

**Clarence Blaisdell
Veteran**

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Interviewer**

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MG: I'm Mike Gridley, editor of the Messenger and we're here today talking to Clarence Blaisdell. You're going to share some of your memories of serving. How did it start for you?

CB: It started in '42, I was going to school. I go home at noon and my draft notice is there. The day before I had already gone down and enlisted in the Marine Corp [both laugh]. So I took the draft notice off to the draft board. They cancelled it. That was on December 15, '42. January of 1943, I went to Parris Island. I went through seven weeks of boot training. I went to [unclear] for a shipment and then I was there two weeks. I shipped [unclear] to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and was put into, at that time, the [unclear] Fleet, Marine Corp. Unit, also artillery. I was with them until June or July. We got our Battalion Colors, so we named it the 13th Defense Battalion. I stayed with it till the war ended. While I was there in Guantanamo I was in the Coastal Artillery Outfit 6 and 50s[?]. We had guns on leeward port. I'd go out there and [unclear] for a month. I was on Woodward Quartent[?] I'd go there for a month. Then I'd go out to Escovedo Bay, which [was] another gun enblazement. I'd be out there a month. That's what I was doing. When I was back at the base I was doing normal guard duty, ammunitions dumps and fuel docks and supply areas.

MG: Now when you're on the Coastal Artillery, what were you doing?

CB: I was parked.

MG: What is that?

CB: You have a canister that the powder comes in, just a metal canister about the size of a soft drink canister you'd see in restaurants. You'd take the powder bag out [of] deshellment[?], put the shell into the chamber. Then, you holler "clear" and you put the powder bag in. The Gunner closed the breech and he puts a primer zip up[?], maybe 30-odd-6 caliber primer blank, puts that in. Then, the Captain of the gun, he's got a pair of field glasses that are graduated, so he can get the [unclear] and the heights of the trajectory. He'd holler "point". Then, the point setter and the traverset[?], the guy that steers the gun – it's all manual, nothing automatic, it was all manual – he'd holler "point". They all [unclear] point the gun and pull the [unclear] and make the gun go off.

MG: How accurate were those guns?

CB: The guns were often a 1917 cruiser [both laugh]. So this was back in '43-'44. We more or less protected Guantanamo Bay in case [of] sub attack or something like that. Because we had sub convoys off Guantanamo that were coming in from New Orleans going through the Panama Canal that would join up and go to North Africa for the Mediterranean area. And there were nights when you'd see flashes on the horizon roughly twenty miles out. If you saw a quick flash,

that was an ammunition ship. But, if you see a big flash and it still glows, you know that was a tanker. That's about it.

MG: Did you ever have and kind of contact?

CB: Well, the only contact we had was when Italy surrounded us. We had two Italian subs come in. Two destroyers, no two PC boats and a PBY went out, escorted them in. They'd been at sea for over a year. But, I found out later they had these tramsteamers that were supplying them from South America. [unclear] saw them [unclear] whereabouts these American ships were coming from. They were supplying them with fresh food and ammunition.

MG: And you brought them to Guantanamo?

CB: Then the American crews after a couple weeks took the subs, for all I know, went to New Orleans. That's the last I heard of them.

MG: How long total were you down there?

CB: I got there right after Easter Sunday of '43. I left there January of '46. I was up and down and on the way back we had to stop in Puerto Rico and pick up some soldiers. Then we stopped [at] St. Thomas. There's one other port [where] we stopped and picked up some more soldiers and bring them back for discharge. We come in the New York harbor and the Old Lady was standing up there at 7:00 in the morning just as the mist was rising off the bay there. She looked good [both laugh]. I hadn't seen her in three years.

MG: What do you remember about Cuba? Did you get to see any of it other than the base?

CB: There was Cuzco Wells. That was a big cemetery, military cemetery. Another one was Escanedo Bay. Another one was San Juan area where Teddy Roosevelt's...and then Santiago, the old Spanish fort at the entrance of Santiago Harbor. We spent most of our time there in that sector.

MG: It's not a place that people get to see too often today.

CB: No. In '43 we got our Battalion colors 1300[?] marines, and a defense battalion. What they did is they...Say you were with an outfit and you had a lot of casualties. They chopped down 500 of our men to give to you and then maybe six months or so later they'd take 250 and give to somebody else who needed replacements.

MG: So you saw a lot of men.

CB: Yeah, at the end I was one of the 250 left. And some of the fellas that I got letters from that were in Tarawa[?] One officer there, I can't remember his name, now we all liked [him], he got hit when he hit the beach and he lost an arm. That was the only one I ever heard of in the outfit. And, oh yeah, when I come back to the States for discharge, I was a week maybe, a marine barracks there shipped me to Bainbridge, Maryland for discharge. When I'm in Bainbridge, the first night my squad leader, I hadn't seen him in two years, was there and he still was a sergeant [both laugh]. He'd been all over. Hell, he had more ribbons on then fruit salad [laughter].

MG: So you came back in '46?

CB: Yes, January '46.

MG: And you came right back to B-Ville?

CB: Yes.

MG: Now what did you do after that? Did you have family?

CB: My father was in bad shape, so I went to work at [Tailbones?]. I didn't like the work. I was pulling [boats wagon?] in a [melt shop?]. Then I went to work in the village in the water department. And I was in an auto accident. I went to the doctor. The doctor said, "You can't do anymore construction work." So, I belong to the Moose Lodge. And a secondary there said something about tending bar. I says, "I don't know anything about tending bar." So, I went to work part-time tending bar. I worked there for 25 years. After 25 years, the doctor says, "You've got to get out of here. There's too much stress and your legs are bothering you." So, I went to work for the school for 13 years. That was it. I retired when I was 62.

MG: Do you have any other family around the area?

CB: I have one sister left. She's in Florida, down around Dale City there. And I have several nieces and nephews around the area, up on Burn Road and the old Route 31 by Connors Road there and up in Bunnyville to South Fall.

MG: Have you ever had any contact with anyone form the Marines?

CB: Just one. It was Glen Young. He lived in Syracuse. And he was with me right up till we got discharged. I haven't seen him in years. He got married and then something happened and that's the last I've seen him. I don't know if he still lives in Syracuse or where he is. I've looked in the telephone directory. Never could find his name.

MG: Now as far as your years in the Service, anything you remember about that that sticks out in your mind?

CB: Nothing special. The only thing I can remember was I was fishing off Niskaneedle Bay there in the bay. I was all alone on an old rickety rowboat. Here comes a sea turtle right up my bow [both laugh]. Oh he scared me. He was as big as the boat was.

MG: Have you ever been back down in that area?

CB: I always wanted to take that trip, hit all the spots where I had [gone].

MG: Well, you still got time. OK, well thanks for talking to us today, Clarence.