And then from there we went right to New York, got on a ship and left.

**PB:** What did they train you for in the Air Force?

**HB:** Mostly...what would you call it?...look over maps and stuff like that.

**PB:** Was your training easy?

**HB:** It wasn't too bad, no. The Army part was rough, at Camp Gordon. But the Air Force, that wasn't bad at all.

**PB:** Where you did arrive?

**HB:** When we left New York?

**PB:** Yes.

**HB:** Scotland. We had to take a zigzag route on account of the submarines. The German submarines were always on the lookout for ships.

**PB:** It says you were a rifleman. Does that mean you were a regular infantryman, or was that more of a specialty?

**HB:** Yes, that's right. That's what I trained at Camp Gordon for.

**PB:** When you landed, what was it like?

**HB:** It was a lot like this country, a lot like the seaports here [unclear].

**PB:** I mean, at Omaha?

**HB:** That's Omaha Beach, Cherbourg, France. That's where we landed. Oh, you wanted to know that? I thought you meant all the way down through... Right there? Well, they let you off there in the waterway, and you had to go in. Of course, it was still very active around there. They were all up on the high cliffs, and you had to scale the cliffs and get up there, which we did after a while. But of course, when you were doing that you were sitting ducks, so to speak. They could shoot and shoot at you, and shoot at you. You were lucky if you didn't get hit. Once you got up there, we kept on going. There was still a lot of fighting going on, it was very hot.

There were a lot of hedgerows, and they told us don't go in the hedgerows because that's where they put the landmines, and they figured if you go in there, you know.....So we had to stay away from them. You had to take cover where you could when things really got hot.

**PB:** Did you, yourself, ever get shot at, after you landed?

**HB:** Oh, yeah, we got shot at a lot.

**PB:** Were you ever wounded during combat?

**HB:** Yes, shrapnel.

**BB:** How did that happen?

**HB:** A shell burst.

**PB:** Where did you get hurt?

**HB:** In this arm here (points to right arm); well, I got a scar there, though there isn't much anymore—it was big as a nickel before.

**PB:** Did you get a Purple Heart for that?

**HB:** No. It wasn't serious enough. All they did is clean it up a little bit, put a bandage on it, and you were back out.

**PB:** Once you got into France, what was your mission?

**HB:** Just keep going, fight on and keep going.

**PB:** Do you have any stories of fighting that happened while you were moving on?

**HB:** Well, a lot of different things happened....Hm...The worst was when we were in Bastogne. We took shelter in a house and things were getting hot so we went down in the cellar. And that's when—it was an old stone house--they hit up above, and that fell down to the floor. And that's where we stayed, down there, probably around seven to nine days we stayed down there. We couldn't move because the Germans were all around outside. If

we moved, then naturally they would lob in hand grenades where they could, or shell it. And so finally we got out, the British got us out when the British came in. I said, "I never thought I'd be glad to see a limey! You guys look good!" They called them limeys. They were good fighters. Then we just went on.

**PB:** What did you do in Luxembourg?

**HB:** Oh, we just went through there.

**PB:** Did you encounter anything in Holland?

**HB:** Same thing, we just went through. Not much at all in Holland.

**PB:** Did you ever come across concentration camps?

**HB:** Yes.

**PB:** What was it like?

**HB:** They were terrible, in the way they treated the prisoners. What they did to those people was unbelievable. You had to see it to believe it; it really sticks in your mind. You can't help but remember it. You can visualize what the people looked like, and how there were so many dead around. It was terrible.

**PB:** Did you serve under General Patton in North Africa?

**HB:** I was attached to his outfit. I didn't serve directly under him. He was over everybody there.

**PB:** What did you do in Germany?

**HB:** Same thing, just kept fighting. Till we got to.... well we were outside of Berlin, but they wouldn't let us go in because the Russians had to go in first. They'd made a deal back here in the United States, in Washington. I remember Patton was madder than heck over that deal. We stayed outside three days, we couldn't go in. The Russians had to go in first, so we couldn't do anything.

**PB:** What was life like during that time?

**HB:** There wasn't any more fighting at that time, so we were just taking it easy, hanging around, which wasn't good because you were always outdoors or in tents.

**PB:** Did you receive any medals or decorations for your service to your country?

**HB:** Yes, they are there on that page (reaches for paper), in fact better yet.... there it is right there (points to paper), and that's what they were for.

**PB:** Was there ever a time when you thought you might get captured by the Axis powers?

**HB:** Quite a few times. Once, outside of Stuttgart, Germany, I thought for sure we were going to get captured that time, but we didn't.

**PB:** What happened?

**HB:** Our tanks started shelling and shelling and the Germans took off.

**PB:** What did you do during the Battle of the Bulge?

**HB:** Fighting, just fighting all the time.

**PB:** Are there any particular events that happened while you were fighting?

**HB:** No, not really. We just had to get moving and keep going.

**PB:** What was it like to see so many different cultures during the war...France, and Belgium.....

**HB:** Gee...I don't know... how you would put it....

**PB:** Were the civilians of the countries glad to see you?

**HB:** Oh yes. They'd had an awful time. The stress must have been tremendous on them.

**PB:** Right after the war, did you stay on and do something in Europe, or did you go home?

**HB:** We stayed about six months. The war was over. I didn't leave for home until December. We left from Le Havre in December.

**PB:** What did you do after the war was over?

**HB:** I took a couple months off, then went back to work at manufacturing.

**PB:** It says you were an MP for a while. What was your job during that time?

**HB:** Mostly directing traffic, and sometimes transporting prisoners. But mostly directing traffic and laying out the routes ahead, putting up signs, and like that.

**PB:** As you were going through France, can you remember any particular battles or fights that you want to describe, that seemed important to you?

**HB:** Outside of Peronne, France, we had a bad time. We got pinned down, but then the artillery and the tanks got us out of there. That was tough, there. That was one I remember that was bad.

**PB:** Did you lose any friends during that time?

**HB:** Oh yes, quite a few. Quite a few. It's bad enough with anybody, but with guys you went in with together, and trained together, to see them get injured or killed in front of you, that makes it bad. But they told you, you can't think, you have to keep going. You can't think about that stuff.

**PB:** Was it easy to adjust from that, after the war?

**HB:** Well at Fort Dix, New Jersey, they briefed you, they'd say, like, "Would you kill again?" And I'd say "Well no, only in self-defense you wouldn't kill again". And "If a German family moved in next to you, you would have no animosity or anything toward them?" "No, not really. It wasn't their fault. They didn't want the war any more than anyone else, any

more than we did.” That’s all they did, just make sure we were all right in the head to go back out in the world.

**PB:** After the war, what did you do?

**HB:** I went back to work at the Rome Manufacturing Company. I joined the Air Force Reserves for three years, but only had to go once a month.

**PB:** You didn’t get called up in the Reserves?

**HB:** No. I got discharged in 1948 from the Air Force Reserves. If I had stayed, I probably would have got called up for the Korean War. But at that time I had married and had three children, so I thought it was time to get out.

**PB:** How many years did you work at Rome Manufacturing?

**HB:** Forty-four years.

**PB:** And then you started driving a bus?

**HB:** I’ve been driving a bus for thirteen years now, for the [unclear].

**PB:** Can you think of any other battles that you found interesting, that you would be able to describe to us?

**HB:** Well, things got bad there--I can’t think just what year it was—they took a bunch of us, some here and there, they took half of my outfit (and I was in that half) to North Africa, for three months. They thought that was winding down, but they were still having a lot of trouble. So they took probably two or three thousand extra men over there, all together, throughout Europe. And that was tough there. Of course, it was always so hot, and the dust and sandstorms would come up just like snowstorms, and you couldn’t see.

**PB:** Was Rommel still there at that point?

**HB:** Yes that’s why we went there. He was a very smart general. Montgomery got us out of that, the British general, and turned the tide there. Then we went back to our own outfits.

**PB:** After you got back to your own outfit, did you get right back into combat, or was there a time you could rest?

**HB:** Oh yes, we went right back into it.

**PB:** And that's when you landed on Normandy?

**HB:** No, that was before, Omaha Beach, I didn't land in Normandy, Omaha Beach I landed, near Cherbourg.

**PB:** Are there any other fights you can think of?

**HB:** Major ones.....?

**PB:** It doesn't have to be a major one.

**HB:** Well, there's Stuttgart, we ran into a lot of trouble there.

**PB:** What happened?

**HB:** They were very well fortified around there, and it was tough getting through. But our tanks and big guns got in so we could get through there. See, the way the pillboxes were, they were rounded, and even the big shells—unless they had a good hit—would just ricochet off, believe it or not, but they did. They must have used awful good concrete. Of course that's where all the trouble was. The only way you could get them was you had to knock them out, or you had to get up there and put a hand grenade in there, but your chances of doing that weren't too good most of the time.

**PB:** Did you ever have to help destroy a pillbox yourself?

**HB:** No, the tanks and the big guns did that. If you couldn't get right up there and throw one in the opening, it was no good. A lot of guys got shot, and killed, trying to get up there; they'd pick them off.

**PB:** Are there any other experiences you can think of while you were in the war? It doesn't have to be a battle, it could be anything that you think was interesting.

**HB:** Well, after we left Le Havre, we were out three days, and something happened to the rudder and it took them two or three days [unclear], and we just drifted. Other ships, two or three ships, came around, in case we had to abandon ship. Until we knew what happened, the ship couldn't do anything, couldn't steer. But then they got it fixed, and we continued on home. We got home three days late.

**PB:** Any other experiences that you can think of?

**HB:** No, not offhand, I can't think of anything right now.

**BB:** Going back to those prisoners you were transporting, what nationality were they?

**HB:** They were German soldiers. We'd take them to the stockades.

**BB:** How many truckloads, would you say?

**HB:** [Unclear] truckloads, sometimes they went by train, by rail, in what they called a forty-and-eight, in the boxcars. Of course, we traveled that way, too, ourselves, a lot of times.

**BB:** Were they under constant supervision?

**HB:** Oh yeah, to the prisons.

**BB:** Anybody ever get out?

**HB:** Not that I know of, but I imagine some did.

**BB:** Did you have watchdogs?

**HB:** No, we didn't have them where I was. Nighttime was the worst, of course, that's when they would try to break out.

**BB:** About how long did it take to transfer the prisoners all the way?

**HB:** It depends on where you were going. Sometimes it might take a day, sometimes three days.

**BB:** When you were at Omaha, when you landed, were there still bodies on the beach that hadn't been recovered yet?

**HB:** Oh it was terrible. They were all over, floating in the water, on the beach, up on the cliffs.

**BB:** Was the ocean colored red?

**HB:** Well, when you were first getting off, a lot had got wounded and fell in the water, in the shallows.

**BB:** How long did it take for you to scale the beachhead and push on into France?

**HB:** Well, we landed there about nine in the morning, and we didn't get up to the top until about one or two o'clock because there was so much heavy firing, and we couldn't move, we had to stay put. But when we got on top, then we moved. It wasn't that bad, once you got on top.

**BB:** How did you get around the German pillboxes and machine guns?

**HB:** Well you had to knock them out first.

**BB:** How did you do that, with artillery?

**HB:** The tanks and artillery knocked them out first. You weren't just going to just walk by!

**PB:** Did you have any experiences with the French, as you were moving through France?

**HB:** They were very nice people, glad to see you. They would bring out bread, they would give us fresh bread sometimes. And they always had a bottle of wine to hand out. In all the countries I went through, about seven or eight of them, all the people were friendly.

**PB:** How did the German people react to you?

**HB:** Oh, they were all right. I never had any difficulty with them. Of course, you weren't that close to them anyway.

**BB:** I'm just curious, what rifle were you trained with, was it the M1?

**HB:** The M1. Later on we had some carbines, but they were [unclear], they were no good to really shoot with.

**PB:** Did you ever get your hands on a German weapon?

**HB:** Yes. I sent home one German gun, that was [unclear] '44.

**PB:** How did that compare to your weapon?

**HB:** Theirs were very good. The Luger was a nice gun, but their P38 was a good gun, too. They were smooth. We had the .45s, and when you shot them, they could take your hand off. But those were smooth. Our .45s were like Thompson submachine guns, they were rough, you really had to hold them or you'd be shooting in the sky. They had a lot of power. Their guns were smoother, they didn't have all that kick.

**PB:** Which did you prefer, the higher caliber or the smoother firing?

**HB:** Oh yeah.

**BB:** In France, did you go directly through Paris, or did you go through any other major cities?

**HB:** We went through a lot of cities, St. Lo, and up where the grapes are, St. Quentin, up that way. Great wine country up around there.

**PB:** What condition were the cities in?

**HB:** Some of them were really bad, some of them there wasn't much left at all. Where they had major battles, like St. Lo, that was just about flattened. A lot of the other ones were hit hard, with a lot of damage in the cities themselves.

**PB:** Did you encounter Germans in those cities?

**HB:** Oh yes, some of them.

**PB:** Do you remember what happened?

**HB:** Not much specific at that time.

**BB:** Where did you find shelter in France? Did you stay in abandoned churches, or did you pitch tents?

**HB:** You always had a tent with you. If you were going to stay around for a few days and there was a lull in the fighting, they'd put up big tents for eight or ten. But we didn't have much shelter. In the winter you'd try to find a house to stay in, but of course a lot of them were all shot; there wasn't much left of a lot of them, either.

**BB:** You were involved at the Battle of the Bulge, right?

**HB:** Yes.

**BB:** What happened there?

**HB:** The Germans wanted to break through, and they brought everybody that they could get up there. The English, French, and Americans all put up a fierce fight there, and that stopped them.

**BB:** Could you tell when the war was slowing down, when Nazi Germany was slowing its pace throughout Europe, and started to lose?

**HB:** Well it seemed to be. There was a slower pace of life over there.

**BB:** Did you ever encounter Soviet allies?

**HB:** Yes, we'd see them. They were all right. They seemed like regular guys.

**PB:** Is there anything that happened after the war, that you find interesting at all?

**HB:** I was just glad to get back to work, after being through all that.

**PB:** How about while you were still in Germany, after the Germans had surrendered?

**HB:** No, we were just on occupational duty. That wasn't bad at all. In fact I stayed in Darmstadt for a while. [unclear] We left on December 12 to go to Le Havre to go home.

**PB:** And there was nothing that happened during the occupational duty?

**HB:** No, not really, not that I encountered. It was like a regular job.

**BB:** Did you celebrate after you found out that Nazi Germany surrendered?

**HB:** Oh yeah, we celebrated. We were glad it was over.

**PB:** Did the war take longer or shorter than you expected, or you really didn't think about it?

**HB:** I didn't think it would go as long as it did. Of course, they had to build back up in this country, to get the tanks and ammunition and guns up and going, but once they got under motion, then there was no problem. We didn't run out of anything. That's one thing we've got to be thankful for, this country did very good.

**PB:** So the Germans, while you were fighting, were running out of some of their supplies?

**HB:** Yes, at the end, they ran out. They'd run out of gasoline for their tanks. Of course that's the first thing you'd try to do, to cut off their supplies if you can.

**BB:** While you were stationed in Britain, were you ever under attack by the V2 rocket?

**HB:** The buzz bombs? Oh yeah. Nobody knew what it was when they first started coming over England. You could hear a whoosh, and all the sudden it hits somewhere. If they'd ever got where they could pinpoint them, that would have been bad. But the Germans didn't have enough made up. If they'd had a lot made up and if they could have directed them, we'd have been in trouble.

**BB:** Did any of them ever hit close to you?

**HB:** No. I was stationed at Chelmsford, and they hit a Red Cross about ten miles away, by luck they hit a Red Cross place. It was on a Saturday night and they were having a dance, and about ten or twelve people, our guys and some of the women with the Red Cross got killed there. Just by accident they hit that. That's the only place I ever heard got hit.

**BB:** Besides the houses in London...

**HB:** Well, they did that with the bombs. Some areas of London were really hit bad. I always thought they'd go after the bridge and the clock, but they didn't.

**PB:** Were some of the cities in France a lot worse than London was?

**HB:** Oh yes. Some of them were almost completely gone.

**PB:** Were you ever in Paris before you came back to the United States?

**HB:** I was there several times.

**PB:** How was that city?

**HB:** It's different from any city I'd ever been in. Always alive, like New York City, always alive. Nighttime, they were always out. Like New York, they say it never sleeps, well it's the same with them.

**PB:** Did anything happen there that you can think of?

**HB:** One thing, we took a bunch of prisoners up there, and we stayed over. During the night we heard a loud bang. And somebody had gone into a theater and rolled a hand grenade in. They thought it was a German, but as far as I know they never did know for sure. It killed a few people in there. That was a terrible thing.

**PB:** While you were moving through Belgium and Holland, I know you didn't fight the Germans too much there, you just moved through it, but while you were there was there anything that happened?

**HB:** No, not really. We would keep moving, and the Germans would keep moving ahead of us. Trying to keep out of our way.

I was glad to see all those countries and go through them, but that was a terrible way to see them. You'd get quite an education doing something like that.

**PB:** Did you come back and finish school at all?

**HB:** I went to trade school for four years. I took up electric and plumbing and carpentry work.

**PB:** If there's nothing else you can think of, do you want to conclude the interview?

**HB:** I guess that covers just about everything I can recall.

**PB:** Thanks a lot.

**Herbert Bambury, Jr. Interview, NYS Military Museum**