

Interview with Bernard Conaway
Interviewer: Leigh Anne Howard
May 21, 2005

Interviewers Notes: Prior to the interview Mr. Conaway did not want to sign the consent for because he wanted to consider what he said prior to agreeing to sign the form. After the interview I explained the purpose of the form and explained how the interview might be used. After the explanation he completed the paperwork.

Q: You were drafted? Or you enlisted?

A: No, I enlisted.

Q: Okay. Why did you make the decision to enlist? When did you enlist? Talk a little bit about that.

A: Well, I had a friend, and he and I knew this girl that worked on the draft board. We told her, "Now if our number comes up you give us a call. So, we can both enlist."

Q: Before the actual draft was official.

A: Right. Because if they drafted you, a lot of times they would send you wherever they wanted to. But I joined the army, and he joined the navy. I went to Ft. Knox and then to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. Then from there I went to Germany, and he went to Georgia and stayed there four years as a mailman. He had it made, you know! I was over there two and half years.

Q: Okay. Was this the first time that you had been away from home? Going to Ft. Knox?

A: No. When I was fifteen, I got a job in Ohio. I was a poor boy, and I didn't have the money to go to school. My mother my dad left me when was six-years old and ten kids. She took care of us. When I was fifteen my two brothers were working in Ohio in the oil field. They came and got me and took me over there just to sort lumber to start with but within a couple weeks I was putting the towers up. You know, the big towers where they drill for oil?

Q: Mm-hmm.

A: We used to put them up, take them down, put them up, and take them down. I did that for two years. Then, I went to the Drill and Tool where I swung a sledgehammer for four hours to sharpen the bits for the cable tools that they had. That's what I was doing when I went to service.

Q: Okay. Did you do that when you came back?

A: Yes. I came back, and all my brothers and sisters had left home, so it was just my mother. So, I went to work back in Ohio, Drill and Tool again. Same thing as what I was doing. December the 10th of '53, I decided that was enough of that. I had to find a different job. Two brothers were in Michigan working for the Davey Tree Company and...

Q: I'm sorry was that the Davey Tree Company?

A: Davey Tree Company. They called me and said there were jobs up there at the time. So, the 28th day of December in '53 I put Ma in the car, and we went up. We stayed in a boarding home for two weeks. Every morning I went to Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company and put my name in to see if they needed people. The second week he hired me. On the 14th day of January he hired me. I worked there for 20 years. Then, I bought two semis and went on the road. I trucked for 13 and a half years.

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Q: Whoa. That's a long time.

A: Yea. Then in '86 I came home from Florida, sat down in a chair, and I had a severe heart attack. So, they put me on a helicopter and flew me to the University of Michigan. They gave me the new TPA ¹ they called it. It's like Drano, and it opened up my arteries for nine years. Then I started having problems, so they did the quadruple bypass on me. That was in '92.

Q: To back up a little bit. What was your training like?

A: You mean in the service?

Q: Yea, in the service.

A: Well, we went to Oklahoma, and we went through boot camp out there and it was the 18th Field Artillery, you know. I was driving the heavy equipment. Truck haul ammunition. That's what I did the whole time I was in there. That's where I got the experience so I could drive a semi when I got out.

Q: Right, okay.

A: Well, you want to know things that happened?

Q: Yea that is where I am headed next. So, what are some things that happened?

A: One day we had this big seven-and-a-half-ton truck with a hundred rounds of ammunition, a hundred pounds of powder, and a hundred rounds of projectors on it. It was hot, and we pulled over to rest for an hour. I was back talking to my buddy, and we got the march order. So, my assistant driver jumped in, took off, got down the road about three miles, and a tank sideswiped him. Flipped him over in a ditch and spilled all the ammunition and stuff. I figured I was just lucky. I might have been in there and I might have been killed.

Q: There was that picture of that; Mr. [Roy] Johnson showed me yesterday.

A: Yea and I had to drive that truck for 100 and some miles with a chain around a spring to hold the front end together.

Q: To get to a repair place or back to camp or what?

A: No, we were going on maneuvers to Baumholder. I drove it there. Then, they repaired it down there.

Q: Wow.

A: Then, I remember one time we were going, and it was cold. Oh, my goodness. We were going up towards the Russian border. I went around a curve, and I hit the curb. The fan belt... or the fan went up through the radiator and knocked the radiator out. So, they told me to pull over in a field, and I had to stay with that truck for two days. I had OD's² on.

¹ TPA - Tissue plasminogen activator is a protein involved in the breakdown of blood clots.

² OD- olive drab which is the basic United States Army color

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Q: OD?

A: Clothes, that's wool clothes. I had two blankets, and I thought was going to freeze to death, staying there with that truck. The rest of them went on. Then the next morning they came back with a wrecker and picked me up.

Q: That was a long night.

A: That was a long night. We were out in the field nine months out of the year. Of course, we drove to the Russian border quite a lot. Then we went to the firing ranges in Baumholder and places like that. We'd go down there for a week and fire the guns to practice.

Q: So, you got around quite a bit? Saw a lot of the area?

A: Oh yea.

Q: What was the fear on the Russian border? You are at war in Korea, but you all are in Germany.

A: You know back then the Russians were mad at us or something. You could step on this hill, and you could see them just like bees training down there. That was scary.

Q: Yea because if you can see them, they can obviously see you.

A: Right. Of course, we were on alert most of the time, but we had a good time. We all worked together.

Q: What were some of the things that you did for fun or to let off steam or to forget about the Russians?

A: I was kind of go getting. I was... well I don't know what you call it but anyways. I went to school in Frankfurt for three days to operate the movies. I operated the movies when we were out in the field; you know we'd have movies, and I would set up the screen and show the movies. Then I went to Frankfurt for coaching basketball, and I was the coach of the team for basketball. And baseball, I was the coach of that.

Q: So, you had these athletic teams among the men there?

A: Yea each battery got together and played. Then I... of course I was truck driver and I got the job driving these Germans to soccer games all over. I did that. I was in a lot of stuff, keeping busy.

Q: Do you remember what son-le of the movies were?

A: Oh gosh I can't remember. I remember... you know when I was in the school in Frankfurt, and we had to take that thing apart and put it back together blindfolded. Then, they gave us pictures of World War II with Hitler and we saw all this of Hitler and lot of World War II movies. Of course, Pearl Harbor; we saw that. I can't remember all of them. They would give us a new one every week and that was interesting too.

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Q: I have this image of news reels. Like rows of men coming in to watch a movie, but it is a news reel of what is going on.

A: Yea we had that too. I just can't remember all of them, but I enjoyed it.

Q: Are there some other things that you can remember? What was the food like?

A: When we were in the States, I pulled KP³ a lot. As I can remember, we had a lot of eggs.

Q: Eggs?

A: Scrambled eggs.

Q: Huh. I've heard potatoes, but I've not heard eggs.

A: Yea we had scrambled eggs, and then as I can remember we were going over on the ship we had chicken. They had this great big pot and they'd throw a whole chicken in there and cook it. A guy would stand up on a thing with a big paddle and stir the chickens around in there.

Q: How many of you were on the boat?

A: I think it was about 2,300. It was a whole unit.

Q: Wow. It took you about two weeks or so to go that you remember?

A: I think it was about 13 days going over and 13 days coming back. We went over on the General Sturgis, and I carne back... well I was RA, so I didn't come back when some of the other guys came back.

Q: Wait RA? I don't understand what that is.

A: Regular Army. Enlisted.

Q: Okay. As opposed to the people who were drafted.

A: Yea they were RA. The ones that were drafted.

Q: Okay. I hadn't heard that definition before.

A: Yea I was RA. I enlisted, and that's what that mean. See, some of the other guys only had to serve maybe two years and they could come back before I did. I was there two and half years. When I got back, I got back to Camp Kilmer, Maryland. They kept me nine days in the army because they lost my discharge. It took them nine days to find it, and they paid me \$9 a day.

Q: Just to hang out waiting for them to find your paperwork?

A: Yea, yea.

Q: That sounds like the government doesn't it?

A: Yea it does. That's the way they do things. Of course, they told us, "If you sign up to be in the reserves for five years you can go home today." Well I didn't do that. The simple reason is that my

³ Kitchen Patrol.

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brother was in World War II, and when he came back, he signed up. As soon as the Korean War broke out, he was one of the first ones to go. Of course, he already had his training; they didn't even give him any more training, and they just shipped him overseas. I had to go through boot training and all of that before I went. The reason... I think the reason I went to Germany instead of going to Korea is because I had four cousins over there, and my brother was over there. They came through and asked us if we had any relations over there, and we won't send you to Korea. So, I think that's why I got to go to Germany instead.

Q: Four cousins in Korea and a brother in Korea?

A: Yea, yea. I had a cousin killed in World War II in the Navy. Oh, I don't know anything else I can remember.

Q: It's interesting that you have so many family members that served in the military. I don't think you see that a great deal anymore.

A: Well, see I enlisted in '50, and they called him back in '50. We went together to Ft. Knox for two weeks. Then they sent me to Oklahoma, and they sent him to Korea.

Q: Did your brother ever talk about World War II?

A: Oh, not very much. He got shot off of a telephone pole. He was a lineman and got shot off a telephone pole and got wounded. General Patton... he had pictures of Patton giving the bronze star. An old basement over there had been bombed out. I thought that was something.

Q: That's pretty amazing to get a bronze star, and then for Patton to be the one to give it to you is pretty outstanding. What was his name?

A: Paul Conaway.

Q: But he had to go back to Korea. They sent him back.

A: Yea, he spent another year in Korea. Then came back was fine, made it.

Q: What was it like for you to come back after that experience?

A: You know. Things had changed so much you just couldn't believe it.

Q: Really? After just that two and half years? Can you give me an example?

A: After two and half years. The cars had changed, and I don't know. When World War II was over, I can remember that, and I can remember Pearl Harbor. I was old enough to remember that. When World War II was over, the boys came back and they couldn't find cars. You know they quit building cars there for a couple years.

Q: Right, right. To make equipment.

A: Yea. Well I was lucky because when I came back, they started building cars again. While I was over there I didn't smoke or drink or anything and I loaned a lot of money to boys. I'd give them \$5 and at the first of the month they would give me back \$7, and I saved enough to buy a new car when I got home.

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Q: That's great.

A: Of course, back then I got a new Chevrolet, four door for \$1,700. Right now, they are probably \$6,000 or \$7,000 maybe \$12,000 I don't know. But I thought that was great, and I can remember my brother coming back from World War II. He looked all over for a car, and you couldn't buy a car then because there weren't any. Look at them now. You can't believe how much things change over the years.

Q: Even in that short amount of time.

A: Right.

Q: I think probably because there is a war going on. It makes it more intense, the change. Did you send money to your mom? You were also able to send money back home?

A: Oh yea. She got \$37 a month and I got \$100 a month and then I had \$37 to go to her. It worked out pretty good. Of course, I didn't use much because I loaned a lot of money and I got a lot of money back on the first of the month. I'd save it and loan it again.

Q: And the army took care of most of your needs at the time. You didn't have to buy food or clothes or anything like that. It was all provided.

A: Yea and like I said, I didn't smoke or drink or anything. You were rationed, had cigarette stamps you know, and since I didn't smoke, I would save the cigarette stamps and then at the end of the month around the 15th guys would run out of cigarettes. I would sell them mine; I'd sell it to them. Of course, they gave it to me, but I would sell it to them, and they were willing to buy. Same way with coffee. You'd get so much coffee and...

Q: So, you'd get cigarettes and alcohol and chocolate. That was rationed. Coffee, too, though?

A: Yea I don't know if you know it or not, but when the war was going on gasoline was rising. You had to have stamps to buy gasoline.

Q: It's very different than from today.

A: Back in the '40s we had to have food stamps; you know. I can remember mother making a mattress to sleep on. The school would get together, and they'd bring in big bales of cotton and they'd tear the cotton up and put it in a thing and sew it up to make mattresses for people. That's something... I can remember that from when I was little.

Q: Can you think of anything else?

A: No, not offhand. I really enjoyed being with the guys.

Q: Yea it is an interesting group.

A: It's just like brother and sisters, you know. My wife says, 'I'm in not going. I don't know anybody.' But I couldn't keep her away now.

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Q: Yea?

A: She found out that people are social and look out for each other really.

Q: You said you have been coming to the reunions for about 14 years or so.

A: Yea.

Q: What was it like to see these guys after not seeing them for 30 years?

A: Well, I just met one the day before yesterday that I hadn't seen in 50 years. My lieutenant, Lieutenant Paul down there. I hadn't seen him in 50 years, and he and I associated in the service. It was... you can't believe how you feel. (Filling out Biographical Data sheet)

Q: Any sort of medals or special awards?

A: No, no. I just got sharpshooter ribbons, and I can't remember what all ribbons I did have. Service ribbons and... I could send and get them. There is a place in Indiana you can send and get them, but I never have.

Q: You probably should get them. Some of your kids might want them.

A: Yea I had them, but I moved so much I lost them.

Q: Okay. This is where you sign for the release and I'm going to give you a copy of my card that way if you should need to get in touch with me or whatever you know who I am.

A: If I think of something else?

Q: Yea if you think of anything. I want to make sure it is all on tape.

A: Like one time we were out on maneuvers, and we were going through this town and the big trucks were all going through the town. There was an old man standing on the corner.

Q: A German?

A: Yea a German man. And I was directing traffic and showing the guys which way to go. This poor man was standing there, and one of the trucks went around the corner and ran right over him. That was bad. Then, one time there were some guys coming back before I did. So, I went down to this little tavern one night to tell them goodbye, and on the way back one of my sergeants asked me if I wanted to ride with him. Six of us got in with him, and he been going all day and drinking all day. On the way back to the barracks, he would pull over when he met a car... it was night, you know. He would stop until the car went by and then he would go on. He did that all the way to the barracks until we got right inside the barracks... probably from here over to the other building. This car was comin, and there were trees around there, and he couldn't pull off. This car was coming, and this man had been down to what they called Piccadilly Bar, and he was drinking. He staggered out in front of that car and that car hit him, knocked him into the car I was in, killed him, and my sergeant told everybody not to say anything. Next morning, he got up and painted his car a different color. It was three months before they found out who

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did it. I wasn't drinking so I could've told him what had happened. But he wouldn't see it that way, so he got busted and sent down to Leavenworth⁴.

Q: Wow. So that was the reason?

A: If he had only just told them the truth because he didn't kill the guy. The other car did but didn't stop.

Q: And the cover up.

A: Yea and he didn't stop either. Just went on and told everybody to be quiet. Terrible. I was over in Poland one day, and I got a call and knew exactly what had happened. They court martialed us all and, of course, none of us got anything but him.

Q: Well, because he outranked you. Right?

A: Yea. I felt so sorry for him. Everybody liked him, but he just did the wrong thing. He went to town to get some paint and got to drinking. That was it.

Q: Wow. Alright. Well, I'm going to turn off the recorder.

⁴ A medium security United States federal prison for male inmates.