

John E. Bailey  
Narrator

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New York State Military Museum  
Interviewers

Interviewed on 2/28/2006 at Delmar Place Residence, Delmar NY

INT: Could you give me your full name, and date of birth and place of birth, please.

JB: John E. Bailey, born in Albany, New York on October 14, 1924.

INT: What was your educational background prior to entering the service?

JB: I had a high school diploma and a year of college at Siena College in Loudonville.

INT: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

JB: I was sitting at the living room table at my home on Elm Street in Albany doing my homework. I guess that's about the size of it as far as where I was and what I was doing. Heard about it over the radio.

INT: Do you remember your reaction? How you felt?

JB: I was probably more confused than anything else. What did it mean to me and my family?

INT: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

JB: I enlisted.

INT: Why did you decide to enlist?

JB: I enlisted in the Navy V-12 [College Training] Program which was college-based and I was at Siena College as a freshman and then went to active duty July 1, 1943.

INT: Did you have anyone in the family that had been in the service? In the Navy?

JB: I had a twin brother, Bob, we went into the program together and after we were in for maybe six months to a year, we were separated.

INT: Where did you go for your training?

JB: I went to Newport, Rhode Island for basic training, basic boot camp, entrance level training and that was the introduction to the Navy.

INT: Did you go to any advance schooling or training with the Navy?

JB: Originally I was in the V-12 Program for a little over a year, I was at Holy Cross at that time. My brother was too, we were both there. That was in the days of the Sullivan brothers, five brothers, and they looked at us as twins and I don't know what they said but they may have leaned toward separating us. He went on to the door of Midshipman School and at the last minute was not entered. He went on to the boot camp Navy and eventually to the mid-Pacific, Johnston Island, where he served as a weatherman. My training in the Navy after boot camp, I was sent to Great Lakes Naval Station and entered the Great Lakes Hospital Corps School where I trained as a hospital corpsman. Subsequent to that I went to Bethesda, Maryland, the National Naval Medical Center, and was enrolled in the naval medical school there where I took various training courses and graduated from the school of medical technology. Then the fun began. I served there a year and then I was enlisted in the Fleet Marine Force, the FMF, to do duty with the 5th Marine Service Corps at Camp Pendleton. Subsequent to that training, I was sent to San Diego where I was shipped overseas to Guam. After a while I was assigned to the 5th Marine Service Corps and I was there for about nine months. I was in charge of recording return of medical supplies from the 1st and 5th Marine Divisions in the Pacific.

INT: Did you wear a Marine uniform?

JB: Yes.

INT: But you had the Navy stripes?

JB: Navy patch, yes. We had both the dress blues and the khaki colored regulation uniforms. That was interesting because we were right out in the training fields where they were using live ammunition. We weren't involved in any military performance because corpsmen were restricted, they were not allowed to handle guns or military equipment. I'm sure in the course of time there was some instance where a corpsman would pick up a rifle because if he didn't he was going to get killed but it was a rule that they were not to be involved in military personal action.

INT: Was Guam secured when you were there?

JB: Yes, and that was interesting from this standpoint. Landed over there after the war had ended in August of that year and as far as the island being secure, it was essentially although there were many instances of Japanese military who had hid and when it was secured, these people took to the jungles. There were several instances while I was there of the Japanese soldiers either being shot or surrendered. I would guess there were well over two hundred that had stayed behind. So it made life in the camp scary at times. I don't know if there were any American personnel killed by these snipers but there were instances of clashes so to speak.

INT: Did you ever see any of these Japanese soldiers?

JB: I personally didn't although they were near our base, the 5th Marine Service Depot. They were near us to the point where you could hear the gunshots in the distance occasionally. I really wasn't interested in seeing any of them personally and certainly not at the end of a gun. [laughs] It was interesting and I met some friends of mine from Albany, a fellow by the name of Ray Williams, he was a high school classmate of mine at Cathedral. Then there was another gentleman, I can't remember his name now, but he was also from north Albany. In high school we were the south-enders at Cathedral and this fellow was at Sacred Heart in north Albany and we were quite strong rivalries. Of course both the south-enders and the Sacred Heart north-enders were Irish and that led to the rivalry.

INT: What was life like on Guam? What was the climate like there?

JB: Well the climate was extremely warm and probably at least half the year, monsoon rains, heavy rains where it would rain for maybe three days and nights at a time, heavy heavy downpour. We were in canvas tents which didn't protect us all that much so you got used to wearing soggy shoes and damp clothing, never did quite get away from it. The only real respite was the mess hall. You were under cover there and for the most part, we were able to get hot meals. Nothing extraordinary but good.

INT: How large was your medical unit?

JB: This was not a medical unit per se, it was a unit of maybe six men all involved in the collection and listing and preparing to return medical goods to a base in the United States. We had a lieutenant jg (junior grade) who was the commander of the unit and we had a chief pharmacist mate who was the top enlisted and then we had four pharmacist mates. We had six men in all and it was collection, take this one, write it down, put it over in that pile.

INT: So basically at the end of the war it was just cataloging and collecting?

JB: Yes, we served both the 1st and the 6th Marine Divisions that were in the Pacific. One was in China, the 1st Marine Division was in China and the 6th was in Okinawa, that area.

INT: Do you have any remembrances that stand out more than others?

JB: There were several pleasant occasions and some kind of scary occasions. I remember when I was shipped out of San Diego to Pearl Harbor and stationed at Pearl Harbor as a holding station. They had a baseball league there of former, as many as they could, major league ballplayers. The lieutenant in charge of that operation called me in one day and said, "I understand you played quite a bit of baseball." I said, "Yes I did. I played in grade school, high school, college, semi-pro and that all occurred in a period of four or five years." He said they were trying to get as many trained baseball players as they could to form a league. So I wound up being assigned to the league and one of the men that I became close with was Dick Bartell who had been the NY Giants shortstop and was an

exceptionally good ball player. He knew that I had played in the infield at short and third and he said, “Why don’t I take you under my wing? I’ll teach you a few of the things that I learned.” I said “Fine.” The league ran about three months and I of course after less than that was shipped on to Guam from Pearl Harbor. It was interesting because many of these players were people that I had followed as a kid. I mention Bartell because he was the one I was closest to. Needless to say, the ball players were fed better, it seems [breaks off]

INT: You mentioned here that you played against the “Yankee Clipper,” Joe DiMaggio.

JB: Joe DiMaggio, only briefly in one game. He shook hands with me and I was quite thrilled over that. I was a St. Louis Cardinal fan even as a six-year-old. I didn’t meet any of my Cardinal idols; I would have liked to have met their first baseman, Stan Musial. He wasn’t there until after I left; I found out later he came there. I was a good, sound, pleasant—if anything can be pleasant in war time—period in my life.

INT: You mentioned here that booze was tough to control. What do you mean by that?

JB: It was kind of tough to control. Even though the Marine Corps and I’m sure other groups in the Navy and so on, would have their officer clubs and then they’d have enlisted man clubs and there would be almost invariably, a sufficient supply of booze, primarily beer. It flowed freely and some guys couldn’t handle it, the same as in civilian life. The Navy and I’m sure the Army the same way, they were very strict, without being overly, about the abuse of alcohol. For the most part, you didn’t see any of the famous riots between the Navy and the Marines, they were bitter rivals although as a Navy corpsman I was often sought out by the Marines. You know, “Doc, doc, gimme some aspirin.” They were always looking out for Doc, making sure he was okay, had good quarters. And in battle of course, they were well protected by the Marines. So that was a novel and very rewarding association.

INT: Where were you when you heard about V-J Day? (Victory over Japan)

JB: I was on Guam.

INT: What was the reaction there?

JB: We didn’t have all that many troops, of course. You always see the pictures of San Francisco and there’s an awful lot of Navy personnel. There was joy and needless to say, there was a little extra in the rations. [Makes a pouring motion.]

INT: Do you remember where you were and your reaction to the death of President Roosevelt?

JB: Yes, I was on the way to the west coast. I was in Bethesda at the Naval Medical Center when Roosevelt was brought in, prior to his death. They allowed us, the corpsmen and the nursing personnel, to be by the front gate and when he came, he waved. Here was the most famous man in the world. Right after that I was shipped to the west coast and

within a month of the time he was at Bethesda, he passed. I was in Salt Lake City on the train going west. That was real letdown. I was a strong Democrat, I had been raised on President Roosevelt.

INT: When were you discharged?

JB: I was discharged in May of '45. Went from Guam on a tour of the South Pacific on the way back to the States. Went down to Kwajalein, Eniwetok and all those islands down toward Australia. That was quite a trip, a weary trip, then back to Pearl Harbor for a week or so and then was transferred to ships to take us to Norfolk down through the Canal. That was an experience that was quite different, something that we had never done before. It brought back a lot of our school days where we had studied the Canal. It had the nickname "The Big Ditch" and it was like a big ditch just wide enough to accommodate some of the major naval vessels. It was very serene with a big lake out in the middle of it, I don't recall the name of it, but it was quite different after being in the Pacific. The passage through the Canal took us over a week because we had to wait at the Pacific end for ships coming through from the Atlantic side. It was a novel experience.

Once we got to the Atlantic, we went up the east coast to Norfolk Naval Base. We were discharged from the ships to shore and we got on trains and went up to Lido Beach which was a discharge center. I was discharged there on May 29 and came home to Albany just in time for Memorial Day, the next day. Got quite a kick out of marching in the Memorial Day parade. Of course there were huge numbers in the Albany area. That was pretty much the extent of the homecoming. My parents greeted me when I got off the train in Albany and that was a happy reunion. My brother had gotten home a week or so earlier.

It was a novel experience being in the service with a twin brother because when we were together—"Hey, Bailey"—two heads would pop up. I would say I had a normal but exciting and safe and healthy enjoyable career in the Navy. Prayed to God every night of course to keep us all safe and maybe strengthened my own personal religion because of the uncertainty of everything.

INT: Did you ever make use of the GI Bill?

RB: Yes, when I got out in '45 I returned to Siena College on the GI Bill. It was significant in that I had three or four years before graduation and subsequent to graduation, I entered Siena graduate school for two years at night. I don't know how many thousands, but a significant amount of money and I was very glad to have it. And needless to say, my father was glad to have both of his sons on the GI Bill. My brother finished Siena in three years and went up to RPI (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute) and enrolled in the architect course up there, continuing with the GI Bill. He did very well, he graduated with honors and went on to work with the telephone company and had an excellent career with them. The GI Bill did us a lot of good, enabled us to continue our education without worrying about money.

INT: Did you ever use the 52-20 club?

JB: Yes. I was discharged in May of '45 and from June 1st until September 1st let's say, I took good care of that.

INT: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

JB: Fort Orange Post Number 30 of the American Legion. I still have a card there—over fifty years, fifty-two I guess. Had a lot of good times there, that was the place to go on Friday nights. Beer was plenty and cheap, ten cents, whatever, and they had a lot of comradeship there. I met fellows that I had served with in the service. My father put my brother and I in the American Legion right after we went into the service so I've been a member for sixty-four years. That's a long time, I've seen a lot of changes there. [laughs] But that was a great place for us as veterans to hang out on weekends and when I was there, I started a basketball team. My brother and I both had athletic scholarships to Siena, primarily for basketball, and so when we joined the American Legion after coming home, I was there for a while and one of the top Legionnaires there said, "Bailey, I understand you're quite a good basketball player. Why don't you get a team up for us?" So we got a team at the Fort Orange Post of the American Legion and we went around to all the different places in the area, the capital district. One I remember very strongly was down at the Cocksackie Institute, it's the next step beyond reform school. We played down there and I remember one of our boys got into a mix-up. They were a tough group as you might imagine, all from New York City, and harassed us something awful. We were beating them and one of our guys had a shoulder dislocated and when he hit the deck, a roar came up from the residents: "Kick 'im, kick 'im." One of the chief guards had to quiet them down but we had to take him to a hospital in the Catskills where his shoulder was set and he was discharged and we brought him back home. That was a novel experience; I wouldn't recommend it but you talk about having to be tough—you had to be tough.

INT: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

JB: Well, I think it focused on the medical aspect because when I returned to Siena, I majored in biology, pre-med, and the combination of the GI Bill and the athletic scholarship allowed me to get all my pre-med training. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get into medical school as many others couldn't. We had thirty-three graduates of Siena at that time, in '48, biology majors, and two of them got into medical school. The rest of us just couldn't, there was no room. It wasn't that we weren't qualified enough, most of us went on to get a master's degree which indicates some advanced ability, academically speaking. Subsequent to graduation, I went to school nights at Siena for two years to get a master's degree in biology and subsequent to that, I went to work in the drug field, the pharmaceutical field. I had about fourteen years of very successful employment: there were a number of instances where I was cited for outstanding sales, et cetera. It was a very good learning experience on how to deal with medical personnel, doctors, pharmacists and so on and so forth, and also to deal with other pharmaceutical personnel that you associated with.

That stood me in good stead when I went to work in the Health Department in 1966. My background and training gave me a good start grade-wise. I stayed in the Health Department for twenty-eight years and did very well financially. I was assigned to head up a program for the United States government for the identification, training, and assistance of veterans with health career training and experience. Set them up to get them into either a health institution for additional training like x-ray technologists and medical techs and licensed practical nurses. Then once they completed that training, we assisted in placing them in employment situations. It was an exciting and sometimes frustrating period but I was quite pleased because at the end, the people in Washington designated me as the number one program director in the United States. Didn't get any more money [laughs] but it was an honor to be singled out by them. I had significant experience in the health field and finally retired—I was going to say discharged—[laughs] from the Health Department after twenty-eight years.

I was home in retirement for a period of about six months when I said I gotta do something. Of course I had a family in the meantime. I was seventy-two when I went back into the employment scene and went to work for JC Penney, Dick's Sporting Goods, a couple of years at each, Sears, most of the time they'd only take you on for maybe a year. I finally went to work for Boscov's department store in College Center and did very well. Of course we got minimum wage which was something because I still had my Social Security and retirement pension from the State Health Department. I worked for them for six years and the last three I had some difficulties health-wise, not life threatening but enough to make it so the doctors said to calm down and take it easy. I had some cardiac distress and was in the hospital for ten days, went back to Boscov's and stayed on for the summer, went back to them in August and said I'd like to come back to work. The woman who was in charge of Personnel said they'd love to have me but only with a statement from my doctor. My doctor, who is still my current doctor, Doctor Stridditch, excellent man, said, "What do you want to work for? You don't need the money, do you?" I said "No, I don't," and I didn't, I had really sufficient funds but I wanted to be with people. That was my whole life, with people, either playing ball or academically or medically, it was always with people and I thrived on it and that was my existence. I stayed for three more years, for a total of six, at Boscov's and then I left medically. They were very nice about the whole thing, they gave me as much as they could in the way of retirement funds. I did very well with Boscov's. One year counting my NY State pension, my Social Security, and my Boscov's income working forty hours a week, I was quite proud of the fact that I grossed \$62,000. That was significant. I lived over in Beltrone Living Center for seniors for six years, enjoyed myself, got to know a lot of people but then I had some more medical problems and they didn't want me fixing my own meals so that's when my son and daughter looked up this place. I've been here three months to the day and it's been wonderful. I was having a weight problem before and I've put on sixteen pounds and that comes from eating good food three times a day. So that's where we are today and I love it here and am so glad there is such a good place as this. I'm able to thrive on it.

INT: Thank you very much for your interview.

JB: My pleasure.