

Harry Bradish
Narrator

New York State Military Museum
Interviewer

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Baldwinsville Public Library
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IN: We are here with Harry Bradish, who is a local resident, who also fought in D-Day, and we're going to hear some of your recollections about that time.

HB: I'd like to tell you a little something before D-Day. We were getting ready to go, and they were telling us-in order to prevent telling us where we were going-they took us to a beautiful big mansion- the whole company was there. They brought us in one squad at a time. They had a big table with sand on it, the same sand that was on the beach in Normandy, that they picked up at night you know. So they told us exactly where we were going to go, exactly where we were going to hit, exactly what we were going to do, and I'm thinking here is the biggest thing in the world that is ever going to happen, that I know of and I can't say a damn thing about it. [Both laugh] That really always bothered me. I'd never be able to get up and tell anybody, the whole world was waiting to know- that really got me.

IN: What kind of feelings were there amongst your outfit when you were getting ready to go in there?

HB: Well, they were pretty quiet. We couldn't go anywhere after we found out where we were going and when we were going. We were under guard-they were standing with machine guns-that was it- we couldn't say anything to anybody. We finally packed up and went.

The sea was rough, the channel was rough-awful rough. So we came up with our boat- a long boat- a big boat-hold about 300 men. We go up onto Normandy, early in the morning, it was still dark out you know. As soon as daylight hit, they said "OK over the side". I remember we were going by in our little boat-going into land and the battleship Texas was sitting there. They were having a dual, I found out later with a railroad gun and they had big heavy shells going overhead both ways. The sailors on the Texas were hollering "Go get'em boys" you know that stuff. I wished by that time I could have been on the Texas.

So we went on to hit the beach. It was kind of rough. There were quite a few bodies lying around already you know. A young kid was laying there and he was crying for his

mother. Another one was crying for Blessed Mary. I don't know who won out-but they were hurt bad, I don't think they lived long.

Then we went up a sand dune and broke over it, it was supposed to be a big high sand dune but heck it was low, the water must have washed it away or something. So we got over that. There was another guy lying there and his head was gone. I said "Holy Jesus what did we get into here". So, my squad was supposed to go as far as the swamp-it was about a mile and we were supposed to set up machine guns and get ready for a counter attack. The rest of the outfit-they worked on the beach-with the engineers and they were helping with things across the beach and stuff like that. It was kind of scary I'll tell you-pretty scary.

IN: What was your outfit?

HB: Our outfit was the Thirty 51st Engineer Combat Battalion. They were trained just for that beach-at that time. When we got over everything there, the way it should be-then we had to have a break out at St. Lo- that's when we first broke out of that place.

I want to tell you about the planes. We were getting ready for St. Lo. Of course nobody knew what was going on but we were all ready to shove off, and there was- I think they said it was about 3000 bombers they had. I never saw so many planes in all my life. There was tier after tier of them you know, they were at different heights and they were coming over, they were bombing St. Lo. I thought, boy if I were a German, I'd run right back to Germany as fast as I could go. [Laughs] They were really banging away and they knocked some of our planes down too.

So then we went on from there to the central part of the country and fought. Then we went up to Holland. We got there just in time for the Battle of The Bulge to start when they broke through Aachen. Somebody figured it out-we got there in time anyway. We had to set up our machine guns. I remember setting them up right in a guy's front lawn. [Laughs] An old fella, he came out of the house and he said something in his language-I don't know what he was talking about, probably "get off my grass" because we dug a big hole in there and sand bagged it. We had to wait there for the Germans to come up- but they never did- they never got that far. So we were on to other things.

IN: Did you feel like things were turning around at a certain point?

HB: Yes, because I hit on Utah beach, and Utah was one of the easier beaches. I got a break there. So, let's see what were they doing...what the heck was there now- my memory is not as good as it used to be. Well anyway...we finally... one of the other guys was talking about going into Cherbourg. We tried it but they had a heck of an army in Cherbourg - the Germans did. We had to wait for re-enforcements, we never thought they'd come up there. They took us out of that frame and we went on with the 82nd. We

were assigned to them at that time. Then we were assigned to the 4th Army division after that.

The next battle was in Hurtgen forest. That was my first site of the tiger tank. Have you ever seen a tiger tank? They were big. [Laughs] I remember I had a bazooka. We were in the forest there, this squad of us and this tiger tank came through the woods and it just sat there. I lined up that bazooka, I got it all set to really let go you know, and I did but it was a poor shot. I just hit the - like a bumper would be on the front of a car-I hit that thing and it glanced off of it and God I saw all those big guns on that thing start to come around and I said to a young kid that was helping me at that time, "let's get the heck out of here". [Both laugh] We ran down a ravine and they never did shoot at us, I don't think they followed us really.

IN: Now you said combat engineers, what kind of stuff did you have to do usually?

HB: Well, combat engineers-their main job was when the infantry came up against the pill box or anything like that, it's their job to knock the pill box out - get it out of the way, because we have the explosives. We also put a couple of bridges across the Albert canal. Well I don't know, there was a lot of shooting and banging and stuff going on that's for damn sure.

IN: Did you ever hear much from back home when all of this was going on?

HB: I wrote a lot of letters home. They said you could write all the letters you want but they won't go out until after the invasion. I kept right on writing like I always did and my family kept writing to me - but then they weren't getting anything back from me and that really scared them you know. They didn't know what the heck was happening-of course because we wrote so often. My mother God bless her, I know she never missed mass in the morning for me. Every morning she went to church - went to mass, according to my wife. She had a baby-she was eight months old when I went into the service.

IN: When did you get out?

HB: About two years later. I spent nineteen months overseas. Then there was about six or seven months back in this country getting ready to go over.

IN: Any other things about D-Day that stick in your mind?

HB: No, not really. It was a real scary day, I know that. I never had anybody shoot at me before. That was the first time and it got real scary. The German's with their 88 gun - their artillery pieces - they were good with them, they were awful good with them. We had to go up a ditch to get up to where our machine gun was going to be and we got up there and our 50 caliber machine gun - the barrel wasn't there. This lieutenant said, "anybody see the barrel". Well this one guy, Virgil Hostas his name was, he went right

for the hills- he had the barrel. He [The Lieutenant] said “does anybody know where he is”, “yes I saw him go over to the pill box” a guy said. We had to go back down to the pill box and boy we hated to go back because they were really shelling that beach. So we got down there and sure enough, here was Virgil – he was just sitting there with the barrel over his arms, he was scared to death – he couldn’t move he was so scared. And there were Germans lying around on the floor that somebody had got earlier. So the lieutenant told me to take the barrel. So I took the barrel and he grabbed the other guy and we got back to our people again.

So outside of that- the second night we got bombarded by dive bombers, the Stuka-Stuka dive bombers. Boy they came in- they dropped chandelier flares, that lights the whole ground up just like day you know – you’d think it was day. I had a foxhole dug I was in and all of a sudden it didn’t seem to me like it was really deep enough. The Stukas come down and they scream when they come down you know and boy they really scare you. So by this time the Navy had knocked out some of the flares. And I knew where a Corporal was- he had a nice great big hole and I go over and jump in his hole and there were about five more guys in there -and I guess we all loved the company – we all liked each other and wanted to get away from everything. So... I don’t know. There’s so many things that happen you know – stuff that you can’t remember.

IN: All in the space of a few days too.

HB: Oh yea, sure. Well I didn’t even get anything to eat the first two days. But I wasn’t hungry – I could’ve gotten something. The food truck was supposed to be on the beach the first day – that didn’t come in for a week. I got it off the Navy – the Navy fed me. [Laughs]

IN: There were probably a lot of people that weren’t doing much eating or sleeping.

HB: No I don’t think there were, no. But when things kind of quieted down then all of a sudden you realize hey I’m kind of hungry you know.

IN: Right. Bob asked me to read this letter you got from Harry Truman; “To you who answered the call of your country and served in its armed forces to bring about the total defeat of the enemy, I extend the heartfelt thanks of a grateful nation. As one of the nation’s finest, you undertook the most severe task one could be called upon to perform. Because you demonstrated the fortitude, resourcefulness and calm judgment necessary to carry out that task. We now look to you for leadership and example and further exalting our country in peace”. Harry Truman. Written about Harry Bradish.

I think that goes for all the people we talked to today. Thanks for coming and sharing your memories with us.

HB: Thanks for asking me.