

Texas A&M University-Commerce

A&M-Commerce Digital Commons

All Oral Histories

Oral History Collection

2016-10-20

Earl Blassingame, Oral History Index

Earl Blassingame

Michelle Hodge

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.tamuc.edu/scua-oral-history-all>

Recommended Citation

Blassingame, Earl and Hodge, Michelle, "Earl Blassingame, Oral History Index" (2016-10-20). *All Oral Histories*. 121.

<https://digitalcommons.tamuc.edu/scua-oral-history-all/121>

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Collection at A&M-Commerce Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of A&M-Commerce Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@tamuc.edu.

Interviewee: Earl Blassingame
Interviewer: Michelle Hodge (ETWMP)
Technical Support: Alex Darschewski (ETWMP)
Others Present: Brittany Walker (ETWMP), Dennis Donald (ETWMP), Earl Blassingame's Daughter
Location: Earl Blassingame's Residence
Date Recorded: October 20th, 2016
Duration: 1:02:02
OH#:1213
Collection: East Texas War and Memory Project
Archive: Special Collections, Gee Library, Texas A&M University - Commerce
Indexed by: Michelle Hodge (ETWMP)
Date Indexed: November 6, 2016

Summary:

Earl Blassingame volunteered to join the Army in March of 1942. His four brothers also served in the military during World War II. After one year of training, Blassingame landed in North Africa where he joined the 4th Battalion of Darby's Rangers. Blassingame underwent further training in North Africa before landing in Sicily. His unit then advanced to Anzio where they invaded the beach. He then joined the 1st Special Service Force in the Army. After the Battle of Anzio, Blassingame's unit advanced to Rome where he was part of the 1st Allied troops to enter the city. He was welcomed upon his arrival by the local Italians. Blassingame then began training for the invasion of southern France but he was sent home prior to the invasion. Blassingame left the military for a few years once he returned home, but he later rejoined as an S2/G2 Intelligence Officer for the Korea and Vietnam War. Blassingame earned five bronze stars during his military service, retiring on August 31st, 1971. He currently competes in the National Senior Games Association Track and Field competition.

0:00-0:49 [Introduction]

0:49-1:40 [What was your family background?]

Blassingame was captain of his football team in 1940 at Slaton High School and received a football scholarship for a Junior college in California.

1:40-2:00 HODGE: What did your parents do?

His father passed away and his mother ran a boarding house.

2:00-2:38 [Was there a history of military service in your family?]

His four brothers served in World War II.

2:38-4:06 HODGE: How did the great depression affect you family?

Blassingame's family was very poor. His father made \$4 per day at the Slaton Cotton Oil Mill. His brothers joined the military shortly after World War II started. Blassingame was shot in the arm during his military service in Italy.

4:06-5:18 [When did you first learn about the conflicts in Asia and Europe?]

Blassingame was sick in bed and listened to President Roosevelt's speech on the radio about the war.

5:18-14:24 [Where were you when you first learned about Pearl Harbor? What was your reaction?]

BLASSINGAME: Well, I think I kinda choked up a little bit. It was really a historical event, and uh I made up my mind right then that I was going in the service.

Blassingame volunteered to join the military in March of 1942. He trained for a year and then left for North Africa where he joined the Darby's Rangers in the 4th Ranger Battalion. He then landed in Sicily and Gala. Blassingame came down with malaria while in Palermo.

BLASSINGAME: They flew me to North Africa in a hospital. And in about 10 days I was ready to get out of there you know, so I went AWOL (Absent Without Leave) from the hospital.

BLASSINGAME: I finally got back to my unit, the 4th Ranger Battalion, and they had me listed in the books as absent without leave, and anyway, by the time my commander called me back to the until he said, "Earl, you know you can be shot going AWOL during the war?" He pulling my leg a little bit, see? And I said, "Well I know we are going to invade Italy, and I don't want to miss out." I was still gung-ho then. Twenty two years old by that time. And so, he says, "You know you can be shot for that." And I said, oh come on captain. Anyway he said, 'The Battalion commander wants to talk to you.' [unintelligible] He says, "Earl. Sargent Blassingame," I said, "I'm a Corporal." He said, "Well you just got promoted to Sergeant." And that really tickled me.

Blassingame was wounded during the Italian campaign.

BLASSINGAME: We were up in mountains of Italy, there, this is the fourth Ranger's Battalion. The Germans were shelling us pretty bad. We were in there in foxholes, not foxholes, but slip trenches, like a grave you get there below the ground, so you wouldn't get hurt. And they

were shelling us for a day and a night and then they stopped shelling. I think they ran out of ammunition. And then they brought our mail around. The company clerk was the mail orderly. So they brought letters to everybody that had them. And I got letter from my mother, and she says, "Dear Earl, Son you better get home. I'll tell you what. Yesterday the deputy sheriff came by for the warrant of your arrest as a draft-dodger." And then I turned and showed the company commander the letter and he made up some silly certificate when we got back off the line. I had drank a little bit too much, beer, uh, wine, one day prior to that and so he gave me, wrote up something saying "order of the wine bottle."

Blassingame was part of the first allied troops into Rome. He later switched to the first special service force as a tech sergeant. After training for the invasion in France, Blassingame was sent home. He later rejoined the army and served in Korea and Vietnam.

14:24-16:33 HODGE: Can you describe what it was like training for your fourth ranger battalion?

BLASSINGAME: Training for it? Well, it was tough. We would go on night marches and forest marches. We had to get in real good shape physically. And, so, it was really, I don't know how to describe it, but we felt good doing it.

Blassingame discussed friend who got killed on Anzio beach.

16:33-18:03 HODGE: Can you describe for us what it was like on your first day when you landed at Anzio?

Blassingame made three assault landings in Sicily and Italy. He entered Anzio on a Landing Craft Assault.

18:03-18:54 [What was your relationship like with your fellow soldiers?]

BLASSINGAME: Oh, we were great buddies. To tell you the truth, we went out every once in a while when we were back off the line, you know, back in our base camp. This was during the war over in Sicily and Italy. And we would go out and drink a little wine as I said before and get a little intoxicated and have fun. Then we would go back on the line again. And start all over again. You know, the fighting.

18:54-23:01 HODGE: Could you describe a little bit more of what it was like in Africa?

Blassingame landed in a convoy to North Africa. One of the ships in front of Blassingame got torpedoed by the German forces. Blassingame joined the Rangers when he landed in North Africa.

BLASSINGAME: We had some tough training over in North Africa. We would go on long marches during the night. We lost a couple of people believe it or not during the training because a lot of that was done under fire you know, they would fire overhead with actual bullets, the real McCoy. [Pauses] It was, uh, it wasn't a nice affair that's for sure. But I wouldn't change it if I had a chance.

Blassingame told story of friend whose clothes were stolen in his A bag by a local citizen.

23:01-25:00 HODGE: After North Africa, did you go straight to Italy?

Blassingame went to Sicily after training in North Africa and invaded Italy. Blassingame joined the Special Forces once he entered Rome. Blassingame received a bronze star.

25:00-26:10 HODGE: Could you describe for us, you mentioned you earned the Bronze star. Do you remember what you did to earn the bronze star?

BLASSINGAME: Well, I helped a guy that was crippled. I helped pull a guy out of a ditch. And, you know, I don't have the paperwork on that, but I got the bronze star. Anyway, we were under heavy fire, machine gun fire, and I helped pull a guy out of a ditch and take him to the medics. It really was nothing to get a bronze star.

Blassingame received four bronze stars in Vietnam.

26:10-28:20 HODGE: Did you training in North Africa help prepare you for when you first landed at Anzio?

BLASSINGAME: Oh yes it certainly did. We trained hard. We were considered an elite unit.

Blassingame received his final rank as a tech sergeant.

28:20-30:44 HODGE: After the battle of Anzio, you then advanced to Rome, is it at Rome that you joined the first special service?

The 1st and 3rd Battalion were in the front during the invasion of Anzio and suffered major losses. Blassingame was part of the 4th Battalion which was on reserve during the invasion of Anzio.

30:44-32:32 HODGE: What was it like when you joined the first Special Forces?

Blassingame said it was similar to the Darby's Rangers. They were the first Allied Soldiers in the city of Rome two days before the invasion of France, June 4th, 1944. This was Blassingame's last combat experience.

32:32-33:53 DONALD: Was there much resistance when you landed in Rome?

The Germans were leaving when Blassingame's troops arrived.

33:53-35:04 HODGE: How long did you stay in Rome?

BLASSINGAME: The Germans were pulling out as we went in. We were the first, I had about eight or ten men with me and we were the first allies the civilians in Rome had seen. They came out and it was something else. It was a mess because there were thousands of them. We were only eight or ten only people. Our objective was the Victor Emmanuel Monument not too far from the old famous colosseum. And after the main troops came in behind, our own company came in behind, I was up at the top of this building and I could see the top of the old colosseum, the Roman colosseum. So I went over there. I was the first allied soldier to look down in that thing.

35:06-36:44 DONALD: Were the people in Rome receptive of you?

BLASSINGAME: Oh yeah they were with us.

BLASSINGAME: We went in when I led this patrol in, I was a ranking man. I wasn't actually in charge. I was a ranking NCO. As we went in, you couldn't hear a dog bark. It was silence. Like it was empty. They didn't want to come out before the Germans were ahead of us, falling back. We went in there, and to be honest, I went down the street looking for a bottle of wine. That's when these Italians surrounded me, and I thought they were going to kill me, but they were all friendly of course.

36:44-37:10 DONALD: How long were you in Rome?

Blassingame was in Rome for three or four days. He then trained for the invasion in Southern France, but Blassingame was sent home prior to the invasion.

37:10-38:08 HODGE: How did it make you feel knowing you were the first allied forces in Rome?

BLASSINGAME: Well, we, we were proud. We were very proud. There were so many Italians around us. You just can't imagine. They swamped us.

38:08- 38:41 HODGE: You also mentioned you were able to look from the top of the colosseum. How did that make you feel?

BLASSINGAME: Well I've always been a history type guy. I love old history. I said, "I'm not going to leave here until I see the colosseum. And I did. I was the first one who looked down into it. And in this story I wrote about it, I said I felt like a country boy going to the city for the first time. It was odd. It really was.

38:41-39:00 HODGE: What was your most difficult moment during the war?

BLASSINGAME: For me? It's when the Germans were shelling us and people getting killed right and left, and I never got hit. I guess someone was looking out for me. I don't know.

39:00-39:15 HODGE: After Rome, you said that was your last battle you fought in World War II, correct?

That was Blassingame's last combat experience.

39:12- 40:30 HODGE: And so did you returned home after Rome?

BLASSINGAME: Just before the troops invaded, made the southern France invasion, that's when we were training for that. They called me up and said, "You had had enough." Which was nice of them. Cause I didn't want to carry that rifle anymore.

Before going to Korea, Blassingame went to intelligence school and became a S2/G2 Sergeant.

BLASSINGAME: I threw the rifle down and basically picked up a pencil. I became an administrator. That's better than carrying a rifle. You don't get killed that way.

40:30-42:42 HODGE: What was it like when you returned home?

Blassingame was welcomed when he returned home. He felt the most welcomed when he and his daughter flew in an Honor Flight and visited the tomb of the unknown soldier.

42:42-43:35 HODGE: What job did you have once you returned home from the service?

Blassingame managed a liquor store and worked in a bakery. He later rejoined the service.

43:35-44:19 HODGE: What was your experiences like in Korea and Vietnam?

Blassingame changed his MOS [military occupational specialty] and became a S2/G2 Sergeant.

44:20-46:32 HODGE: How did your experiences in Korea and Vietnam compare to World War II?

BLASSINGAME: I wasn't carrying a rifle. I wasn't a combat soldier as such. We were always behind the lines, actually behind big barb wire fences about as high as this building. They did that so the girls couldn't come to the fences and chase us or whatever. And we couldn't do that to them. So, I wasn't bad.

Blassingame shared his opinion of the Korea and Vietnam War.

46:32-47:18 [When did you leave the service? Why?]

Blassingame discharged from the military on August 31st, 1971. He later went to real estate school and retired shortly thereafter from working.

47:18-48:14 [How did you adjust to civilian life?]

Blassingame left the military service for three years. He currently competes in the National Senior Games Association where he competes in shot put, discus, and javelin throw.

48:15-48:52 HODGE: How long have you been involved in shot put?

Blassingame started in the early 1980's, and he has competed in nationals for almost twenty years.

48:52-49:52 HODGE: You said you left the military service in 1971, is that correct?

He retired in 1971.

HODGE: Why did you choose to retire?

Blassingame served almost 28 years and was ready to retire.

49:25-50:39 DONALD: How had the military changed from World War II to Vietnam?

BLASSINGAME: I don't think I can answer your question.

He then started discussing the competitions he competes in.

50:39-51:08 HODGE: After the real estate business, what job did you have?

BLASSINGAME: Nada. Nothing, honey.

DONALD: Your retirement pay was sufficient?

BLASSINGAME: Oh yeah. I do alright.

51:08-52:03 [Have you been involved with any veteran organizations?]

He hasn't joined any in the Dallas area.

52:03-53:03 [Why did you decide to settle in the Northeast Texas area?]

Blassingame and his wife agreed that they liked in this area.

53:03-54:30 HODGE: So you mentioned that you spent 28 years in the military service? How did this shape your life?

He discussed his relationship with his wife.

54:30-56:05 [How has the United States remembered World War II?]

BLASSINGAME: With World War II, everybody was behind it. Everybody was behind the military and the country. And it was something else. It was a war, I don't want to say proud of, but the whole country pulled there for it.

56:05-56:28 HODGE: How does the United States remember Korea and Vietnam?

BLASSINGAME: Not nearly as well.

56:28-57:10 HODGE: How did your military experience influence you?

BLASSINGAME: To the good, I think. I'm proud of it. I am proud of the units I was with, and it's just a sorry thing that we lost so many men. It couldn't be helped.

57:17-59:27 DARSCHEWSKI: You said you went to Germany after the war. What was it like in German Occupied?

BLASSINGAME: You can imagine living in a country that you had defeated in
The war and you still had some old Germans hanging around
that still liked Hitler.

59:27-60:56 [Is there anything else that you would like to tell us?]

Blassingame will be competing in nationals for track and field in early
June of 2017.

60:56-62:02 [Closing Remarks]