

**Bob Hourihan
Veteran**

**Baldwinsville Messenger: David Tyler
Interviewer**

**Interviewed at Baldwinsville Public Library
November 30, 1994**

DT: Good afternoon. I'm David Tyler, the editor of the Baldwinsville Messenger and I'm here this afternoon with Bob Hourihan, who is a Korean War Veteran. We're going to talk about some of his experiences in the war.

DT: Bob, why don't you talk about where you grew up and what you were doing before the war started.

BH: Okay. I grew up right outside a [unclear], four miles over on thirty-one Belgium, born and raised right there. Lived there all my life, went to grade school in Belgium, one through eight, and came to [unclear] for my high school career over here at the old Elizabeth Street Academy.

DT: What made you decide to go into the service after high school?

BH: Well, at the time, I was eighteen-years-old. I graduated in 1950, and at that time, everybody – all my buddies – was enlisting in the service. I had a brother-in-law that was in the Airborne Paratroopers and jumped in Normandy, in World War Two. He bet me – at the time it was a case of beer – that I couldn't get through Jump School after basic training. I said, "I'll take that bet." I enlisted right in [unclear] building, right in Syracuse, in the Airborne Infantry that was on my papers.

I went to basic training in Fort Dix, New Jersey and was there for probably twelve weeks. I joined on February 7, 1951, the basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey and then went straight from there to Fort Benning, Georgia for Airborne Jump School. I was there for four weeks, graduated, got my wings – jump wings – and then I was assigned to the 82nd Airborne in Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

I stayed at Fort Bragg for probably eight to ten months, had two maneuvers, Operation Longhorn in Texas. We had three jumps there, went back to Fort Bragg and had another maneuvers there – Operation Southern Pines. We had three more jumps there and then the regular infantry training. I went through Ranger School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. After Ranger School, I went back in the [unclear] and regular infantry outfit, you know? Then it kind of got dull; I thought it would be exciting. I volunteered for Far East Command, and I knew where I was going – myself and eight other guys – and we got kind of antsy and wanted a [unclear] to see. We ended up, forty-five days later, taking a troop ship over to Yokohama, Japan. Ten days after that, I'm in Korea.

DT: What was the situation in war when you got over there?

BH: Well when I got there, I was assigned to the 187 Airborne Infantry Regiment, being a paratrooper. Out of the hundred guys, I had a hundred new

men that came in [unclear] and eight of the guys left Fort Bragg with me. We were only there for probably four weeks, about a month. This outfit that I ended up going to got hit pretty bad, they lost a lot of guys and had some casualties. So they took the hundred guys out of the 187 – where I just got assigned – myself included, and they put us in the fortieth division, the 223 Infantry Regiment. When I got there, they were in reserve for a week. They just got back in reserve and there were resupplying and getting more men. About two weeks later, I'm on [unclear]. I just turned nineteen and it was quite an experience, real scary. I wondered then, what did I do? I volunteered to get over here for this stuff. The second night on line, one of the guys I came over with, was killed. Out of the eight of us, one guy was killed and three guys were wounded pretty badly – severely. I got out of there with just shrapnel in my right leg and some frostbite. I was in the mash hospital for three days, nothing serious.

DT: What was the fight like? How close were you to the enemy at that point?

BH: They'd come over and attack once in a while or try to retake the hill or [unclear]. Never had hand-to-hand combat, but I was in on capturing a Chinese prisoner. Across from us was a mostly Chinese division over across from [unclear] in one of their cracked divisions. Mostly mortar rounds and artillery rounds came in everyday; I mean you had to stay down in the trench and wear your flack jacket and helmet all the time or you were a goner. I was in probably half a dozen firefights, where they'd come over but we never went over after them, they came over after us.

We were up in what they call Kumwha Valley, where this [unclear] ridge ran right through. When I went overseas I was a mortar man, a sixteen-millimeter mortar man. Of course being a big guy, six-foot-one, the enemy BAR – I don't know if you're familiar, but it's Browning Automatic Rifle and I think it holds thirty rounds.

DT: Those are one of the big ones?

BH: Yeah, like a John Wayne Jap. They handed me that and I said, "Jeez, I've never fired this, only in basic training," and they said, "Well it's yours now." The one unfortunate thing about it, when we used to do these patrols – we'd go out on a reconnaissance patrol or an ambush patrol – the BAR man was always a point man. That was kind of scary.

One time we were out on a reconnaissance patrol when we got encircled – or surrounded – and had a firefight, with a couple guys wounded badly. What the worst part of it was is that it was in a cold winter month. Usually when you went out on patrol like that, you'd go out and stay for four hours then you'd come back in while another patrol went out. Once you make contact, they don't come out and relieve you; they leave you there until you can get back in the best way you know how. We ended up – out of that one patrol – with fifteen guys, myself included, with frostbite. I think five or six of them had frostbite, but luckily I came back to the mash hospital and I got out of it without anything. A few of the guys lost some fingers – amputated – or their earlobes and toes. The only lieutenant that was with us on the patrol, we ended up carrying him back in – he was wounded and had frostbite.

DT: Why don't you talk about your experiences after the war for a little bit? Your family, what you're doing now, if you had any regrets about going into the Service?

BH: One of the nice things like Korea – I don't know if the other guys told you – you get an R and R. When I came off line, we went back in the reserve and I did go to R and R to Tokyo. My brother-in-law was stationed there at Tachikawa Air Force Base and my sister was with him.

DT: That's nice.

BH: When I went on my R and R over in Tokyo, Japan, I'd saw my sister and brother-in-law, which is pretty close to home. That was nice. When I got back from R and R, our [unclear] then was over on [unclear], another hill. I finished my time there and rotated back to the States. I got back and went to the 82nd Airborne; I ended up with twenty-three parachute jumps. Being an enlisted man, a volunteer, I had to serve my full time in so I got out on February 7, 1954, three years from the date I went in. Got out, got a job at Western Electric and worked there for twenty-eight and a half years. They laid us all off, we went out the door, AT&T was Western Electrics' [unclear], so I did end up with an AT&T pension. [Unclear], I married my wife, Millie – used to be Millie Dunham – she's from [unclear], born and raised here. We had four children, three boys and one girl, all Irishmen. [Both laugh]. All college graduates, all four of my kids. Right now I'm working for [unclear] School District; I've been there for ten years in the Maintenance Department. I'm going to retire in February and head for Florida for the winter. [Both laugh].

DT: Did you receive any awards for your service to the country?

BH: Yes, I got some medals. The ones I'm the proudest of are, naturally, my Jump Wings, from Airborne Jump School and Ranger School. In Korea, I got awarded the Combat Infantry Badge; it's a blue rifle thing that shows you were in a rifle company in combat. I received a bronze medal with three oak leaf clusters – or battle stars, whichever they call them – [unclear] knows about them. Other ribbons, I probably had half a dozen ribbons, [unclear] and this one and that one. The ones I'm proud of are the Combat Infantry Badge and my bronze medal and my Jump Wings.

DT: Was the experience worth that case of beer that you won off your brother?

BH: [Both laugh]. I think so. As a matter of fact, he's never paid me that case of beer. It was quite an experience. I was eighteen-years-old when I enlisted and it was exciting. Everybody said that, you know, jumping out of airplanes and that it was exciting. They said, "Well, how was the first jump?" And I said, "The same as the twenty-third jump; they're all scary." I probably made a mistake volunteering for [unclear] command because I would've stayed at Fort Bragg for the full three years. The 82nd never went in Korea and the 187 Airborne Infantry Regiment that I was in, came out of Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

When I got back home, I was happy and safe. When I got there, I said, "What did I do?" It was the dumbest thing I think I ever did. There's a woman besides, my

mother, she's up in an old people's home in Syracuse now, [unclear]. She had – it kind of brings tears to my eyes – burnt a candle for me everyday over at Saint Mary's Church, my mom, too. I think that's what got you home; that woman was great, she prayed for me everyday and naturally you needed a [unclear] there.

DT: Well, thank you for coming in and sharing your experiences with us.

BH: Okay.

DT: America is lucky that we had people like you that went over there and did the dirty work for all of us. Thanks very much.

BH: Thank you.