

**Clarence Benware
Veteran**

**Interviewed by Senator Patty Ritchie's Office
With an introduction by Senator Patty Ritchie**

**Oswego County Legislative Office Building
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I: Interviewer

CB: Clarence Benware

PR: Senator Patty Ritchie

PR: They are called the greatest generation : Men and women from all walks of life who grew up in the great depression, led our nation to victory in World War II and helped make America a beacon of freedom and democracy for all the world. And do they have some stories to tell! I am pleased to be partnering with the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center to preserve the words and memories of many of our World War II veterans. These stories will be entered into the state's archives where they will be accessible to researchers, academics and future generations. Our veterans have given so much to help build a brighter future for all Americans. This tribute is just one small way of saying, "thank you".

CB: Well, I wanted to go when I was sixteen because I was working at Pine Camp but my father wouldn't sign it.

I: Pine Camp today is now Fort Drum.

CB: My brother was registered for the draft. He got his paper to visit Watertown, somewhere. I was seventeen and I told my dad. I said, "I want to go into service". So he signed the papers when I was seventeen and I went.

I: So you went at seventeen. Where did you go for your training?

CB: Sampson. It was built new at that time. I forgot. I saw something in the papers where thousands and thousands were trained down there.

I: So talk a little bit about your experience during training. What sort of things did you do? Did you learn anything in particular?

CB: Not really, more or less.

I: Just the basics?

CB: Yes basics. Yes, marching, this and that, and standing guard on your barracks and so forth. That's about all. And training, yes.

I: Now, how long did you stay there for?

CB: I think it was about twelve weeks. I was taken in twelve weeks. Originally, they didn't think that they would take me because I have flat feet. Well, the same day, they changed their minds and I got in.

I: So, when you were all wrapped with your training, where did you go after that? Were you able to go home first?

CB: I did. No, I wasn't. I was sent to Fort Smith, Virginia. They were going to make a Medic out of me. And I was there probably two months. And they didn't want me in there. And then I went into Amphibious Command.

I: What do you do in the amphibious command? What are some of the duties?

CB: We learn rifles and pistols and that.

I: It's a lot of target practice then you had to go through?

CB: We had to do that, yes. [We] learned how to do it and after that I went to Little Basin, Virginia. And I was there for just a while. I don't know, a short while doing quite a lot of rifling and then I was sent to New York and went on the Queen Mary and it landed. It didn't land there in way up Scotland out in the water because the water wasn't heavy in the oriental.

I: Now, what year was this?

CB: In 1943. Yes, November 1943 and [I] stayed there for about a month till Christmas.

I: In Scotland, you stayed?

CB: And from there I went to Penarth, Wales. And we were going to work in the Landing Ship Tank (LST) and that is what we did till we went to London, once changing guard and so forth.

I: See, you got to [do] a little travelling and got to see some pretty nifty places. Right?

CB: Well, Cardiff, Wales. This was in June when that was happening because I and two, three others went up there. We were going to get photographs of us. [We] were going up the street in Cardiff, Wales and I got ahead of them and they said, "Hey, Benware! People are... on us" I said, "what?" I took my peep jacket off and threw it up.

I: Why were they doing that?

CB: Because they are mean [laughter]. I had them turn around and there was the same thing ... at them. I could have had a little bit of work but some things I don't want to say.

I: So during your time on the Queen Mary when you were travelling, what was some of your duties like when you were out there?

CB: My duty was on a small boat. There were only a few sailors out there. I forget, a couple of hundred but there were thousands of people on that Queen Mary. I was on a small boat and the rest of them were nearer to us where the food was. Hitler would give a hundred thousand dollars in silver if one of the submarines would knock her down [the Queen Mary]. They never did. They were up and down [on] the water. We were out on the New York harbor and we saw a big pillar there. He said "Okay, you yanks, nobody falls off here because I will stop for nothing. Right after [that] they went into France. My brother was on that ship with a fast gun deal. He will run up there and knock the ... down and get out of there. He was there the day they went around. I met him by the way when I went to go see him where the big shots were in England. In the Bureau station and somebody came up and hit me in the back and it was my brother that hit me.

I: And you had no idea that he was over there?

CB: No, because the last time I knew he was over in Australia.

I: So, what was the meeting like?

CB: Pretty Good. He told me that he started writing a letter to a girl: her husband was killed in Canada. One of my uncles worked over there. He got them to write back and forth. When my brother came he went to Canada and married her. He is dead now. Smoke got him. It did. He was sixty-nine. I am eighty-eight. My brother who was on. My brother who was on ground he died two years ago. He was eighty-five. And I have a sister who is over eighty. And here is my brother who died sixty-nine. Now, what happened? The cigarettes [Laughter].

I: So, you got a chance to meet your brother over there. How long did you have? Was it just a quick meeting to say "Hi, how are you?"

CB: Just a quick meeting because he was only there for a meeting because he was there for a meal or something. Their job was to go over to France all the time and knocking out it [pail mockers?] He wasn't alone. They had other small boats. They were fast. So they went over there and forty-seven years before he died. And we don't know what happened to another brother who worked right over here at the barber shop for over fifty years at that hotel over here. He died two years ago [at the age of] eighty-five and we don't know what happened to him. He never told my father and mother anything. He never told me. So all I know is that he got money. I don't know if it is ten or twenty percent or thirty percent. Something like that; He never told us what happened to him but he had to be with the marines because he was navy. I don't know if he was a medic or whatever. His son was over in Hawaii. He [the son] died over there while he was in the hospital here. It is what it is.

I: So, you got the chance to meet your brother and you are happy to see each other. You go separate ways.

CB: Before that, I was in Penarth. I can't tell you the names of all of them but the LST (Landing Ship Tank). Some of them were coming from India: from wars over there. We were putting in railroad tracks and things like that in it because a lot of it made it so that we had to get rid of them LST's right on the landing. The first one that was there was a fellow from my hometown. He was home on a leave. Right after [that] he got into the navy. He killed a man in Carthage. He wanted to fight with him and they did. And he fell on concrete and he didn't mean to do that but the guy wanted to get after him, so he killed him. That was the guy I saw he never came back home. He stayed out there in the state of Washington. His folks were going out there and I bought their house. They went to Washington and they never came back here. They stayed right there; which was a good idea. It must have been hard on him and the family, what happened.

I: So during your whole time in WWII, did you stay just specifically on the Queen Mary?

CB: No, after D-day. It was after the fourth of July. I went to town near London. I went over and got on an LST. That's when I got on the 601. There was a flotilla getting ready to go into southern France. And at daytime we went through Gibraltar. I saw land on both sides and it was dark. During the night, there was a bang! The captain said "be prepared to abandon ship. I thought, "What's going on? I didn't think it was that bad. Then there was another one. Somebody said, "This is it!" One of our own ships hit it. How I got into Tunisia, I don't know but that's where I ended up in. I don't know what ship I was on or anything else. Anyway, to make a long story short, a fellow called me. It was in the American legion, I think. Does anybody know me [in] 601? I called him and I told him my name and so forth. It was down south somewhere. I said, "Yes I was on the 601". I said, "What had happened to you?" I said, "I didn't get up there. The 158 get there?". He said, "We got there". So I said, "I went down to Tunisia and helped load ships and so forth for the invasion out there. So I stayed there most of the time loading ships and so forth that were going to southern France. And then I went to a bigger ship from a small one and we got rid of our gas tank. We all had gas masks over there all through England and down to Africa. So I gave it all away and went home for a couple of weeks: three weeks. Then I got on a ship there. It was in dry dock because it got hit by a Kamikaze: nineteen were killed on that.

I: Were you on that ship?

CB: No, I wasn't on it. I waited till they got on. It goes right to Treasure Island but you call it somewhere else. We would have gotten repainted but we went to sea. By that fact, I got a picture of the general, "the big shot". I will show it to you.

I: So now when you got on the new ships once it got repainted. Where did you go?

CB: I don't know a lot of places. I was down one time and bullets were like this, they go around [he was making a circular motion with his hands]. You put them there and you put them here and they would go down to the ground. And I had fever for quite a while. I did not know where we were sometimes. One time I was out of it. I was burning up and water was coming back into the ship. I was in the tail end. I see the captain come in and he looking around and he said, "What are you doing over there?" So I said, "I am burning, burning up. I got malaria". He went back up and put that thing down. So water wouldn't come in no more. Where we were I don't know [laughter]. You don't know where you are going, you know? I know we were up up in Japan and I got assured twice. I got a picture of a couple of things. So that's about it. It was about fifteen months before they operated on me. They were going to put me on the battle ship, Wisconsin. And before they could me over there, they've taken off for the United States. A lot of ships were gone. They put me on a hospital ship. I don't know how long I was on there. I don't know if it was before I was operated on or afterwards that I saw bodies, bodies going by in caskets with the flags over them. The guys were dying. I don't think they put them in the water because where they were anchored out, it was too shallow for bigger ships. I saw a lot of guys jump off. He had one of those things on [arms folded].

I: Straight Jacket?

CB: Yes

I: You said that you saw a lot of that

CB: That one they got him out there

I: Why do you think that guys were jumping overboard?

CB: Mind...

I: Just the experiences of combat or battling, you think could have played a role in it?

CB: Yes, I think so.

I: So, when you were serving during WWII. Did you ever have any close calls?

CB: The only thing I know is that over there bullets were going off and I didn't know nothing when I had fever. They pulled into Hawaii once, I had the fever. They pulled into Hawaii once, I had fever and a Hawaii man who had a small bowl took me into the army because the navy didn't have hospitals over there. They still don't, by the way; just the army. I went over there and they did what they had to do and put me back out again. I don't know what went on.

I: But never any close encounters

CB: Not personally that I knew of. That's all that I could tell you. It was that Malaria. I don't know. It's tough.

I: I bet, yes.