

**Murray M. Benson
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke
New York State Military Museum
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on
May 23, 2001,
Lexington Avenue Armory
Manhattan**

Q: Mr. Benson tell us about where you were born and raised?

MB: I was born raised here in New York City, spend almost my entire life here in the city, had a few you know military service and a few jobs. So basically, I'm a rare apple and a native-born New Yorker.

Q: What was your father and mothers name?

MB: Their name was sane, the came here as children many many years ago consumption of those families the name change too many times and so they just go by the name best.

Q: Any brothers or sisters?

MB: I have two younger brothers; one is 5 years younger than me and the other one is 12 years younger than me. And also, one is down in Texas and one is here in New York.

Q: And what about where did you go to school?

MB: I went to school here in New York and I went to City College here in New York and I did my graduate work at NYU and in the army was very lawful. They send me to ASCP where the line of work where I went to work for a University in the Bronx. So, my entire mutation is right here in New York City.

Q: So, what year did you graduate from high school?

MB: I got out of high school in 1938.

Q: And, so what were you doing when Pearl Harbor?

MB: When Pearl Harbor came, I was already in college, spending my time in college and across from that interrupted all the world studies. But I had already finished about half, I've been half way through college by then.

Q: Okay, did you kinda like drop out and?

MB: Yeah, I took a year off in 1940, my need was finical as the city called it at the time "tuition was completely" free so the important most thing to do was to get through living cost. Well this was the heart of the depression; the depression wasn't over until the war began. So, I took a year off and I had a semi military experience, I would 1940 I signed up with the Civil Conservation Corps (CCC) and I went out about far away from New York as you can possible go. I wound up in the Olympic Peninsula in the state of Washington Marisol conversation. It was a very interesting experience. Where they helped with

paramilitary and in a sense, it helped eased the way in the army later. The world is a totally strange place coming in from basic training.

Q: And where and when did you go to basic training?

MB: My basic training was of a satellite camp before Mahwah New Jersey it was a Segar, the camp had a Segar nutrition part of the cigarette pole. So, we had up to two months of basic training there and then we went on to training.

Q: And from there you went?

MB: From there I went to the ASTP, Army Specialized Training Program, where I learned the language program and I went to Fordham Universities for about six to seven years. Until the program was shut down.

Q: And, so the whole program took place at the college?

MB: Yeah, it took place at Fordham University.

Q: And where did you go from there?

MB: From there I went on to a very special school, to camp Ritchie Maryland which a Military Intelligence Training Center and I guess my German was good enough, so they selected me for that. And I also completed my undergraduate work in psychology, so I was trained as a prisoner war integrator. It was very interesting experience.

Q: Now how long was that school?

MB: That ran about three or four months and then we went overseas.

Q: Now at that point what rank were you?

MB: I was T/5 Technician fifth grader, they we very sorry about giving out promotions out to us.

Q: And you went overseas on a troopship?

MB: I went on a troopship, went to England, went to replacement betel outside of Birmingham and with all the usual run around I eventually ended up at the main headquarters outside of Paris. The integrator headquarters.

Q: So basically, you went right from England to Paris?

MB: Yes

Q: Okay and tell us about what your daily routine was like, what did you like to do there?

MB: Well, when the Battle of the Bulge broke in December 16th of 44, I was still there and just waiting for an assignment. I decided, I went up to the Fourth Cavalry Group which revered from cavalry from the Upper Midwest and I came up there as a replacement as an integrator and the situation was pretty chaotic, there weren't too many prisoners to integrate, but I did work a little with the intelligence setup. Mostly one of the problems cause they weren't like most Atlanteans, they were really aware of the value of what we were doing. So, there was an outcome I had to hassle, they wanted me to be their KB. Which was I wouldn't want to do that? When I said, when I asked when Christmas most was chaotic was. They said go out and get your own, this is my cell phone here.

Q: Now what type of prisoners did you interrogate, officers?

MB: They were very few, that we had a few listed men, it was, and the situation was very chaotic. The Germans were on the run at this point, the battle was more or less compressed, so the only persons I saw was the ones that didn't have enough information to give anyways. Of course, we had a few oddballs, I had a couple of young sailors who would talk German sailors in prison or what you're doing up here. We would get the man to the boat and say what boats? The boats to evacuate the German troops back across the various rivers; the Roaring River and the Ring River. So, I passed; of course, I passed on the information that wasn't exactly critical at the time because they're on the run anyways. But it was an interesting experience.

Q: And what else did you do besides...?

MB: Well, we reached the right Martin Bridge and we got to see some combat on the other side, but that very same morning my; I got my orders to report back to Paris and I went back there got about a ten day rest after running around in the combat zone. And then there was a completely new type of assignment. The war was almost over, this was the end of March beginning of April of 45 and the interrogator team along no longer required to work with prisoners, so they did something very imaginative they teamed us up with counterintelligence people who were mostly young lawyers investigators, some were ex-cops and some newspapermen. But basically, involved in the detoxification program and wound up in the city of Cologne rounding up all political prisons we could get people call automatic arrest category. They remember the Nazi party have been holding various civilian officers. We got those guys interrogating, find out what they have done. Gestapo agents wanted to reach them assessment and the training we had was very valuable, understanding what was going on within the German culture. It was very dynamic situation, as a matter of fact I wound up doing a study; writing a paper about this much later when I graduate, on the relationship between the Nazi Party and the German civilian administration and it was very interesting for us to see what these people thought. And in a way it was kind of parallel of what happens over here. If you ask somebody if you were a Nazi, they said, no that meant they were not a member of the Nazi Party but their culture, theories may have been very much sympathetic. The same thing I mentioned to somebody today, it's the same thing as the relationship between the democratic of a small d over here and with a capital d, same difference. So, we did get some; you know experience with that, worked very hard tracing these people down finding out what they thought and making some kind of study preparing for the Lunenburg Trails also. The interesting thing is we had mostly no small fish, the big ones wound up in Nuremberg. The small ones were eventually released, and the Cold War was already on its way like it was the end of 1945.

Q: Now, did you actually have to go out and make these arrested?

MB: Oh sure of course we were you know acting as policemen on the sentence chasing down those people relying on our phones, replying on all kinds of information of so and so was back he was a big Nazi, where is he located, so and so. And the interesting thing was that I've written about the Germans had no reluctance to denounce each other to us. They said so and so is big Nazi why did you arrest him? Well we found out what was really

going on but the so-called big Nazi that rules the city had problems with the other person wanted. So, these are stories that nobody really hears about.

Q: Any kind of resistance from any of these people?

MB: No, no

Q: They all went willingly?

MB: Yeah, they were glad to see us. They must rather have us than the Russians and a matter of fact down in the southwest the French were using African troops.

Q: Now, how many were involved in your company doing this?

MB: We had a combination of several teams in the city of Cologne to being with. There was five of us on the interrogator team and the rest for Calvin College, we had 19 people all together and closes or record a room but people were coming back and there was a dynamic situation different graphical refugees all over the place, evacuees who were coming, back road city people trying to put it back together again so we had to work with whatever we could. The way of performance, information's, issues if you will. Yeah it was interesting.

Q: Now, were you involved with any arrests or any Americans or...?

MB: No

Q: Anything to do with the Black Market?

MB: No, there was no real Black Market at the point. The Black Market was back in France, in Belgium as a matter of fact it was an active black market because we had a ration of cigarettes the week and of course it was equivalent to fifty cents. Well in the black market in Paris you could get the equivalent for twenty dollars for a pack of cigarettes. Outside of that I think the German was involved in their own black market. There was some involvement with currency transactions we were getting paid in occupation marks and there was a lot of sending it back and converting it back to dollars over here and the army put a stop to it really quick, but outside of that it was pretty straight forward.

Q: Now, did you get to participate in any of the Nuremberg Investigations?

MB: No, I got home before that. I left in December of 45.

Q: So, what was it like over there when the war ended for you?

MB: Well the country was pretty much in the state of Rome and we worked closer to the military government trying to put together some kind of civil administration. The first thing we do was to locate technicians, people to turn on the water works together, get the sewers going, get the waters flowing. I being to clean up some of these buildings and we didn't live off of the civil economy of course. We had our water and own rations, but we saw the scratches going to be built up again there are a lot of, one of the big problems was displaced persons sales. People came mostly from what is now Easter New York and a lot of them didn't want to go back. They knew they were going to be up against the Russians, a lot of Poles didn't want to go back, Russian prisoners didn't want to go back. The interesting thing was in the rural area was these men basically been prisoner of war working on the German farms had better relationship with the German framers than they

would have than going back, they convinced them not to go back. And of course, we had people coming out of concentration camps, but they were separated to their own situation.

Q: So, when was it that you came back to the states?

MB: I came back, I was discharged in January of 46.

Q: When you came back to the states where were you discharged from?

MB: I was discharged from around this area in Jersey. That was the basic discharged point you know.

Q: And what did you do once you were discharged?

MB: I got back into college and it took me about 6-8 months to finish the credits and I got my degree and then I spend a year looking for a job. A lot of men coming back, and the situation was not the way it should be.

Q: Did you get any kind of employment compensation, for unemployment insurance?

MB: Yeah, I had, right at the end of the war there was something called a 5220 Club, if you were a veteran you got \$20 a week for 52 weeks. That was your unemployment insurance, that's why it's called 5220 so. And most of us got jobs after, doing what we had to do.

Q: And did you get married at some point?

MB: No

Q: Once you completed your schooling and after that year that you were unemployed, what then happened?

MB: Well, I wound up working in fundraising for charitable organization like Federation of Jewish Philanthropies and Jewish Appeals and eventually with the March of Dimes. We had a field representative in upstate New York for the Jewish Appeals organizing campaigns in small communities all the way out to Buffalo, it was interesting. Of course, there was a lot of provisional sentences at the time, late 40s early 50s, so lots of cooperation it's was interesting.

Q: Okay, and that's basically what you...?

MB: Well I had a lot of career in market research for many years and eventually I did wind up in Wall Street and I retired as a Co-Marketing future expert.

Q: That sounds pretty interesting.

MB: Yeah it was exciting. It was great. Of course, it was pretty chancy, but I kept on telling people that this is not for amateurs, these are not mutual funds you've got to know exactly what you're doing.

Q: Have you over the years kept in touch with any of the men you served with?

MB: No, we had a small reunion a few years later but they all disappeared, they all vanished. And the few friends I had before the war, a few of them I kept in touch with, but they all scattered, everybody is gone. Of course, only a few are with us. Out of the 16 million men from WWII there's only 4 million of us left. I'm going at the rate of a thousand a day.

Q: You belong to any Veterans organizations?

MB: No

Q: Okay, anything that stands out in your mind, anything unusual or exciting at that time?

MB: Yes, as a New York resident I think this would be relevant. The country was not really unified at the beginning of the war, but not of course it is more modernized we have television, media. But there was a great deal of resentment or activity to New York. We kept hearing that New York was not really America in the sense and there was some unpleasant incidents; I don't know if you have to cut the tape on this. When I was in the sports cavalry reunion, I was an outsider; I was a New Yorker, and this was in the middle of the battle I didn't see anything actions myself. I was back there in the headquarters company, but there was men who was brought up in a traditional, a little birth tradition; isolationist American tradition shouldn't be in the war and just sitting and talking and they said to me; it's all the fault of Roosevelt and you New Yorker that was in the war. It was very nice to hear. And when we need transportation constantly moving almost every other day it was a mobile until, I had to scrap around for transportation. Nobody took care of me, they had nothing against me personally; I was just a New Yorker and I was an outsider.

Q: Now these guys were mostly from the Midwest or West Coast?

MB: Upper Midwest, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Dakotas, all that area. And they were proud of the fact that they were the sister organization to cross the 7th cavalry, so I told them if you're proud of that get lost. They really didn't know how to use personal and ourselves as a matter of fact in the middle of the ride on the plane, we were going across and we moved almost every day and three o'clock in the morning they came to wake me up, come over to the command pole somebody had found an obsolete German military telephone directory. The Germans valued it; I should get up at three o'clock in the morning to translate a telephone directory. So, you know we had that sort of things, but on the other hand the rest was good, we tried to do something worthwhile in Germany, tried to. The interesting thing was that we did have contact with some Russian officer who were trying to get their own people to go back and somehow, I noticed they were getting very cold, they talked to us, of course it was the opening dun of the cold war. We didn't know it was until words later, don't be friends with the Americans.

Q: Anything else that stands out in your mind that maybe we didn't touch on?

MB: Well, not really, I think the codes that everybody this oddball experience, everybody has war stories. One of the interesting things was that the trains here in this country as far as intelligent or so extremely impressive, very attractive, very thorough and one thing the commanding general opposed down there in camp Richardson. One reason why we got caught shot at Pearl Harbor was that cause the Japanese view of the Sunday morning after payday knew everybody was going to be so we're gonna change your way of thinking getting off a seven day week, we're going on to an eight day week just to shake up your thinking that was a magical thing. And in the scenarios, in the interrogation training were very magical, we had simulator prisoners' people who were native Germans, in German uniforms and with a prepared story that we had to extract,

and it got tougher and tougher as it went a long in training. But it was excellent training, it was very impressive, and we thought not all the people that were running were morons, they knew pretty well what they were doing.

Q: Did you get involved in any training with cryptography or...?

MB: No, we didn't. We did have some training in photo interpretation but that was kind of a motivating force plus it was very tricky, they set up strange things for us to try out and it was very unusual experience. But for example, they had what was an airplane stranded at the backyard of a house, we could see the white wings. Everybody said it looked like an airplane, no it wasn't an airplane it was the housewife who put out her linens to dry in the sun. So, it was tricky, but somebody was using imagination setting up the training program, it was excellent. And the language program of course made later on when I was Monterey California, but the ASTP program was imaginative too very very good. Conversations entirely and you had to of course you had to get to know the language.

Q: Did you find it difficult or...?

MB: Well, German was not an easy language Mark Dwayne said that you had to go to the end of the sentence first to find the verb to see what's going on. That's what we get used to and being in Germany for almost a year and continue practicing. But the interesting thing was the commanding officer of my team was a fine gentleman, he was a Mormon from Salt Lake City and he relied on the rest of us to do the speaking while he took care of the administration. It was an interesting combination. He was a German speaker off to New York City, but we got along fine.

Q: Now coming back to the states what kind of reception did you get; the war was over at that point?

MB: Well it was a little old celebration; it wasn't unique because of so many men coming back and we had our parties, and everybody was happy to see us. And I was for the sense that none of my friends was casualty, just one had an injury but outside all of us went back. But eventually they just drifted off; you know the war was over and we had to get on with our lives. We didn't really see ourselves as heroes, just glad to get out. So today, now everybody looks back and say what a great generation. We didn't have much choices of the matter for it. We didn't ask for it, it came to us.

Q: Now looking back do you think the whole experience was worthwhile?

MB: Well like I said I wouldn't want to repeat it but I wouldn't want to give it up either. As a matter of fact, now, a couple years ago I was making rounds at the bar with a couple friends of mine, who were in the navy and were talking to sailors; young sailors. We were not completely aware that our generation, they look up to us in the sense if you serve in the military or navy whatever it was. There's a futurity in this brotherhood, we have a shared experience whether it was the basic training and the nonsense and the discipline and all that, but the certain amount of discipline is internalized and there is a camaraderie. I don't know how I feel if I men in the German veterans from that period, but I did meet some and we did share some experiences. They've been in the underground so; they were also that relationship and the younger generation is not inaccurate.

Q: Okay, anything else you'd like to add?

MB: Will there be a published report on this sometime, any kind of data?

Q: This will go into our archives and it will be open to anyone doing any research on WWII. Any family members looking out to find out about relatives.

MB: Well, I don't think it will be a problem trying to locate me, my whole family knows where I am, my friends know where I am. But the interesting thing was the relationship with the rest of the company that was highly significant to us. Where Hillbillies, they didn't like the office and there was a certain amount of political amenity to it, at least men who a lot of them had been in the army before and they were not nice guys. Their circle, the hillbillies you know they had their own culture, I was thought later where the treatment of black troops. Where Blacks were segregated, they had very little. So, we had that experience of seeing as New Yorker, we're different but we're not Americans, we're New Yorkers. But of course, you have to think a little about that, and now of course everybody wants to come here. And the time as a matter of fact 1 out of 15 American now live in New York area so more New Yorkers than any other kind of Americans. So that's us.

Q: Okay so I guess this is a good point to end the interview and I thank you very much.

MB: My pleasure