Harry Hebold
Veteran

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Interviewers

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Q: My name is Shannon Bowen, and today is January 8th, 2004. I'm here with Mr. Harry Herbold, and I'm just going to ask you a couple of questions. All right, let's start—where were you the day Pearl Harbor happened, December 7th, 1941.
HH: I would have been a sophomore in high school at Sers, New York.

Q: Did it affect you directly, or?
HH: No, it affected us in that teenagers were very much interested in getting involved. It was a very extensive war, with a lot of people involved, and individuals were eager to join up. We were part of that feeling. Also, rationing was in full force then. Butter, gasoline, and lots of other materials that were vital to the war effort were not readily available. You needed food stamps and gasoline stamps to get a certain amount of those things. So, in a sense, we were part of a rationing system. We were also part of the growing enthusiasm as time went by. At that time, we were pretty much losing the war defensively. Industries were just getting into full gear and starting to provide materials for our forces. So, I'd say those two things, enthusiastically wanting to get involved and also rationing food—stand out.

Q: How do you feel? When did you feel passionate—like, when did you join up?
HH: I was a 17-year-old senior, and I went in and joined up when I was a senior. But they wouldn't take me, they said you had to be 18. So, I joined up when I was 17, and then I was 18 in August, which was just after I graduated in June of '44. I was called up in August of '44. It didn't take long for them to catch up with me. In fact, I wrote a letter requesting immediate induction. They obliged me by calling me into the army by August 22nd. So, I was 18 on the 13th of August, and by the 22nd, I was in.

Q: From there, where did you go?
HH: Well, basic training at Camp Croft, South Carolina, for 16 weeks. It was originally 17 weeks, but while we were in our last week of basic training, the Battle of the Bulge occurred. They immediately increased the call for infantrymen, particularly, as we were

taking heavy losses in Europe. They were constantly sending replacements over. So, at the end of the 16th week, we got an immediate call to march back to camp at noontime. Our Jeep rolled up, and we heard that we had orders to move back to camp.

Q: So, from noon that day, what happened next?
HH: We stopped basic training on the 17th and marched back to camp, arriving the next morning at about 5: 00. At that point, we were informed about what was going on—the Battle of the Bulge and so on—and that we were going to be shipping out early.

From Camp Croft, we were given a few days off to go home. After that, we reported back to Camp Shanks, New York, where we were given equipment and uniforms. Then we were taken to a ship, which I later found out was Queen Elizabeth, and we shipped overseas.

Q: You said you were informed about the Battle of the Bulge, but as a replacement, did you really feel like you had a good grasp of the situation you were entering?
HH: Not really—you don't fully grasp that sort of thing until you're in it, until you're involved. However, we were carried along by the enthusiasm I mentioned earlier. Being 17- and 18-year-olds, we were very eager to take part. We were aware that things were not going well at the time. The Bulge began on December 16th was the actual start of the battle. Up to that point, we had moved into France and were heading toward Germany, with the tide beginning to turn in our favor. We'd had some bad experiences in Italy, and of course, the war with Japan was still going on in the Pacific. But we did start seeing some success. When the Bulge occurred, though, there was an immediate need for replacements because the turnover was tremendous, especially in the infantry. There was a very heavy turnover, and they needed riflemen. We were young, enthusiastic, and eager to take part. They handed us rifles, told us to report to this outfit or that one, and at that point, you became combat replacements.

Q: From Queen Elizabeth, where did you go? Where did you land initially?
HH: When we first boarded the ship, we didn't even know it was Queen Elizabeth. We were loaded onto a train, taken down to the docks, and marched through an entryway on the side of the ship. We didn't learn what it was until we were on board and started asking questions.

We left New York Harbor. Once the ship was loaded, we went over to a town called Greenock, Scotland, which is near Glasgow. The ship was too large for Glasgow's docks, so they let us off at Greenock. From there, we boarded a train down to Southampton, England. In Southampton, we got off the train and boarded a smaller boat, which took

us across to Le Havre, France. We reported to a center called Camp Lucky Strike, which was essentially a camp where troops were assembled. This would have been early January of '45.

Q: Compared to what you thought they would be, how were your initial experiences?
HH: Well, we were assigned to Camp Lucky Strike. You were assigned out to different units as needed. They sent us—we didn't know we were going to the 35th Division at that point. We just knew we were being assigned to an infantry unit. It was nighttime, and we marched to where we got onto some trucks and were transported up to the front with the division. It was cold, and I didn't have the slightest idea of where we were or where we were going at that point. Even later on, I didn't really know. There were just two or three of us when we moved into the combat company. We were met by the company commander, and he spoke to us briefly. I could hardly see him because it was pitch black. He welcomed us and said, "Call me Red." That was unusual, he was an officer, and you don't usually call an officer by his first name. But up there in that combat situation, things changed. It became less formal, less rigid, and you just did as he asked. He said, "Call me Red," but I never saw him after that. I don't know what happened to him. I often wonder whether he made it—I'll never know.

Q: It sounds as though you developed a feeling of brotherhood while you were there. Did you ever lose any close friends?
HH: No, because I didn't get to know anybody. I was actually in combat for only about two months—from early January, February, into late March or early April. I did get to know one soldier, but I don't know what happened to him, either. It was very easy to become separated because people were wounded and killed and shipped right back to a field hospital. His name was Frank Fedi. He and I were both brand new, and we kind of latched onto each other. But by the time I became ill and was sent back, I lost track of him. I had no idea what happened to him. I even tried to contact him through the organization I belonged to, the Battle of the Bulge organization, but I never got any response. It bothers me badly, yes. You have that feeling of camaraderie, but at the same time, you can't get too close, because maybe your buddy won't be there the next day.

Q: Right. What was it that you said—you were ill and were sent back? You mentioned you were ill—what happened?
HH: I had hepatitis. At that time, they didn't know much about it, but there must have been something I ate. The only thing I can think of is that when we went through towns, people would just up and leave, and all their belongings were still there. Every so often, we'd find something different to eat. I remember eating canned cherries—apparently, the people there had canned them—and I also ate some of their homemade bread. But I

don't know medically whether that's what caused the hepatitis or not. I don't know what else it could have been.

Q: Did you feel a need for food? Was there a lack of resources?
HH: I admired the effort the army made to get hot food to us occasionally, as much as possible. We had mobile kitchens, but they couldn't bring that equipment up to the front line. You'd get C rations and K rations, and occasionally a hot meal—but only occasionally. It was nice having variation from the C and K rations.

Q: What did they contain?
HH: They were packaged in a nice little box. It might have cheese, a bar of chocolate, or a can of hash—something you could eat without having to cook it. You could open the package and have a meal right there. I think they did very well, all things considered, getting hot, nutritious food up to the front line.

Q: While on the front line, did you encounter any enemy close up?
HH: Only as prisoners of war. Along the way, we'd see bodies—dead soldiers—not knowing whether they were American or German. In fact, the first night we joined our outfit, my first experience with a dead soldier was seeing a man lying in a ditch. I thought, "I wonder who he is, what he's like, what his family is like. Is he American or German?" Nobody knew. The army did a good job of bringing these dead soldiers back and getting information to their families. On several occasions, I observed prisoners of war. At that point, a lot of them were surrendering. You'd see whole truckloads of prisoners heading to the rear. It was a sad experience to see dead people, knowing they were just soldiers like yourself—even if they were German.

Q: You seem to have a feeling that the Germans were humanized toward people like you, as opposed to the animosity felt toward the Japanese enemy.
HH: The Japanese were brutal. Certain units of the German army could be brutal too. During the early stages of the Battle of the Bulge, one of the SS outfits massacred a group of about 80 American soldiers—machine-gunned them down. That wasn't usual. The regular army men weren't like that—they were a little more human. I read that the prisoner-of-war camps were more brutal in Japan than in Germany. All the POW camps were difficult, but the Japanese camps were the most brutal to deal with.

Q: While you were on the front lines, what did you and your fellow soldiers talk about?
HH: We shared information from back home—that was important. It's important for morale for everybody, even if you're just listening to somebody else's letter. That was important. Where we were going to eat, where we were going to sleep—that was another

big topic. You never knew when you were going to move out. You'd settle down, find a cellar that was dry, and try to get some sleep. But at any time, they'd say, "Okay, let's go," and off you'd go. You never knew when you were going to be on the move or where you were going. In fact, there was this one time, when we were moving from the Third Army up to the Ninth Army, we had stopped our train. We stopped, started a fire, and were seeing if we could cook up some food. We found some chickens, got them ready for cooking, and had a fire going in the stove. The chickens were in the water, just about ready to eat, when suddenly, "Okay, everybody out, you have to move on." That was not unusual, because orders to move could come at any time and with varying frequency. If you could build a fire and get warm, that would be great. But it was very difficult to do that, particularly depending on where you were in terms of the journey.

Q: While you were away from home, were you able to correspond with your family a lot?
HH: Yeah. My mother did the writing for the family. She wrote regularly. My brother was too young to write his own letters, but she handled most of the correspondence.

Q: Do you feel like she had a good sense of what you were going through? Were you able to describe that to her?
HH: I don't think anybody, unless they've been through that, can have a real feeling for it. Being somewhere where someone is shooting at you, where you could step on a landmine, where artillery shells could come in and burst overhead—unless you've experienced that, you just can't understand. There's a tremendous amount of fear involved. You're always afraid of being wounded or killed. It's a situation where you just hope for the best, stay out of sight, and hope you'll get through the next day.

Q: Did the situation ever seem too grim for you?
HH: Yeah. The feelings you had most of the time were fear and cold. Those were the two big ones. We were lucky as replacements were winter-equipped. But there were a lot of GIs who weren't. They didn't have winter boots—they had the boots from the fall and weren't re-equipped with winter clothing. As a result, we lost more men to frostbite than for many other reasons. A tremendous number of men were lost to frostbite. So, yeah—fear of being wounded or killed, and coldness. Those were the two major things that you worried about.

Q: Did you ever come into contact with any commanders or high-ranking officials?
HH: Not at all, no. The setup was that the sergeants and corporals were the people you dealt with pretty much directly. Occasionally, you'd deal with the company commander, who could be a lieutenant or a captain, but that was about as far up the ladder as it went.

Once in a while, you'd hear about people being visited by celebrities or high-ranking officers, but not as a rule, no.

Q: Where were you when the war ended?
HH: V-Day—this was in May—I was in England, in the hospital. I had contracted hepatitis. I flew back to a Paris hospital, then back to England, where I was hospitalized. When the war ended, instead of sending us back to our units, they sent us home. So, I went back to the States. I was hospitalized in England for a couple of months, and then, after the war ended, I was hospitalized in the Massachusetts hospital for a couple of months. Naturally, I was patient when the war ended.

SS: Where were you, rather?
HH: I stayed in the hospital for two months—the war ended in May, so that would put me back at Fort Devens, Massachusetts hospital, for May, June, July—something like that.

Q: How did you feel about the use of the atomic bomb?
HH: I think it was a terrible thing for the Japanese. But I think, certainly from what I've read, it shortened the war. You ask people who know about this, they seemed to favor the fact that it was a necessary evil. We needed to end the war sooner. If we hadn't done it that way, it would have lasted much longer, and we would have lost many more people. The Japanese would have really put up a fight as we got close to their homeland. So, I think it was one necessary evil—unfortunate, but something we had to do.

Q: Post-war, what did you do as soon as you got home?
HH: Well, after the hospital, I was assigned to—when I first came home from overseas, we had a seven-day leave, and of course, I spent that at home. After that, I was assigned to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, and then up to Fort Bragg. I was doing counseling work at that point. The GIs had a point system. You got points for being overseas, points for being in combat, points for various things. These points were added up, and the ones with the most points would be discharged first. Someone who had medals, combat experience, and overseas experience—they all added up to a certain number of points. Compared with a new recruit who came in with no points at all, the one with points would be discharged first. So I was involved as part of that discharge system, interviewing soldiers who were leaving. We were asked to make them aware of the benefits of being a GI—what's available to them from the government now that they're out. I would interview these people, and that would be part of their discharge process. I did that until I was discharged.

Q: Did you still have that positive feeling about the government and what you had done after speaking with other GIs? Were you able to encourage them or give them advice?

HH: They were all anxious to get home, I mean, that was a universal feeling. I don't think there was any bad feeling about the service. The war was over, and it was time to go home and start life. So, I didn't feel there was a lot of negative sentiment about the army.

Q: Right after you were released from the Armed Forces, what did you do from there?
HH: Well, I was discharged—I must think now—I was discharged in June of '46, yes. I had a great high school experience and a great high school principal. In fact, he was responsible for me getting into college. I got out of the army in June of '46 and entered college in September of '46. He pretty much made all the arrangements for me to get from the point of discharge to entering college.

Q: Where did you go to college?
HH: State College of Cortland.

Q: What did you major in, and what was your occupation?
HH: I was a physics major. My first job was in Randolph, New York. From there, I went to Plattsburgh. While I was in Plattsburgh, I decided I wanted to be an administrator. So during this time, I went back to school, got a master's, and became certified in administration. After Plattsburgh, I went to Ben Falls and took a job teaching science at the junior high school. I taught science for two years and then moved to fifth grade to gain experience at the elementary level. When the new Kensington School opened, I became principal.

Q: You've had quite a career, it seems. How do you feel about our involvement in foreign policy now, particularly in Iraq?
HH: Well, I wish Mr. Bush had handled things differently from the very beginning. I think he mishandled it. I think we're in it now, and I don't know—I think we almost have to stay in it and do what we can to straighten things out. But I'm not at all pleased with Mr. Bush, I'm not going to vote for him.

Q: I see. I forgot to ask you a couple of questions earlier—when is your birthday?
HH: August 13th, 1926.

Q: where were you born?
HH: New York City.

Q: Me too. Naomi, do you have any other questions? **N**: Were you aware of the concentration camps in Europe, in Germany?
HH: My outfit eventually got involved, but I didn't. That was when I was sent back to the hospital.

Q: Did they liberate any while you were there?
HH: They did, but I wasn't with them when it happened. No. I believe it was Dachau, but I'm not sure about that.

Q: Are you involved in any other organizations pertaining to the Armed Forces?
HH: Just the Battle of the Bulge organization and the VFW.

Q: Are you active?
HH: No. I belong and maintain my membership, but I'm more active in the Battle of the Bulge organization than in the VFW.

Q: When did you meet your wife—postwar or prewar?
HH: Where did I meet my wife? In college. When we were sophomores, we started going together. We graduated in June of '46 and got married a week later.

Q: Was she involved in the war effort at all?
HH: I doubt it. I don't think so—I can't think of how she might have been involved, except as part of the rationing system. She had to do her share, as all people did. But to answer your question, I don't think so.