

#243 HENRY BAILEY
FORT ARMSTRONG, SURVIVOR

INTERVIEWED ON
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TRANSCRIBED BY:
CARA KIMURA
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(Background conversation)

Michael Stucky (MS): The following oral history interview was conducted by Michael Stucky from the National Park Service, USS *ARIZONA* Memorial at the Sheraton Waikiki on December 4 at eight p.m. The person being interviewed is Henry Pete Bailey, who was at Fort Armstrong on December 7, 1941.

Pete, for the record, would you state your full name?

Henry Bailey (HB): Henry Horace Bailey.

MS: And your place of birth and date?

HB: I was born in Laurens County in South Carolina, May 9, 1921.

MS: Very good. And you say you were a little hungry and you had to get out of . . .

HB: (Inaudible)

MS: . . . and get into the military.

HB: I'm a depression kid. There was -- my daddy worked in a cotton mill for very minimum wages 'til he was -- well, he slaved for what he had and he was a -- eventually he turned to, more or less, to religion and he was a minister and he got, oh, what money the church gave to him and that helped us out. And then I went into the CCC Camp and I was in the CCC Camp for about nine months. And when I come home and I was -- naturally, being the depression, it was no jobs and so finally I just decided I was going to join the service and so I had three meals a day. That's about it. (Chuckles)

MS: (Chuckles) When did you go in, what year?

HB: I went in 1940, January 18, 1940.

MS: And where was your basic training?

HB: My basic training was in Fort Multrie, South Carolina. And then I came to Hawaii in '40. I think it was May or June. I forgot which it is.

MS: Oh?

HB: And we -- I went --- I come to Fort Armstrong and I -- well, Fort Armstrong was a quartermaster post that was food dispenser. We fed the whole territory of Hawaii, the serviceman, the Army (inaudible). Then they wanted a military police and they transferred me to the military police. And then I didn't last very long there 'cause I didn't like it. Then I went back into quartermaster. Eventually

transferred to the signal corps, and that's when I started producing and felt like I was producing. 'Cause as it was, well, when you do the same things, just dispense groceries all the time and it gets to be an old hat, you know. But in signal corps, you have a little deviation, a lot of different things to do, you see. But rather than sitting around, pushing a pencil.

MS: And so what was your actual job then as the time came closer to Pearl Harbor and all of that, what was your actual job?

HB: I was military police company.

MS: Oh, I see.

HB: And then Fort Shafter. Then from there, I went to the signal corps. I think it was just after Pearl Harbor. And then, I went to Ellice Island -- now, I'm repeating myself.

MS: That's all right.

HB: But went to the Ellice to a little place, little island called Funafuti. Then I went to Tarawa and we went to the Marianas. Then from the Marianas, we went to the South Tinian. And then I had enough points that they sent me home.

MS: And you were with the signal corps during those other assignments?

HB: Yeah, most. All the time we were down in the South Pacific, I was in the signal corps.

MS: Now before we actually get to December 7, what were you doing on the sixth? Did you have leave or did you . . .

HB: On the sixth? Yeah, Hanauma Bay.

MS: Oh, okay. All right.

HB: Had a little beach party over there. And a little wahine too. (Laughs) We had -- oh, there's about three of us and we just had a regular beach party. Little beer. And I think it was about half a pint of whiskey in there somewhere, but a private back then wasn't making but twenty-one dollars a month. And after you got your small stores and all that good stuff, you didn't have very much left over. And then I just joined the Army to keep from being broke and I was more broke in the Army than I was ever.

MS: So you had a party on the sixth and were you in your barracks that night?

HB: No. On the sixth we were at liberty at Hanauma Bay, on the sixth.

MS: But that night.

HB: That night -- no, we stayed overnight on the beach.

MS: Oh, on the beach. Oh, I see. Okay.

HB: And somebody got the word that Pearl Harbor had been bombed and we all got back. One of the guys had a motorcycle -- two guys had motorcycles. We left one of the girls there. She wanted to stay and we came back to Honolulu and went to Fort Shafter -- no, went back to Fort Armstrong. We were stationed at Fort Armstrong. And then from then on in, it was nothing but -- excuse me -- assholes and elbows getting their groceries out of there. (Chuckles) Getting the groceries out to the troops. And then, well, as I said, I'll give you a summation of most of the time I was back in the South Pacific.

MS: Now, at Armstrong, when you took the motorcycle from Hanauma Bay all the way back?

HB: Yeah, we drove. We came up what was Waimanalo, the road there. Not the road to Waimanalo, but then we came up over the -- come up over the hill and we seen the smoke and we sort of barreled ahead and got down there to it. And the old man, he was screaming, "Where's my men?"

And the Army used to have a big commissary right down there by, oh, about two blocks from Fort Armstrong. And they had about, I'd say, thirty-five, forty acres of tin storage buildings, and they're all full of food. And we -- that night, on the seventh, the night of the seventh we sorted this mess of groceries to the troops. And that was about the longest twelve hours of my life, boy. I ain't kidding you. Standing up with that SKID and loading the trucks. And there was only about six of us and don't ask me any names, 'cause I can't remember any of 'em. But there was about six of us and we worked steady, twelve hours, getting food out to Schofield and DeRussy and Shafter. And that's about the only ones who was up here running this. Let's see, Schofield, Fort DeRussy, Fort Armstrong, yeah, Fort Kam.

MS: Now, did you have a big traffic jam to have to come through to get where you were going?

HB: No. Very, very little traffic, as a matter of fact.

MS: Thankfully Sunday morning . . .

HB: Yeah, Sunday morning, everybody is sleeping in and the conflict had started by then.

MS: Do you remember about what time you would have left? What time you heard the news and jumped on your motorcycle?

HB: About 8:30, something like that.

MS: Oh really?

HB: Yeah. It was early in the morning. We got back and we just went to work. That's about all I can tell you because, man, it was a backbreaking job for the first twelve hours.

MS: And was this the contingent process for the next couple of days? You were still . . .

HB: Yes, it was the same. It was so much for this station, so much for that station. Then after you got 'em all out, you have to start all over again.

MS: Yeah, they just keep eating it (inaudible).

HB: Oh yeah. Yeah, they're hungry people.

(Laughter)

MS: I guess. Now, later on, you went into the signal corps after Pearl Harbor and made that switch and ended up in the South Pacific.

HB: Yeah.

MS: What seems to stand out in your mind with all those island-hopping operations?

HB: Well, first thing, it was hot. I mean, damn hot. Then, oh, we were operating with the second Marine division, and we were attached to the seventh Air Force. And those guys were flying out of -- well, the first strip they had was in Funafuti, then after that, the Marines took Tarawa. Then we strung all the wires and kept communications between the islands. And then, well, it's practically not a routine, but it was the same thing, but it was our job then to get communications. That's what it was. Yeah.

MS: Pretty essential stuff, the communication going.

HB: We kept up pretty well. At Tarawa, there was about seven islands -- I mean seven islands in the atoll. And all the fighting went on and on. There was a (inaudible) named Helen. That was where the airstrip was. And that's -- every time I think about that, I get mad at the Marines for -- a General named Shoop. I don't want to get started. (Chuckles)

I mean, I went all the way to a general now. I don't want to get to anything that'll go all the way Washington with it. But I just --- I had lost a lot of good buddies and I had some good Marine friends that got killed in Tarawa.

And after they sent me back from Saipan, after they flew back to Hickam Field, and three days, I was in Alexandria, Louisiana, waiting for discharge. And I got discharged in Fort Gordon, Georgia, 1945.

MS: You were a happy man (inaudible)

HB: Yeah, but then I hung around for about three months, and then I said, "The heck with it, I'm going back in."

And then I joined the Navy.

(Laughter)

HB: I guess I just, I don't know, appreciate discipline, but I mean, without discipline, you're just nothing.

MS: Did you have -- you or any of your friends -- have an inkling that the Japanese were going to make a move soon?

HB: Don't have any idea. I was just an old beat-up private. They didn't tell me nothing except, "Do it."

(Laughter)

MS: So it was a real surprise to you, as was so many others?

HB: Oh yeah, sure. I mean, so far as putting the blame on the military, I can't do it. And so far as putting it on Washington, I can't do it. I can't blame anybody, because it's a happening that I don't think anybody could've prevented it. I mean, you read a lot of books about what could've happened or who could have been at fault, or we have a big alert that they were coming, and I don't know anything, I don't know for sure and I couldn't comment on it.

MS: Now that so many years have gone by, now in the fifty-fifth anniversary, as you look back, do you have a different perception, or what is your perception now (inaudible) then or shortly after the war?

HB: About the same thing as the day I quit, "Thank god it's over."

And then, after that, then after I got out of the Navy and I adjusted to civilian life and I made my will. I learned a lot of rigging in the Navy and I worked on a pile-driving rig for twenty-five years. And I made a pretty good living.

MS: Do you have any feelings about where we should go with our remembering or commemorating Pearl Harbor? (Inaudible)

HB: I got my own opinion.

MS: Okay.

HB: Well, they could take a black man, like -- now, I am prejudiced -- they could take a black man and make a national holiday out of him, and they could just give a remembrance for the guys that died in Pearl Harbor. That's what rubs me. And just to think that they couldn't set aside a day for mourning for people that's still under that ship out there, and that's what's rubbed me about right now. Even to think about it sort of makes me a little mad. And matter of fact, it pisses me off. (Chuckles)

MS: Well, if you can have our great grandkids, say, a hundred years from now, if you would want them to know or learn or remember anything in particular, what would that be?

HB: Well, just about -- not from my experience, but from what the people have written about it, I would appreciate it if the people would tell it exactly the way it happened. And rather than if this shouldn't happen, it would have did this. And if this hadn't happened, would it do something else. I mean, when I'm a historian, I love a little history. And I would appreciate it if they tell it straight, just like it is.

MS: Tell it straight.

HB: Yeah.

MS: That's not an unreasonable request.

HB: No, it isn't. I don't think so.

MS: Well, we appreciate you coming and sharing some time with us on this and your perceptions are appreciated.

HB: Well, it was my pleasure.

MS: All right. Well, thank you very much for sharing.

HB: Okay. Okay, kiddo. You got me.

(Inaudible)

END OF INTERVIEW