

William J. Callahan
Narrator

Wayne Clark
New York State Military Museum
Interviewer

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New York State Military Museum
Saratoga Springs, NY

WAYNE CLARK: Today is the 30th of November 2011; we are at the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York. My name is Wayne Clark. Sir, for the record, would you please state full name, and date and birthplace.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: My full name William Joseph Callahan. My birth is March 10th 1926.

WAYNE CLARK: ...And where about were you born?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Brooklyn, NY

WAYNE CLARK: ...And did you go to school in Brooklyn?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I went to school in Brooklyn. All school, grammar schools, to college.

WAYNE CLARK: And what was it like growing up in Brooklyn?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Wonderful

WAYNE CLARK: Was it? Laughs** Now what did your father do for a living?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: My father died when I was ten years old, he worked for a phone company.

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, and where were you when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I was home on a Sunday afternoon, I heard it on the radio, we got a little noise you know, my two brothers went into service then I went.

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, now you went into the service in 1961?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No, 1944, you got that wrong.

WAYNE CLARK: Oh geez, I am sorry laughs** all right, I apologize for that one

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No problem.

WAYNE CLARK: all right, and uh were you drafted?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: no I enlisted in Navy. I was 17 when I was turned in.

WAYNE CLARK: and what made you pick the Navy?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I didn't want to go into the army

WAYNE CLARK: uh huh laughs*

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I didn't want to be a foot soldier.

WAYNE CLARK: and was that your first time away from home?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Yeah, I went to Samson, took the subway over to Penn station and got on the train there, and went up to Samson, NY here.

WAYNE CLARK: oh I see

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Boot camp is only three weeks there

WAYNE CLARK: Three weeks?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: yeah

WAYNE CLARK: Now, what did you learn at Samson?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: How to get along with people, you know

WAYNE CLARK: okay, and once you completed boot camp where did you go next?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: then I went to a navel hospital up in Samson, and then from there I went to Philadelphia, and then from Philadelphia I transferred over to the marines.

WAYNE CLARK: okay, and you say you transferred?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Well, I was... marines don't have their own medical course, they get it from the navy, and once I transferred you change uniforms and everything.

WAYNE CLARK: okay

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: so I had two uniforms one was for sailing, and one for the marine.

WAYNE CLARK: and what was your training like?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I went through all the training the marines did, plus you had to take medical training too.

WAYNE CLARK: right, well your medical training, what was...

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: well that was teaching first aid, and battle conditions and everything, you know?

WAYNE CLARK: And how long was that school?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: well, maybe a month, two month, everything was short, time was the essence for everything you know, I was like lucky I just, if you go to school you get out the thing in a few months, that why I feel bad for most of these guys in Vietnam, they flew them over there, it took me six days to go to cross country by train, and then another six days to go to Hawaii, that was twelve days, and I got a cousin he went to Vietnam, he flew out of New York, in Vietnam the next day.

WAYNE CLARK: Mhm.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: then it got hit that day, and he came back again.

WAYNE CLARK: really? Wow

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Yes sir. Taking time was good you know

WAYNE CLARK: now as a medic, how are you treated?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: good no problem.

WAYNE CLARK: But I often heard that the marines were really protective of their medics.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh sure yeah cause that's cause we would help them that's all, you don't like to hand feed yah. We had a two-way relationship,

WAYNE CLARK: now when did you go overseas?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I went oversea in September 44; I got back in May of 46

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, and you took off from where about in the states?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: San Diego

WAYNE CLARK: San Diego?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I went to Penn Elton, not southern California.

WAYNE CLARK: Mhm, and from there you went to Hawaii?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: yeah, a lot of fellows I was with, yeah, and I ended up going to Carrith, a lot of fellows I was with ended up going to china and everything, but I didn't get picked up for that.

WAYNE CLARK: And you stayed in Hawaii?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I stayed the whole way, till the end of the war, then we left, ended up coming home.

WAYNE CLARK: and what did they have you doing in Hawaii?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I worked in a hospital in Maui, then I worked warehouse in Oahu.

WAYNE CLARK: Now what was your job in the hospital?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I was a core man there, and I did a lot of prostate massages, and stitching, and all that stuff. I worked in a surgery ward, so we did quite a bit of stuff, that we wouldn't do normally you know?

WAYNE CLARK: Mhm, so they must have kept you extremely busy cause I know there were a lot of wounded marines.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Well the guys weren't wounded that much, but the thing is, out where I was anyway, and then most of them came in there for circumcisions.

WAYNE CLARK: Really?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Yeah well they went on a campaign, and you couldn't wash yourself properly, and you'd end up getting infected, and then they come back to get circumcised.

WAYNE CLARK: Now did they have any choice in the matter?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh, well listen if you get ... (at 6:05 I have no idea what he said), you might want to take care of it.

WAYNE CLARK: No but I mean was it voluntary or did they...?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh yeah it was voluntary.

WAYNE CLARK: Oh it wasn't mandatory.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh no it wasn't mandatory.

WAYNE CLARK: Okay

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: But you had to watch out for that stuff, but a lot of circumcisions, a lot of Seri Tomas and all that stuff you know?

WAYNE CLARK: Mhm, now once a fellow went through that operation, did they have to stay in the hospital for quite a while?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh they stayed in there a week or two weeks. Plus they go back, living in a camp, and we dirty them, its not the same thing, we could have more problems, so we keep them in the hospital and they're clean.

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, now what was life like in Hawaii, when you went over in '44?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Well we never got over night passes; you had to be back on the base at 6 o'clock. Plus something, if you leave it would from like 9 o'clock to six at night, you never got over night.

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WAYNE CLARK: Okay, now what was life like in Hawaii, when you went over in '44?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Well we never got over night passes; you had to be back on the base at 6 o'clock. Plus something, if you leave it would from like 9 o'clock to six at night, you never got over night. There was nobody in the army except the fourth marine division and the 30th and 50th and that was about it, there was about 40,000 people there, all men. And that's what we were.

WAYNE CLARK: And now was that the big island of Hawaii you were on?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Maui, that was a big resort.

WAYNE CLARK: I was going to say, what was Maui like then, I mean obviously there weren't too many hotels there.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No hotels, just a small town, that's about it.

WAYNE CLARK: Now, what was the food like there?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: We used to eat out once a month, on payday, the rest of the time you starved. *chuckles* the food is terrible.

WAYNE CLARK: Was it really?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Yeah, except when the marines came Christmas, thanksgiving, and Easter, you ate good then, the rest of the time the food was horrible. That's how they treated the marines, they made you miserable so that you went in combat, and so you didn't give a shit anymore.

WAYNE CLARK: Now, what were your living quarters like there?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Tent

WAYNE CLARK: In a tent? So there weren't any permanent barracks there or anything.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh no no. On the other way, Cestleville, yeah we went to barracks, but Maui was tents

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, so when you went to Oahu, did you do hospital work then too, or was that at the warehouse.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No that was the warehouse.

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, now how did you end up getting transferred out of the medical the core?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Well I was still in the medical core; there was a medical storage near.

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, now of the two jobs, which one did you like the best?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Well I didn't care at the time, as long as I could keep alive, that's all I wanted to do. No body was shooting at me.

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, now what was your life like in Oahu?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Eh, the same as any place else, you had a place to go, cause

Oahu was a big natural Pearl Harbors, and nothing but sailors, and marines, and army people there, that's all, nothing else you know, I got there after they closed down the compost, you know.

WAYNE CLARK: Oh they closed them down.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: They heard we were coming; my friends got shipped to China that's where they got stationed in Oahu.

WAYNE CLARK: Now on Oahu, the warehouse you worked in, how big of a warehouse...

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh, I don't know how to describe it was a big storage area, it had a small warehouse in it, but most of it was a storage area, you know. It had all kinds of medical supplies.

WAYNE CLARK: Did you operate a forklift?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No, I don't know what the hell I was doing there, I ended up taking this guys' warts off their hands, and I got the kit and everything else, the doctor told me how to do, and I did it.

WAYNE CLARK: So did everybody refer to you as doc?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No they call you by your name.

WAYNE CLARK: Did they? Now what about entertainment there, did you have and USO shows?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No just card games that's all.

WAYNE CLARK: A lot of card games?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No, I saw one USO show that's all.

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, and now you were there obviously when the war ended? What was like when the war ended?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh well everybody was happy.

WAYNE CLARK: A lot of celebration?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No celebration, everyone was just happy that's all.

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, now it says here you were discharged till May of 1946, now

did you stay in Hawaii all that time?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Well yeah, most of the time I was there, I was in Maui when the war ended, and then I got transferred over to Oahu. Took my first airplane flight

WAYNE CLARK: Even after the war ended, was there still a lot to do, or were things pretty quiet?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I mean there were a lot of things to do, they kept you busy that's all, you know, you had to keep busy otherwise you would be bored, you know.

WAYNE CLARK: Did you see a lot of guys coming and going?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No not really. I was in transfer center, that's where I stayed, that's all. A lot of people came and left you know.

WAYNE CLARK: And what rank were you?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I ended up as a third class; I got that by cutting cards too.

WAYNE CLARK: Ha-ha, you want to tell us about that too?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Well there was six of us, we were pretty much all the same, and this friend of mine he made it the Normandy invasion and then he made the Uwajima then came back he had to purple cards, and all kinds of decorations. We cut the cards and it was taxing day, he was in the Navy for five years didn't get out the hospital, he thought he should have got it, and I gave it my friend. So I got the fathers to make third class to next time.

WAYNE CLARK: Well okay, now you were discharged like we said in May of 1946

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Yeah Lido Beach, NY.

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, so you came back to the states by ship?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh yeah.

WAYNE CLARK: And what was that like coming back was they're any, there wasn't any celebration then or welcoming home.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No you're just going home, that's all, that's the big thing. Came in to San Francisco I saw that was a nicer city, I enjoyed that.

WAYNE CLARK: How did you get from San Francisco to Lido Beach.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: By train. A troop train, that took another six days.

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, and you were discharged in Lido Beach, and then from there you went home to Brooklyn?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Yeah, took the train in, then I took the trolley cart from New York and came over the Winds burry Bridge and then took the trolley cart home.

WAYNE CLARK: Were your family happy to see you, your mom?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh sure, sure, they all wanted us home, in one piece too.

WAYNE CLARK: Oh did you have any brothers that were in the service?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Yeah, two brothers, one was in the Army, and other was in the Navy.

WAYNE CLARK: And they made it home all right?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh yeah, yeah.

WAYNE CLARK: And what were their names?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: John and Paul

WAYNE CLARK: Are they both living or diseased?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No, Paul is still alive. John's gone.

WAYNE CLARK: And where does Paul live?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Garden City, NY

WAYNE CLARK: Okay, all right now you got home from the service, what was the first thing you did.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I went home ha-ha.

WAYNE CLARK: Well I mean, did you look for a job, or school...

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No I tried to, and then we walked all over and drinking beer and went to every bar I could find, we just walked all over the city, you know. Then we went fishing and all that stuff and then I went to St. Johns.

WAYNE CLARK: Yeah I was going to say, obviously you took advantage of the GI Bill. And what did you study at St. Johns University.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Accounting.

WAYNE CLARK: All right, so you became an accountant?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Yeah I'm an accountant.

WAYNE CLARK: All right, and you did that as a career. And when did you retire?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I'm still working; I've been retired three times already. I'm still doing accounting work.

WAYNE CLARK: Are you in business for yourself?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Yeah, yeah, I don't work for anybody.

WAYNE CLARK: And did you get married along the way?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh yeah I got married, and we had 7 children.

WAYNE CLARK: Oh, so you have a lot of grandchildren?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Yeah 17.

WAYNE CLARK: 17? Is your wife still living?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh yeah she's still living.

WAYNE CLARK: And her name is?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Dorothy.

WAYNE CLARK: All right.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: We have a good marriage.

WAYNE CLARK: Great, now did you stay in touch with anyone you were in the service with?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No I don't keep in touch with anybody.

WAYNE CLARK: Did you attend any kind of reunions at all.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No, no

WAYNE CLARK: Did you join any veterans...

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I just follow the American Legion that's all; I just joined that maybe 10 years ago. I think you should come home to something you know. Not that I agree with everything but they have something to say anyway you know.

WAYNE CLARK: Now how do you think the service changed or affected your life? Think it had any bearing?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh I guess, I was just happy to get out of the war, that's all.

WAYNE CLARK: Yeah, it sounds like you lucked out especially being in the marine core and being trained as a medic and then ending up in Hawaii.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I worked for the bank, before I worked for the service. And there's a guy who's married, and had two kids, and he got drafted after I went in, and he made the Normandy invasion.

WAYNE CLARK: Oh geez.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: And that was maybe six months. So I was very fortunate.

WAYNE CLARK: Now do you think you would have gone on to college, if it hadn't been for the GI Bill.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh yeah, I think you need an education.

WAYNE CLARK: Oh defiantly. Now is there anything that we haven't covered, that you would like to add, any incidents?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: No, no. I used to practice landings in California. You go out in the ship overnight and come back the next day you know. Climbing up and the rope ladders, the Jacob ladders, they're a pain in the ass, but that was the way they did it you know. You got to go up the ship. And some of those were dangerous too; cause a lot of guys got trapped in between the hinges boat and the ship.

WAYNE CLARK: So you were pretty lucky?

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: I was lucky, cause one time; there was a hinges boat ahead of me, and he capsized, and 15 guys got drowned, so it was dangerous work. And coming in landing, if the hop sin didn't pull the boat back, you got that ramp right across your back and it would kill you, so you had to be careful.

WAYNE CLARK: Yes, defiantly. All right well thank you so much for the interview.

WILLIAM CALLAHAN: Oh thanks for asking, okay.