

**Harold L. Bennett
Veteran**

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Interviewers**

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Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

HB: My full name is Harold Lee Bennett. I was born in White Crick in 2/10/1923.

Q: What was your educational background prior to entering military service?

HB: Graduated from High school, 1939.

Q: Do you remember where you were, and your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

HB: No, I don't know where I was. But shortly, you decided you had to go. I went, it was one of those things back then. You knew you was going and you went and there was no ..

Q: So, you enlisted?

HB: No, I was drafted.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

HB: Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Q: How long were you there?

HB: I left there in April I believe, then we went to Missouri. From Missouri, we left there in late August. They sent us to West Point and supposedly we were going on a boat in New York City. So, the Captain came in, and I was a sergeant, he said get six men, were heading for the port, but he didn't tell us it was the port of Los Angeles. And that's where we went, we were there about a month. They didn't know what to do with us when they got there.

Q: Now, you were in a unit?

HB: Yes.

Q: What was your unit?

HB: Signal Service Battalion, and I was a cryptographer. So, when we got to Port Los Angeles, they had orders to report to a Captain White. He didn't know we were coming, he didn't know what to do with us. We were there. He said check with me every morning, and we did for a month. Then when we went overseas, the seven of us, each one went on a separate boat, the Kaiser freighters. Why? I don't know, we all wound up in the same place, Calcutta.

Q: were all of you cryptographers?

HB: No.

Q: I thought maybe they split you up because of that.

HB: No, they were repairmen and radio guys.

Q: were there other GI's on your ship with you?

HB: The ship I went over on was a freighter. Right up on the deck, they had a little bit of a bunk house. Right on top of the deck and there were twelve bunks in it, and it was full. I don't know where the other guys went or what they were supposed to be doing, they didn't know either. They got to Calcutta and I joined my unit again. Then we went up [unclear] Ledo-Burma Road the whole stinking way.

Q: The road was built already?

HB: No, we were working on it.

Q: Were you working on it at all?

HB: I didn't work on it, but I was there in the message center all the way over. Went into Ledo first then we went to Myitkyina. And the Ledo road went all the way down through Burma and hooked onto the old Burma Road, which wasn't too promising either. And then when we got down to where the Burma Road was, they flew us all back to Ledo, and we drove the first convoy all the way to Kunming. Eleven-hundred and ninety miles, it took us 21 days to drive it. They flew the stuff they couldn't drive over for a long-long time. Then when the monsoons come in there, you couldn't drive it anyway.

Q: Were there ever many attacks by the Japanese when you were on the road?

HB: Had a lot of strafing attacks, and snipers. Snipers were all over, everywhere. Every building almost all the way over. The roofs on most of the buildings were thatch, they'd go up in the thatch roofs and tie themselves right in there. There wasn't much you could do about it, only if you had the right kind of ammunition, you could stick one in the thatch and set it on fire, then they'd come out. Myitkyina was a tough one, Merrill's Marauders and the Flying Tigers.

Q: You said you were in an operation with Merrill's Marauders?

HB: We went in with Merrill's Marauders.

Q: Could you describe that for us? Did you ever see Merrill himself?

HB: Yes, I saw him, but he wasn't in my unit. Stillwell was the first one I saw.

Q: What was your opinion of him?

HB: He was good. He was an older man, he knew what he was doing. He wasn't one of the fresh ones just out of school, he'd been in for years. He was tough, but he was good.

Q: Can you describe the action when you went in with the Marauders?

HB: It's just a heck of a lot of jungle fighting, that's about what it was.

Q: What kind of weapon did you carry?

HB: I carried a .45 Colt revolver and most of the time, we had .30 Caliber Carbines. We were in the second Corps so we set up stations and tried to get radio contact back to somebody. Sometimes you could and sometimes you couldn't. A lot of the guys had the old Thompson .45 machine guns. They had bigger machine guns up with the Marauders.

Didn't have these modern things you got today. But I think really, the heat, the rain, the snakes, bugs, and disease was the worst thing, all the way through.

Q: I saw that you wrote down that you were ill for six months? What happened?

HB: I had amoebic dysentery, I got it in Nanking, China. It only affects light-skinned people, and it is caused by using the human waste as fertilizer. That's what they all did over there, but it didn't affect them because they're dark skinned. I went in the hospital in Nanking and I came out in the hospital over here in [unclear].

Q: So that was toward the end of your enlistment?

HB: Yes, that was the end. That was from late October to March, all the way through.

Q: You said that you saw the Flying Tigers? Were you based near them?

HB: Well about within a mile. Their landing strip cut out the jungles. They went into Myitkyina with Merrill's Marauders. The Marauders after that broke up and I believe they called them the Macks, what was left of them. They went separate ways all through the jungles and taking care of Japs, here and there and all over. We saw a lot of interesting people too.

Q: In what ways were they interesting?

HB: Well, the little Nagas, they couldn't talk. They were just interesting to see.

[Given photos of Naga tribesmen]

Q: These are the Nagas that you were talking about?

HB: Yes.

Q: What did you find interesting about them?

HB: Just the way they lived I guess, what they ate. They mostly ate roots and they didn't have any guns or ammunition, they couldn't kill anything to eat. And of course, their cattle is sacred. So, they ate bugs.

Q: Can you tell us about this gentleman that you came across? Where did you meet him?

HB: He was on the Burma road, way up in the mountains somewhere. And the convoy was topped, and he come walking [unclear].

Q: What are these things that he has with him, hanging around his waist?

HB: They're skulls.

Q: So, he was a head hunter?

HB: He was the head of the headhunting tribe. I suppose they were his prizes of how many people he beheaded.

Q: When you went into China, how long did you stay there?

HB: I was in China for about five months. We went from Kunming which was at the end of the Burma Road. We went all the way across China, I came out of Nanking which is almost on the shore. And we took surrenders, small Japanese armies. We wound up with the first Japanese army in those pictures. [Handed photos] This is most of it, that's the surrender of the first Japanese army in Nanking, China.

Q: When was that?

HB: September seventh, forty-five.

Q: Do you remember how many Japanese surrendered?

HB: I don't know how many of them were right there, but there was about two million of them in China. We saw the big boys, there' one of them.

Q: This is one of their officers?

HB: No that's the Chinese. There's the Americans and the Chinese. They flew seven of us, and our crew into Nanking and we were supposed to set up a message center and radio contact back with everybody. Actually, when they let the seven of us off the plane, we stood with .45's, nothing else. And there was the Japanese army, what are you going to do? All of a sudden, a big General walked over and I was the highest Non-Com. there. He took off his bandoleer, his sword, his gun and handed it to me. And I lost it when I went into the hospital, somebody took it. That sword handle was probably sixteen, eighteen inches long and it was set with emeralds, and it came off. Inside the handle was the name of every Japanese general that was in China, all written in there.

Q: Somebody stole it?

HB: Yes. When I went to the hospital, of course, it stuck out of my barracks bag like "Here it is"! and when I got my barracks bag back, it was gone.

Q: What did they do with the Japanese forces that surrendered to you?

HB: Honestly, I don't know. I got in the hospital and I don't know what they did with them.

Q: Did you have any dealings with the Chinese army at all?

HB: Yes, we were with them all the way through.

Q: What were the relationships like with the Americans and the Chinese?

HB: They were alright, we both kept separate. And if you wanted to find them, it was no problem, you could smell them, because they ate garlic. They would have great big tubs of garlic boiling and you could smell it for miles. If the Japs wanted to find them, all they had to do was use their nose. They ate that and pork mostly, they always had pigs with them. If the snakes didn't eat the pigs, the Chinese did.

Q: These were the Nationalist forces; did you have any contact with the Communist forces at all?

HB: No. We kept pretty much separated, we were one camp, they were another camp. They might not be far apart, but we didn't intermingle any. They did their job, and we did ours.

Q: So, you ended getting sick from some of the food there?

HB: Yes.

Q: When were you shipped back to the hospital in the United States?

HB: In December of forty-five.

Q: So, you were in the United States when the end of the war took place?

HB: No.

Q: Do you remember hearing about the dropping of the Atomic bombs?

HB: Yes.

Q: What did you think of that?

HB: I thought it was a great thing at the time, get the damn war over with and get home! That's what everybody thought.

Q: Do you remember hearing about the death of President Roosevelt?

HB: Yes.

Q: What were your feelings about that?

HB: That was a blow to everybody I believe. Probably everybody thought a lot of him. It was a blow. I was a cryptographer, so I heard most of that stuff first. At that time, we had two machines in the whole India area. Nobody had broken the code, I had one of them, the other one was in New Delhi. So, if we could get radio contact, I could send a message to New Delhi, and they could send it to Washington through radio. You get back in those mountains and those hills and valleys and stuff, the radio contact really wasn't all that good. Sometimes you could, and a lot of times you couldn't.

Q: Radios, of course worked on batteries. How often did you have to replace those?

HB: A hand crank, nothing like there is today with the satellites up there [unclear].

Q: How long did the batteries last in that kind of weather climate?

HB: Not very long. Depending on how much you used them, of course. With the rain and the wet, you couldn't keep them dry, there's no way keeping everything dry in those monsoons. You and yourself. Id say malaria took down fifty percent of them. It was a big big deal. Another thing that took out a lot of our troops was suicide, believe it or not. They'd get to the point where they just couldn't take it and they'd walk out, and that was it.

Q: So, you were discharged from the hospital?

HB: No, I was discharged from Fort Dix. They sent me from the hospital out here in Utica-Rome down to Fort Dix for the discharge.

Q: You were discharged in March of forty-six?

HB: Yes.

Q: When you returned home, did you make use of the GI Bill at all?

HB: There wasn't any that I know of, back then. That didn't come in until after Korea did it?

Q: I thought it came in after the end of World War Two.

HB: Well maybe it did.

Q: Did you use the "52-20 Club" at all?

HB: No.

Q: Did you join any veteran's organizations?

HB: I joined the VFW, that's all.

Q: Did you join that right away?

HB: No, not the first three years I didn't. Maybe in 1952.

Q: Did you ever stay in contact with anyone that was in service with you?

HB: Yes, I did for a while. They're like me, they're all getting old.

Q: Did you ever go to any reunions?

HB: No, I don't think our outfit ever had a reunion that I know of. There was one radio operator that lived out in Cape Cod. We went back and forth for a few years, then he died. He was older anyway, he was in his forties when he was in the service. Both of my radio operators were in their forties, one was from Texas and this one out here. So, they were twenty years older, they'd be over a hundred now.

Q: How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect on your life?

HB: Just that I missed thirty-nine months of the best years of my life. When I came back, I didn't know anybody. You know, you take a kid that was my age when he went in there at nineteen and you come home, and they're twenty-two or twenty-three, they're changed, they're married, you don't even recognize some of them. But, I went back where I started, doing carpenter work, made a life of it.

Q: Could you tell us about this? [Handing Mr. Bennett an award]

HB: Well, it was issued to me for being at the first Japanese army surrender in Nanking, China. And as far as I know, there was only seven of them ever issued. The seven guys they flew in there and left.

Q: Now, where did you wear that? [Handing Mr. Bennett, a unit patch]

HB: You could wear it anywhere you wanted to, it was on your fatigue jackets.

Q: Where did you wear yours?

HB: Where? All the way through until your jacket went to the devil.

Q: You said you wore that on the back of your jacket?

HB: Yes, in the middle of the back.

Q: That's made of leather, isn't it?

HB: Yes.

Q: And this one, [Handing Mr. Bennett a much smaller unit patch] that's made of silk? Did you buy that overseas?

HB: I think they were all issued to us, sometime or another. Some of the places you went or a battle or some other thing, I don't know why.

Q: And could you tell us about this patch? [Handing Mr. Bennett, a different unit patch than the other two].

HB: This patch was issued from going from Calcutta, up all the way through Assam to the end of the Ledo road at Ledo.

Q: You have another one, a leather one. Two I see.

HB: I think this is the same idea.

Q: Yes, that one is made of leather that is kind of interesting. Well thank you very much with your interview.

HB: You're welcome.