

**Harold Leonard Bloom, Jr.**  
**Narrator**

**Wayne Clark**  
**Interviewer**  
**NYS Military Museum & Veterans Research Center**  
**Saratoga Springs, New York**

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**Greenfield, New York**

Harold Bloom **HB**  
Wayne Clark **WC**  
Mrs. Bloom **Mrs. B**

**WC:** Today is the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, 2012. We are in Greenfield, New York. My name is Wayne Clark, I'm with the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga. Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name and date and place of birth, please?

**HB:** Harold Leonard Bloom, and I was born in Providence, Rhode Island on April 7, 1925.

**WC:** Did you attend school in Providence?

**HB:** Yes, I did.

**WC:** Did you graduate from high school?

**HB:** I graduated from high school, and I went to Rhode Island State College, from where I was drafted in 1943.

**WC:** All right. Do you remember where you were when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

**HB:** Yeah, I believe I was at home and I felt that we would get even. I guess I was more angry than anything else. I had no doubt that we were going to win at that time, so that's why I was angry more than afraid. Afraid didn't come till later.

**WC:** Now, did your life change after that point.

**HB:** One of the major things that happened, is there was a shortage of lots of things. Very quickly, there developed a shortage of metal. I didn't have much of my own, but when I went to school every day, I would see piles of metal on the sidewalk where people were collecting it and leaving it to be picked up. I didn't have much of my own, but I had one of something that was very precious to me. I had an old sword that my grandfather had picked up someplace and let me play with when I was a kid. When I got older, I simply took it with me and brought it home. And when the request for metal became rather strident, I took it, in tears, and I put it on the pile of metal in front of the house, and went to school, not very happily. My mother detected right away that I was pretty upset, and unbeknownst to me, my mother went and picked it back up and stuck it in my closet. Not until after I went to war and I got wounded and came home and recuperated and went back to school, one day back from school I was looking for something in my closet, and my hand touched cold steel. I pulled it out and there was the sword, and I've still got it. I don't have it here, unfortunately; it's in my other place. But I've still got it.

**WC:** Was your father alive?

**HB:** My father was alive, but he already too old to be drafted or to join up.

**WC:** What type of work did he do?

**HB:** He was a butcher. But he had been a jewelry maker, and he had done lots of other things. My father was a jack of all trades. So if he couldn't join, he decided he'd volunteer to do some work to help the war effort. He went and took a course in torch burning of metal and went to work in the shipyard in...

**Mrs. B:** Was it Quonset Point?

**HB:** No, it wasn't Quonset Point, but it was another place in Rhode Island where they were building ships. Kaiser was building ships there, and he went to Kaiser. And he had all kinds of guts. They used to use him to go all the way up to the upper mast on destroyer escorts, which are long, narrow boats. And while they were fitting them up, he would burn the holes in the mast so they could put communications gear down below. So he always remarked that the ship sitting in water was so narrow, it would sway from side to side so he spent half the time over the water. A lot of the younger men wouldn't try it, but my father would do anything, so he would go up there and he would do it. That's the way it was all during the war. He worked there, and I was in the Army.

**WC:** Now you got drafted out of college?

**HB:** I got drafted out of college. The college, Rhode Island State College at the time, had gone onto an accelerated program, so they finished a year in eight months. No summer vacation, no other vacation, just steady. I finished my freshman year in August, and I was drafted in September of 1943.

**WC:** So you were drafted into the Army.

**HB:** I was drafted into the Army. I took the AGCT test and I found out I had choices: I could either join the Air Force or the Army at that time had what they called the Army Specialized Training Program, ASTP. Their whole objective was to grow more engineers quickly, and that's what I wanted to be anyway, so I took that instead of joining the Air Force. Everybody who is drafted has to go through

basic training. So they sent me down to Fort Benning, Georgia for my basic training.

In basic training, I ended up, with some of the rough games that they play, with a broken shoulder. So I spent six weeks in the hospital, and meanwhile, my class kept on going and they were off to school. By the time I recovered from that, I had to join a different group of people, and they never got to college because at that time we were planning the invasion of Europe, so I was sent to Advanced Training in Louisiana.

**WC:** Was that an infantry training?

**HB:** Infantry training, yes. I became a rifleman. I did well, I made expert and when I went overseas, they took us out as replacements because I finished up just about the time the invasion was over, and now they had all these replacements they had to have because there were a lot of casualties during the invasion. So I went over, it was a group of people, 1500 from Camp Livingston, Louisiana, over to Europe. And there in Europe they began splitting us up among the various divisions that needed help, replacing the people. And I was...

**WC:** Let me just go back a little bit. How did you get overseas, did you go by ship?

**HB:** Yes, the Queen Mary. Let me tell you, it was very impressive. We went first to Fort Meade, Maryland, which is where that picture (gestures beside him to a picture) was taken, and they sent us out all fresh clothes. We marched in one side of an open area, took off all our clothes, and they gave us all new stuff again.

**WC:** Do you want to hold that picture up?

**HB:** (Holds up a frame with two photos) This has got two pictures here. This is the one at Fort Meade.

(Camera zooms in on a photo of Mr. Bloom, posing in uniform)

**WC:** And where was the little [picture] taken?

**HB:** The little one was taken, I think, when I came home on leave from Camp Livingston.

**WC:** When you went overseas, did you go over in a convoy, or was it just a single ship?

**HB:** The Queen Mary doesn't go by convoy. They were quite confident that they could go fast enough to outrun any sub, and when they got to what were considered dangerous waters, they would zigzag every seven minutes. They decided, in their own minds, that it takes a submarine seven minutes to sight on a new target, so every seven minutes they would zig and then zag. They took the northern route so when we went over to England, we were actually were above England and Scotland. We went down the Firth of Forth, which was that big inlet that runs all the way down, next to Scotland. It was an interesting trip. There were 22,500 troops on board that ship. They had taken the staterooms they had, and they converted them to six-man bunkrooms. So you shared your stateroom with six other guys, and some liked to stay up and talk and others liked to snore, so I found that a lot of guys slept up on the promenade deck. So I took my sleeping bag and I slept, the whole trip, up on the promenade deck, which wasn't bad. It was enjoyable.

**WC:** Did you get seasick at all?

**HB:** I never got seasick, no.

**WC:** Whereabouts in England did you land?

**HB:** We landed in Scotland, I think it was Brulach in Scotland, some distance away from Edinburgh. And we marched from Brulach to Glasgow; I'm not positive of that. And that's where we boarded a Belgian ship, the Leopoldville, which was the biggest ship they had

at the time. It was later sunk by the Germans. But they took us out to just north of France, and off France they brought these landing craft, LCIs and LCTs. LCIs are landing craft – infantry, and LCTs landing craft – tank. We took an LCI, and the way they operate, is they load you on and then head for shore full bore in order to ground it. And when you get out there, they let down the leading edge of it, it's like a ramp that lets you off into the water, and then you get on to the shore.

**WC:** So you went from Scotland right to France, you didn't go to England?

**HB:** Yeah, we did. We went, I think, for four weeks to England, a place called Drew. The only distinguishing mark I could make of it, was it had an old castle, a ruined castle off on one side. We stayed there for about two or three weeks, and it was very crowded, lots of guys there.

**WC:** Was it like a replacement center?

**HB:** Sort of. You didn't get assigned to a replacement yet. But this group that went over on the LCI they landed us at a replacement center – repo depot, they called it – and at the repo depot, you went by troop train from one repo depot to another, to another, until you finally got close enough to the front that you could begin to get taken on by various organizations. I went to about three repo depots, until I was picked by a sergeant from the 28<sup>th</sup> Division, and that was when we were already pretty close to the front. Once you get picked-- there are about five of us he picked--we could walk and be on the front lines. It wasn't that long, it took only about an hour of marching.

**WC:** What time of the year was that?

**HB:** That was October 1944. The first night, we were right up on the line there, and I've got to tell you I was pretty nervous, and I wasn't

the only one. They put one new recruit with one of the old-timers there, and he was supposed to--

**WC:** Show you the ropes?

**HB:** Yes. The one that I was with said, "Don't get out of this hole. If you go to the bathroom, do it in your helmet and throw it over the side." And it's just as well, because all night long, grenades were going off. It turns out that most of the soldiers, when they heard any sound, they would throw a grenade. You didn't have to find anybody, you'd just throw a grenade. That was pretty scary, anybody could get killed that way. But I didn't. The next morning, they organized an attack, and the sergeant decided the new guys were not smart enough to the ways of war yet to do much, so he assigned a bunch of us – five of us – as ammunition carriers. He stationed us on a hill while they made the attack, and when he wanted ammunition, he would call back, we'd have it ready to go, and they'd move us down there. Well, two of the guys were real gung-ho guys and they didn't want to carry ammunition, they wanted to be in it. One was from Louisiana and one from Texas. So after he left, even though I was supposed to be in charge of this little group of five or seven that's left, they're not going to listen to me and they took off to find the front and do some fighting.

I stayed where I was, and when my sergeant called me for ammunition, three guys went with ammunition down to where they were. They were in a village called Vossenack – that's the way I pronounce it. Oh, by the way, I was at that time in the 28<sup>th</sup> Division, in the 112th Regiment, and Company F of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion at that time. So they had taken the village, and they were essentially hunkered down in the remains of a big stone house that had been hit pretty good, some of the walls were down, and it had a cellar in it. The whole squad I was in was in the cellar, and they sent one guy up to keep an eye on what's going on. We were, like, in reserve. It was very scary – the Germans had that thing you called a minenwerfer, a 90 mm mortar, and that thing was all explosive, and it's very effective against stone buildings, because it sets up a percussion wave, and the

walls just give, and stone doesn't have integrity like that, just stones together, so they were coming in. So even though they were in the cellar, and we were in the cellar, the sergeant warned us that that could happen. So you could either sleep outside and take a chance with that, or in the cellar. Well we were lucky nothing happened there, and we were able to get out and fight from there. We were located so we had a good idea where the opposition was. The Germans had an 88 up on a hill behind the lines, in a cave. When it was ready to fire, it was rolled out and fire those things down. Those 88s are terrible, they've got a straight trajectory, and practically no sound, just (makes whooshing sound), boom! With no warning at all. So the sergeant and the heavy weapons platoon got together and they set up a 50 caliber in a corner outside of the house; around the corner so it can't be seen from the 88. And what they did, was whatever the 88 rolled out, you'd hear that thing go Boom! Boom! (punches fist into palm twice). It's a slow thing, but you had those great big shells in there, and they were able to keep that thing down pretty good so we didn't get hurt.

And then the other thing was, it was not far from a town called Julich, I think. We were getting some pretty tough spotting on where our troops were. And they finally decided that this tall building, which was like a church which had been sort of off-limits to us, had people who were spotting us on it. And we couldn't quite stop it. So after the first time we got real good air support, they called the Air Force and they got P38s, and it was quite a sight to see - they come diving down and they dive-bombed that thing, and they blew it pretty well apart. Finally, a group of combat engineers went in there - it's not their main function, to fight, but they can - they went in there and they were really tough. We could see bodies coming out the windows of this thing until they cleared it so we could advance. I'll never forget that. The Air Force earned my deep respect at that time.

**WC:** Let me ask you this: what happened to those other two fellows that took off on you?

**HB:** That was something; I'll never forget that. Once we had cleared the town, we were supposed to go through all the houses and make sure that it was clear. We came to one house, and it sounded like crying. So I went in, and sure enough, there they were. They had been subject to bombardment by our side, then the Germans bombarded our side, and this went back and forth till we got the town secured. So they had been bombarded by both sides, and they were devastated. They finally went back with combat fatigue. They were lucky they were alive. So that's about it.

And we went into Germany, the beginning of it, and we set up a line of attack at the Siegfried Line. That's just a tough place, you can't get in there. They have the pillboxes, these great big things with ten-inch walls and little openings for their machine guns, and all around their field of fire, the grass was no longer than two or three inches. There was no place to hide. Like any Army thing, they had a procedure for taking a pillbox. A platoon could do it. Two guys were assigned to carry the charges; two guys were assigned to cover the door for going in; I think four guys were assigned to hitting the embrasures, and so on. That's the way we did it, we took one at a time, with everybody assigned a job, taking care of two pillboxes, watching the third one, suppressed, and that's the way we went from one to another. It cost us some casualties, and I was lucky I didn't get hurt there. But it's a tough way to do anything.

**WC:** Now you mentioned that you joined the unit in about October of 1944. So how was the winter of 1945?

**HB:** First, we had the Bulge way back in 1944. We had been in combat for some ninety days, or 180 days or whatever it was, and they decided we could be in reserve. So my regiment was pulled back to a place in Luxembourg, which was considered a very peaceful area. Luxembourg is made so that it's tough to be concealed. All the forests are straight, all the trees are planted in a straight line this way, and a straight line this way (gestures), and the space between them there's a little room to walk, and all the branches of the trees are cut to about six or eight feet off the ground, so it's

tough to be concealed. All the roads were right along the ridges of these hills, and I'll never forget how impressed I was at the fact that, when you look out, you could just make out a vehicle going down the road, you could see just where the wheels hit the road – that's how precisely they were located.

So anyway, they put us in a section. First we went and took the big town Wiltz, but then they had us bivouac near a town called Weis-Wambach, and we had the side of a hill and the back of it, and in the good old Army way, they had two foxholes, one on the front end of the hill where they'd be firing, but another one to retreat to in the back side of the hill. We had a sergeant that was by the numbers so the first thing we do when we're assigned to this area was to dig two holes. It turns out that that was the way they handled this [something] concealment. Where the headquarters were, they had a big hole dug with bulldozers that looked to me like thirty or forty feet square under the ground, and the top covered with wood and then dirt piled on top of it so the headquarters were protected that way. We had smaller holes of our own that we made, and we put our own cover on them, which was trees that we cut down. All we had to have was our bayonet, we cut trees with bayonets, and we put the dirt on top. It was pretty much a standoff; they would fire occasional shots over at us, and we dug trenches from one foxhole to another so we didn't have to be exposed, and we were living that way.

**WC:** Now this was in the wintertime?

**HB:** Yes, but not snow yet. This peaceful area was... they didn't want anybody to attack the other side, there was such open areas. We were required once a day to send a patrol from my platoon to company headquarters, report on what was going on, and they'd report back again to us. It was almost like a [unclear]; nobody shot at us and we had all this concealment. The company headquarters was being run like they were in the United States. They had a nice place to eat, they had their own latrines there, and this was on a section where you could see, right across the hills, to where the German lines were. We weren't firing at them at all, and they didn't fire at us. I

remember when I was on one of those patrols from my platoon to company headquarters, it was nice walk. It was all concealed, and you could walk down there, and we were supposed to be looking out for Germans, but we didn't see any, so there was no problem.

But when the Bulge occurred, that's when they came up and they hit us pretty hard, the whole regiment really got pretty well banged up. We had... the whole Division was pretty well banged up. The 110<sup>th</sup> was completely captured, and they got our kitchen and other supplies from the 112<sup>th</sup>. It was pretty bad. So we had to retreat in front of the bulge, and I guess the Army commanders had to assess the situation. There wasn't any regiment that was big enough to operate by themselves. So they replenished our regiment, and instead of being a regiment now, we were called a combat team. And for the rest of the war, that's how we were used. Whenever they needed a live supply of shooters and defenders and so on, we got sent. Most of the time they'd get us there in trucks, although lots of times we had to walk.

**WC:** What about equipment and clothing, was it adequate for the winter?

**HB:** Well, they did one thing, and it probably saved part of my problem. It was later though. Just before Thanksgiving, and we were having trouble slogging through the mud. Those Army boots are nice, but they can't take a beating for a long time. They sent out a shipment of overshoes, all one size, 12. So I didn't like wearing a 12—I wear a size 8 shoe. You had to take one step inside before you could take a step further, but they kept your feet dry. Well, looking forward, when I finally was wounded, it may well be that that oversize boot saved my leg and maybe my life. By that time it was late in January. Other things happened in between, but I'll tell that story.

We were doing a reconnaissance patrol in the Alsace region of France, that's where we had been moved the last time. We were sent to replace the 30<sup>th</sup> Division — not the whole Division, but part of the

30<sup>th</sup> Division. We had to get up one morning about 4 o'clock and where we were going... Alsace is a very wild forest area, really forest. It had been occupied through most of the way by a lot of French partisans, and they didn't have much in the way of anything, guns or ammunition, so what they did is they mined a lot of the area there, and you had to be careful where the mines were. Part of the job everybody had was to note where the mines are and put up a ribbon or something where it was, so you wouldn't be killed. So we didn't have anything from that, although some of the others did.

But anyway, I was part of a reconnaissance patrol to get information on the location of any machine guns, storage depots of the Germans, things like that. Lt. Christiansen had held up this platoon reconnaissance patrol. It started at about 4 o'clock in the morning, and we went pretty much toward the German line without spotting any trouble, and about 11 o'clock, somewhere along that time, we came to a hill where there was a long, flat area, and there was actually the remains of a dirt road that ran out into this area, and along the side of the road was stacked cordwood, stacked in neat cords, which was what the Luxembourgiens liked to do—everything neat.

I was first scout, and there was a guy assigned to go with me as second scout, a fellow named Charles. I had been in combat, then, about six months. He was new; he'd never been in combat before. But we were assigned this job, and you couldn't do anything about it. So we walked about 10 yards apart, out into this flat area, and the lieutenant was behind us about 500 yards, and every now and then I'd look back to see if we were to keep going. I wanted to stop, but he wanted us to keep going. So we came to this flat area in the road, and it had snowed the night before, everything was nice and smooth. We walked out into this, and I think we got about 100 yards and all of a sudden there was this tremendous blast and I went up into the air, and there was a second blast as I came down and was lying there, and I thought we'd been hit by a mortar. Turns out after I started to get my senses back, that I could look around, was laying there looking around, and I could see the German little antipersonnel

mines from the pillbox, and when you step on one, the outer cover slips down and cuts the restraining pin and boom! It isn't much, it's like a quarter pound of TNT. Well, my overshoes must have just clipped the edge of it. Most of it went up here (shows the area on his foot), and took out the heel of my shoe and my foot. And the rest of it came up here and there was shrapnel in my thigh, and one piece of shrapnel actually went through my scrotum. Later on, when the doctor examined me, he said you're one lucky guy, because it went through the scrotum and didn't touch anything else. Well, so anyway, I laid there, and I could see the stuff around us, and Charles was thrashing around like crazy, and I was trying to calm him down, but I didn't want to roll any, I couldn't move.

**WC:** So he set off a different mine?

**HB:** A second one, yes. So our sergeant, Sgt. Lamming [?], got our squad behind this stacked wood because no minefield ever upset by our combat group, was uncovered with some kind of fire. So he figured that any minute somebody would start shooting. Anyway, nobody is shooting at first, and I'm enough discombobulated that I was trying to do something with my foot, and I couldn't do it. I could see it was bloody, but I couldn't see anything else. The sergeant was one brave guy, Sgt. Lamming. He came in despite of the fact that somebody was going to be covering this. He found me, took a bayonet and cut the boot loose and took my pack (everybody carries a medical pack), took the sulfa out and dusted everything with sulfa, and then we stood up. At that time, there was no problem, nobody was shooting at us. He couldn't get Charles to stop thrashing around, to see what he could do for him. It turns out, I found out later, Charles had a bad wound in his arm; I don't know how that happened. But anyway –

**WC:** Did he survive?

**HB:** Not yet. The sergeant tried to get us going back, and at that time, they started firing initial rifle shots at us, and the sergeant dove back behind the stacked wood, and his people started firing back. So

they were going over our heads, so I yelled as much as I could to the sergeant don't... What happened was, our fire apparently hit one of them- I could hear him hollering "Hilfa, Hilfa," meaning "Help." So I yelled back to the sergeant, don't shoot at the wounded man - because if you shoot at him, they'll shoot at us, and they hadn't been shooting at me and Charles. And that's the way it went. That happened probably 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning, and we lay there until it started to get dark, and about the beginning of dark, instead of firing rifles they started opening up with mortars. That's when I got worried, because mortars don't worry about who's getting hit - they hit anyone who gets near it. So I heard the sergeant starting to talk about getting out, so I yelled to him "Don't leave us here!" Now, two nights before another platoon had gone out for reconnaissance, and they left their wounded men behind, and the sergeant said, "we won't leave anybody behind." He said, "If you can get safely over here to the wood, we'll take you back." So I yelled to Charles what to do. Where the explosion had been, it pretty much cleared, and you could see the mines there so you could avoid them. I said to Charles, "Don't roll over because there's mines right over here. Get up on one leg, jump as far as you can, and crawl across," and he didn't answer me, but I couldn't afford to stay myself. So that's exactly what I did. I left my rifle behind, and when I was ready to go, I asked the sergeant to cover us, they were firing, and I leaned forward on my good foot and I jumped as far as I could where it was clear, and I crawled back and got behind the wood. Charles, unfortunately, did roll over, and there was another tremendous blast, and the sarge, going out there, saw it had killed Charles.

So I got behind the woodpile, and I tried to figure out how I was going to get back, and Sarge said, "I'll carry you." And he did; he put me on his back and we went into the trees and started back. He knew where we were going, and the others were following him. And the Germans of course were trying to stop us, so there was firing going, and they hit a couple of other guys, not too bad, they were able to walk and so on. And I could see we'd been out since 4 o'clock in the morning, and the sergeant must have been terribly tired. Plus which, they began firing mortars trying to locate where we were. I

thought, sitting up on his back, I was particularly vulnerable, so I said, "Put me down, I'll crawl." And this is the technique he worked out. Two guys were sent out ahead to find a place where we could stop, that we could defend. And then as soon as they got going, I went behind them, crawling as fast as I could. I ended up using up everybody's gloves. As I wore out one pair of gloves, another one of the guys would give me his gloves, and that's what I did. I got over to where they were stopped, and the rest of the guys would come, and we went all that way back. I didn't have any idea how far we were, or even the direction to go, but the sergeant knew. So we came to a nice hollow in the area there, and he said, "You guys set up a perimeter defense here, and I'll go back and I'll bring back help." So we set up a perimeter defense, those who were still able to shoot, and we waited, and sure enough, after a little while, we hear this jingle of equipment and so on, and pretty soon, the sergeant shows up and he had a mule and a sled. They put me on the sled, and one of the other guys on the sled –

**WC:** You said a mule, do you mean the animal?

**HB:** Like a horse, yeah.

**Mrs. B:** Does mule have different meanings?

**WC:** Well, there's a military vehicle called a mule, too.

**HB:** I've got to tell you, those mules they do a fantastic job. When we first got sent down to Alsace to replace the 30<sup>th</sup>, we were going up into one of those big hilly areas. The way we got up them, they gave us a mule and the first guy in line would hold the mule's tail, and the second guy got hold of the belt of the first guy, and it went all the way back, and that mule pulled us all the way up the hill, all the way up to where we could get to the foxholes the 30<sup>th</sup> left behind.

So anyway, they brought us back to battalion aid, and right away gave me a shot of morphine, so I was out of it. And so I was told then that Charles had been killed, and it bothered me because he

hadn't had any combat experience at all, he was fresh. He should never have been given that job, but, anybody it could have happened to, I suppose. So they took care of me at battalion aid; you know, they don't do any--it's not like MASH on tv--they take you and just keep you from bleeding to death and give you a bandage, and give you a shot to keep you quiet and get you back to wherever you're going. They got me to a hospital train, which took us to Vittel, France, and in Vittel, the Army was operating a hospital. At that hospital, which was staffed heavily by people from the Buffalo General Hospital, the doctor there operated on me. He told me that I'd lost my os calcis, which is the heel bone, but he got out most of the shrapnel from me, told me what I had up here, and then from Vittel, we were there long enough that they had two hospital ships in Marseilles.

So the train, again, took us to Marseilles, and they got us aboard the hospital ship. The hospital ship I was on was the Ernest R. Hines, the funniest little thing. It was almost as wide as it was long, and it was slow as molasses. But there was another one, a much sleeker hospital ship, the Cherokee. So we left for the United States in the Ernest R. Hines. The Cherokee left 14 days later, and it got to Charlotte, North Carolina the day before we did. But they were nice people on board, they really treated us good. The crew brought everybody ice cream, things like that, and we had to take a detour anyway. They were keeping us informed of all of the information that they were getting, and they told us that we were going to have to divert from the course because a Navy ship had reported that they had a seaman that needed to be taken off their ship and brought on the hospital ship. He needed medical attention.

So we went off to the Bahamas where this happened, and there they were going to transfer this wounded seaman to our ship. Damnedest thing you ever saw. The first thing they did was, the other ship, spread oil all around the other ships. It turns out that keeps the waves from breaking, so that made it easier. The sailors on our ship took a lifeboat, and they rowed across from our ship to their ship. Well, our ship was so wide we didn't have a lot of trouble, but

this navy ship was going back and forth like crazy. They brought out a thing like a hamper to pick him up, and you could see the hamper going here, and there, and here (gestures up and down); now, how are they going to do this? So everybody out of bed had to watch this whole thing. I had a pair of crutches, so I hobbled over to a porthole and watched that. Just amazing. So they rowed over to that ship from our ship, and they placed themselves close to where the guy was coming down. And when [the basket] came over this way, they went underneath, and when it went out, they got ready to dump him out of the thing that looked like a basket, and when it came down, our guys grabbed him and put him into our boat, and they did it successfully, and everybody was cheering like crazy. And then we found out the ins and outs of it. He had been stabbed by one of his own shipmates, in the groin, and it cut an artery, so it was a pretty hairy thing, but he did survive.

We ended up in Charlotte, North Carolina and stayed there a few days, just temporizing, until another train came down and I was sent to Utica, New York, the Rhoades General Hospital. That's where I fell in love with the Adirondacks. I'd never known how nice it was until I went up there. I'll never forget that. It was a nice hospital, the Rhoades General Hospital, and they treated us. They had great food and things like that, and every day – of course I was bedridden – I and other bedridden patients were taken outside and it was like June, and the sun was nice, and they let us take our clothes off so we could get the sun. And it was the damndest thing: we had a snowstorm in June! By the time they got me in, there was two inches of snow on top of my blanket!

**WC:** Now that was June of 1945, so the war had ended in Europe. Do you recall where you were when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt? He died in April.

**HB:** April, yeah. I was probably in Charlotte. Hard to tell... But I remember when Japan surrendered, and I was in the hospital in Framingham, Massachusetts. I'd been sent there... First, while I was up at Rhodes General Hospital, they decided that things were coming

along pretty good with the healing of this thing (gestures to his leg), I was using crutches pretty well. They said, "Well we can give you a recuperation leave, if you'd like." So sure enough, they gave me a recuperation leave, and I came home with my crutches and I survived that nicely. And to go back, we got on a train at Worcester, Massachusetts, and it went up through Albany to Utica, and to Buffalo, and one section was set aside for veterans. And the railroad men took care to make sure we got to the right place. At night, when we were traveling, the lights would be turned out so we could sleep, but they kept track of where we were. I'll never forget it. They would turn on the lights and warn us, "We're going to be in Utica in so many minutes." I thought that was pretty nice, too. Unfortunately, I don't know if something happened on the trip home that time, but I came down with osteomyelitis, an infection of the bone. I don't know if you can blame anything on that, but that was pretty bad. I was out of my head for quite some time. I was on a regimen of sulfa and penicillin. Sulfa every three hours, penicillin every four, all the way through the night. While I was in that bad state, I guess they must have warned my mother, so she came up. Here I am, out of my head—

WC: Now you were in Massachusetts?

HB: I was in the Adirondacks, at Rhoades. It was one of those sprawling hospitals, it spread all over the place. It was an Army hospital with lots of structures connected with walkways. And I'm laying there, out of my head, and I called the nurse "I think I hear my mother." And sure enough, it was my mother and one of my sisters; they had been told that I was in the hospital and they came all the way out from Providence to Utica, and I'll never forget my sister's cool hand, and my head was so hot. But I finally got over it, and they sent me to Cushing Hospital in Massachusetts, and that's where I was discharged from.

WC: You were there when the war ended?

HB: Yes. They had a big celebration there, and I was enjoying that, too. The biggest thing was that the doctor at the Cushing Hospital said "We can send you to Valley Forge Hospital, where they do plastic surgery, and they can put more flesh back on the wound here. You can't get the heel bone back, because that was shattered in pieces, but we can at least make it look decent." And I said, "Will it do anything to help me walk?" And he said, "It might, but you don't have the heel bone so it's going to be tough." I had already called the school where I wanted to finish my degree, and they were starting in September and this was August. So I said to the doctor there that if there's no guarantee that it'll make me that much better, I would just as soon go back to school. The fall term is starting. "Well, it's your choice," he said, "You can always opt to have the plastic surgery through the Veterans Administration."

So that's what I did, I went back to school. I started out using crutches to go from class to class, and I made it ok, no problem. The teachers were pretty nice about that. I was determined that I wanted to get rid of those crutches, so after a few months I started trying it with a cane. The VA gave me a cane, and I hobbled around with the cane for a while. And after a while I thought I'd see what I could do without the cane. And it was tough for a while, but I kept at it and kept walking, now I walk without a cane most of the time. I still have a cane – that one right there (points) – which I use sometimes, but I feel relatively free of it.

WC: Did you ever have to have the surgery done?

HB: No, I decided not to. They couldn't guarantee a thing. They said, it's very likely to work, but I could never get anybody pinned down to say yes, this will do it. I'm just as happy I didn't. For a long time, I was walking three miles a day. I don't do that so much anymore. At 87, that's really more than I have to do.

WC: So you went back to school and got your degree?

HB: Went back to school and got my degree in engineering. I was an aeronautical engineer, and I ended up working on a missile program, and lots of space programs. I went down to the Cape to watch the launches. I worked on some of the stuff that was launched. I'm happy I contributed something to this organization.

WC: When did you retire from that?

HB: I retired from there in 1985.

WC: There was a fellow I was in the service with. He was the chief engineer for the international space station.

HB: He came in after I left already. But we had put to NASA many plans at their request, for a space station, back in 1966. They would go through various studies, and they would put out another request for a proposal, for another space station, a few years later. They kept reinventing the space station again and again. GE was actually awarded a \$400 million contract to build a space station, and I worked on it for a while. I had to help put together a plan for its manufacture. There was some unique thing that had to be done for the manufacturing, I never forgot. I went into an inflatable atmosphere, like they make now (in fact there's one out there [unclear]). And there was going to be a situation in which the center had a great big hoist, and the space station starts at the center, and parts, as it was put together, go around and around this thing in an ever widening circle, so by the time you get out to the front where the door is, the thing is assembled and ready for launch. It was the funniest thing. I had so much fun doing that. I worked on all kinds of crazy things. GE gave me the opportunity to try anything new that I wanted, and I never had to go to work. I just loved my job. Every day I went in I went on a high; I really felt like I was taking drugs, I was so high. I've got to say, I really enjoyed my job, and I think I gave the company full value for what I did. One of my jobs was evaluating ideas... people sent in stuff to GE unsolicited, for something that should be done or something that should be made. I had a job, called the Advanced Engineering Group, to evaluate these

ideas. Some crazy things came in, and I'd have to find reasons, mathematic and engineering reasons why it wouldn't work – or if it would. The best time I had, was working for GE. I worked at NASA for about four years before I came to GE.

WC: Did you use your GI Bill at all?

HB: Yes, I did, to finish up my bachelor's degree. There were three more years – I had one before I went into the Army – and when I was mustered out, I went back to the same school and the guy who was in charge of admissions, Dr. Weldon, knew me already from the first year. I said "I've been gone for two years. I'll never remember what I did for the first year I was here, so I want to start all over again." He said, "Nothing doing. You're not starting all over again. You go ahead with your sophomore year. If there's something you're not able to do, you can take that later, don't worry about it." And he was right, I had no problem. I remembered what I had learned, so I did my three years quite nicely.

WC: Did you go on for a masters?

HB: No, I never did. I always thought I would, but I was so busy I just didn't want to give up what I had. I had a nice job. Working for NASA... the first time I finished school, I worked for a bunch of high-class people. I was the least, probably, qualified to work with these people, but I did my best. I finally learned something. If you're not the smartest guy in the world, you can be the hardest working guy. And I did. I put in more hours than they ever paid me for. And that's how I was able to keep up with these people. But the pay was government pay, it was not a big deal. So I decided at some point in time it was time to start looking for ways to get a higher paying job, and that's when I came to work for GE. And that was really satisfying; I enjoyed that.... It turns out that the things I learned while working at NASA stood me in great stead when I took the job with GE. In fact, some of the work I did for NASA is what got me the work at GE, because the guy that was in charge of the aerodynamics

program for the Hermes read my stuff that I turned out; that's why they hired me.

WC: Did you stay in contact with anyone you were in the service with?

HB: No. What happened was, for some reason, I was put into an organization that was mostly from the West, from California, Texas, things like that. It's interesting when I was drafted and I was inducted, my basic training was with people from the Boston area, Providence area; it wouldn't have been any trouble. When I got picked to join the 28<sup>th</sup> over there, these were all guys from the far west. They were nice guys, but there was so much that we didn't have in common. We watched each other's back, and things like that, and everybody did their work (except those two from Texas and Louisiana), but we never really got friendly.

WC: Did you ever attend any reunions of the Division?

HB: No, I never did. In fact, I'm not sure if they ever had one. They do have a museum of the 28<sup>th</sup> Division in Pennsylvania, but I've never been there, and I can't travel that far anymore. I sure would like to see if there are people there that I knew. I may get on the internet sometime and try to find them. I've got to say, I didn't feel particularly close to any of them. There were a couple guys from California that seemed to be nice guys; we used to, when we were in camp here in the United States, we used to go drinking together. But I never felt really close to them.

WC: Did you ever join any veterans' organizations?

HB: Well, I've got to tell you about that. I never joined, and I'll tell you why. I just barely was discharged at home, and one after another, various veterans' organizations came to see me. And they all had...either the first thing they would say, or the second thing, was "We're here to make sure you get what's due you." And I've got to tell you, I didn't think anything was due me. I think that what I

did was a payback for what the country did for me. Both my parents, and their parents' grandchildren, left Russia under tough circumstances. My mother described pogroms where she came from in Ukraine. My father, his father, moved the family from Russia because he had left a [unclear] job in [unclear] Russia, and moved to what he thought was a safer place in Bialystock, in Poland. While he was there for a year or so, he heard about a pogrom just south of where he had come from originally, [unclear], and he decided that that was no place to stay, that's why he moved. Following that, they came to this country, and they found not only safety and peace, and ways to make a living, that I owe this country. That's all I did was try and pay some of it back. So their arguments of what they were going get me, bonuses and things, just hit me wrong, and I never did. And that's all of them, I'm telling you, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, one at a time I went through this.

WC: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life? Obviously it did change your life.

HB: Yeah. One thing I did do, before I went into the service, I was a straight guy. I studied and I was going to get educated, and I didn't want to waste any time with women, and stuff like that. I took a couple girls to the senior prom from high school, and when I went to college, my older cousin, a woman, introduced me to a girl, a nice kid but I wasn't interested. When I was in the Army, I realized that I could have died there, and never had the pleasure of love or a love affair or anything else, and I made up my mind that once I got out I would have time for women, and I did. I saw lots of women, but I was lucky. I married this one (gestures off camera to his wife), the smartest one of all.

WC: And when did you get married?

HB: In 1948. I graduated one weekend, and got married the next weekend, and went on a honeymoon the next weekend, and from that point on I was committed to go to work for NASA.

WC: And you had children along the way?

HB: Yeah, we have four children, three girls and a boy. They are all doing so well, and they get along so well with each other. Boy, that's nice.

WC: How many grandchildren?

HB: Five.

WC: Any great-grandchildren yet?

HB: Not yet. We've got hopes.

MRS. B: We have one who just got married last summer. But he's earning his PhD at this time, so I think that's not quite in the picture yet. But you know, things happen.

HB: My son's got a PhD, his oldest son's got a PhD, his next oldest son's going for a PhD, and his daughter is going for a PhD.

MRS. B: They live in California, so we don't see them very often, but they keep in contact with us all the time. (To HB) You didn't mention that you got some awards.

WC: Ok, you want to tell us about your awards?

HB: I'll even show them to you (moves off camera to get them)

WC: Ok, we're back, and you've got your combat infantryman's badge?

HB: Yes. (Camera zooms in on badge) I'm proudest of this because it means I met my enemy face to face. Every one I ever shot, I saw his face, not just a number from 20,000 feet up I dropped a bomb on, or from behind an artillery piece five miles behind the line. I am proud of that; I faced my enemy.

This is the Bronze Star.

WC: Let me get a shot of that.

HB: My Purple Heart. (removes other awards from a box) Do you want me to hold them up?

WC: Yes. That's the American Campaign Medal, and your Good Conduct Medal. And you've got two Battle Stars.

HB: The Rhineland Campaign, and the Ardennes Campaign. (removes others from another box) Oh, these are the Victory Medals.

WC: Oh yes, the World War II Victory Medals. Actually I haven't seen that medal before; let me zoom right in on that. Ok, got it.

HB: And this is my dogtags. That's it. Oh, and this is...

WC: Oh, your shooting qualification medal.

HB: Yeah, rifle, first gunner with the light machine gun. There's one thing about these medals that bothers me. I'm proud that I did some good, and was recognized. The thing that bothers me is I hate the idea of glorifying war. And I can't help thinking that when you show your medals you're glorifying war. The worst thing I want to do is glorify war. I hate war. Old men make war, and young men die—I hate that. [unclear] that those guys feel the way I do. But, all right.

WC: Now you have some photos you want to show us.

HB: Here's the liberation of Paris. I have no idea where I was in that. [Photo caption reads "The 28<sup>th</sup> Division Liberating Paris, 1944"]

And this is the little one from which the big photo was made [shown earlier]. And this is when I was in training in Louisiana; this is one of

my friends. And that's it. [Looking at photo album] That's from the ROTC; I was in the ROTC for a while.

WC: Oh, you were?

HB: Yeah. (Shows another photo) Here's me and my friend, Martin Tatz, and that's my father there with me and Martin Tatz.

WC: And is that your wife there?

HB: No, that's my sister, one of my sisters. (Shows another photo) This is when I was home on leave; my sister brought a couple of friends. And that's about it, my life in a nutshell.

WC: All right, well thank you, sir.

HB: Thank you.