

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral History Interview with Gerald Bork
Headquarters Battery, 526th AAA
1955-57
Interviewed by Mary Rasa, NPS
July 14, 2004
Transcribed by Mary Rasa, 2011



Mr. Bork at work in Battalion Headquarters.



Mr. Bork and friend inside Barracks 25.



Photos from Mr. Bork's album.
 Above photos are courtesy of Mr. Bork.



Gerald Bork at Fort Hancock in 2004.
 Photo courtesy of NPS/Gateway NRA

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

MR: Today is July 14, 2004. My name is Mary Rasa, Sandy Hook Museum Curator. I am here to conduct an oral history interview. First of all, I would like you to state your name.

GB: My name is Gerald Bork. I go as Gerry Bork.

MR: Can you tell me when and where you were born?

GB: I was born in Wisconsin, Fremont, Wisconsin. Born in 1937.

MR: Where did you graduate from school?

GB: I attended grade school in Richfield and I went to high school in New London and graduated from there in 1954.

MR: Did your father or grandfather serve in the military?

GB: No. They didn't.

MR: How did you end up in the Army?

GB: I originally was going to go into the ASA, Army Security Agency and then I found out I had to go in for three years and I decided I didn't want to go for three years so I enlisted in the Army as an R.A., which was a two year enlistment back in 1955.

MR: What is an R.A.?

GB: It's considered U.S. Regular Army instead of U.S. If you volunteered for the draft you became a U.S. If you enlisted you were an R.A.

MR: How did you become involved at Fort Hancock?

GB: After Basic in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, I went to Clerk-Typist School in Columbia, South Carolina, Fort Jackson. And after I was done with school there I was assigned to Fort Hancock in August of 1955.

MR: And did you know what you were going to be doing when you came here?

GB: Not really other than that I would be working in an office doing office type work.

MR: Did you know anything about Fort Hancock or New Jersey for that matter before you came here?

GB: No. Never heard of Fort Hancock.

MR: What was your rank at the time?

GB: When I arrived I was a private and I became a PFC (private first class) and then eventually a Spec(alist) 2.

MR: What unit were you in?

GB: I was in Headquarters Battery and I worked in Battalion Headquarters.

MR: Of the 526th.

GB: 526th Triple A Missile Battalion. (AAA of Anti-Aircraft Artillery)

MR: So, what building did you work in?

GB: I worked in what is now Building 26 which was Battalion Headquarters for the 526th.

MR: And tell me a little about your job.

GB: I worked in personnel. I was in charge, when I first arrived, I was in charge of all the enlisted men's records and later on I became I moved in, I took over all of the officers' records and I was also the recorder of court martial's. We didn't have a lot of court martial's on, at Fort Hancock but we did have a couple and I recorded and the took the notes and the records of them.

MR: And were the court martial's actually performed here?

GB: Yes.

MR: Oh, they did.

GB: They were performed here.

MR: What was a typical offense to get court marshaled for?

GB: Most of them were misdemeanors. The biggest one we did have a murder that didn't go through our court. It probably went through Fort Monmouth or Fort Dix. (clear throat) Excuse me. We had one fellow who was taking twenty dollar bills, separating them and putting one dollar on one side and twenty on the other side and he would have forty for two dollars and pass them off so...but we didn't have major crimes.

MR: Did they get discharged for that or was it just like a reduction in rate?

GB: No. They usually were discharged. They were given a dishonorable discharge.

MR: Okay. How many people worked in the building with you?

GB: In Battalion Headquarters? Thirty maybe, I'm not sure how many. I would say thirty including enlisted men and officers.

MR: Probably only a few officers?

GB: There was usually an officer in charge. We had S1, S2, S3, S4 and personnel. And there was an officer in charge of each one of those groups and then you also had an officer that was in charge of Battalion.

MR: So who, the highest rank in the building?

GB: We had a bird colonel. That was the highest rank.

MR: And he was stationed..?

GB: He was in charge of the whole thing.

MR: Okay. And was he in charge of all of Fort Hancock at the time?

GB: He was in charge of all of Fort Hancock.

MR: Do you remember what his name was?

GB: I would have to look. He was a Lieutenant Colonel Harold Broudy B-R-O-U-D-Y. And he was here when I came and he was here when I left.

MR: So the time you were here, what units other than the headquarters battalion what else was here?

GB: B Company was here, C Company was here, A Battery was out and D Battery were off site. They were in the area a certain number I'm not sure say fifteen to twenty miles.

MR: Working on the missiles?

GB: Yes.

MR: Is it all the 526th or were there other units?

GB: Well, the Navy was here, I should say Coast Guard. The Air Force was up at Highlands. And then there was the Army which is what we were.

MR: Okay, so basically the 526th was the big unit here.

GB: Yes.

MR: Was there also, the Military Police were they in your unit or...?

GB: The Military Police were in the barracks next to us but they ate with us in our mess hall.

MR: And they were probably in a different unit I guess.

GB: Yes. I would guess. Yeah.

MR: The hospital wasn't still open at the time you were here was it?

GB: Yes.

MR: It was.

GB: Yes. We had, that's the one fella I showed you. Dr. Long was one of the doctors that were there. And he resided in our building on the first level. There were private rooms off to the back. That's where his room was.

MR: So, it must have been kind of a small operation at that point?

GB: Yes. Yeah.

MR: If you needed something serious where did they send you?

GB: I don't know. I never had anything serious.

MR: Okay.

GB: We were all young fellas. Nobody got that bad.

MR: Would they actually do surgeries there or was it just...?

GB: No. I don't think so.

MR: Just medical exams.

GB: It was like a, you could go in and get shots and medications and things like that.

MR: More like a clinic.

GB: More like a clinic.

MR: Did you ever see or work with any civilian employees when you were here?

GB: Not personally. We saw them. They came in because there were civilians that had things to do with the missiles, but we had warrant officers which were also at Battalion Headquarters that were in charge of the missiles, but I didn't have anything to do with them personally.

MR: Anything else about your job that was interesting?

GB: We had a lot of good times. (laughter)

MR: Did you work a typical five day week?

GB: We worked usually a four and a half day week.

MR: Okay.

GB: We, because we were here there were a lot of people who lived in New York or Philadelphia. They would leave those fellas leave early and usually that left us leave early also.

MR: On Fridays.

GB: On Fridays. And we worked typical regular eight to five days, you know, and that was a normal day for us.

MR: Did you, was the boat still operational to get to New York when you were here?

GB: No.

MR: So you had to, was the train still operational?

GB: Yes. Because the train was how I came in. I came in on train to Highlands and then a cabbie drove me out here when I, you know.

MR: There was actually a taxi cab waiting at the station?

GB: Well, no. When I had gotten in they had given me a phone number, who I had to call. And I called and he came out and picked me up at the train station. If I remember right that was the end of the run. Wasn't it? Highlands?

MR: At that point in time, yeah.

GB: And then it went back to Elizabeth.

MR: Tell me about your part-time job.

GB: I worked in the PX (Post Exchange) and it was kind of a job you inherited as somebody was discharged. Somebody that they knew they would love to come in and do a little interview and you worked in the PX. And you just worked at nights and you worked Saturday mornings if you didn't have duty. And if you knew you were going to have duty you told them and they scheduled around that. There was three of us that worked in the PX that were military people plus probably four or five civilians that worked there.

MR: Who ran it? Was it a civilian or military?

GB: A civilian ran it.

MR: What was in there? Did you work at the Bowling Alley?

GB: No. Worked upstairs. We had a, we had a lunch counter and we had where you could buy, you know, basic essentials that you needed like toothpaste, toothbrush, a few clothes and pretty much what you could need in food. We had food items in there. We stocked shelves and waited on customers. Some nights you worked behind the counter and did cooking.

MR: Was the barber shop still there?

GB: Yes. Yeah. I think the barber shop was still there.

MR: Post office there or somewhere else?

GB: No.

MR: Okay. So did you bowl?

GB: We did bowl. But it wasn't expensive because you did your own, one guy in your group would be the pin setter and the others would bowl. It was, you know, there was nothing automatic. You step on lever and the pins, or pegs would come up and you put a pin on each one of the pegs. That's how you did it. I think there was, was there four alleys down there maybe?

MR: Yeah.

GB: Okay.

MR: Did your work here help you in the future?

GB: Yeah. Because I was born and raised on a farm and after working in an office I didn't want to go back to working on a farm.

MR: So, what did you do?

GB: I worked in an office and eventually I got into sales and I retired as a sales manager.

MR: Were there ever any potential attacks with the missiles while you were here? Were there ever any like, do you remember any times..?

GB: You would have alerts on occasion. Not, because we were in Headquarters we didn't always know when they would happen, but they did have alerts when something, apparently a plane would come out of the wrong area or something was wrong. And they would have an alert and all the missiles would come up out of the silos and they would be ready but we never had any fighters.

MR: Okay. So, you lived in Barracks 25. What was that like? How many people were in there?

GB: We had all the people who worked in Battalion Headquarters. The people that worked in the Motor Pool were part of our group. The cooks were part of our building and the doctors. We probably had thirty-five, forty people there.

MR: How was the sleeping arrangements? Was it all second floor? Were there some on the first floor?

GB: The doctors were on the first floor on one side and the cooks were on the first floor because they had to get up early. And the Battalion Headquarters were all on the left side and the Motor Pool people were all on the right side.

MR: And did you eat in the Mess Hall right behind there?

GB: Yes. All of us did including the MPs (Military Police) which were good. We had good friends in the MPs.

MR: Tell me about any social activities? Did you go to the Theater, the Service Club?

GB: Usually we went, they had the NCO (Non-Commissioned Officers) Club. We would go there because it was such a small base. There was an Officers' Club. Everybody could go into it. Weekends usually during the summer time we would go to the beach.

MR: Which beach? Was it up in the north end or..?

GB: We'd go to like Long Branch.

MR: Oh okay.

GB: Not on base. I don't think we ever went to the beach on base.

MR: Oh, okay.

GB: Not that I remember.

MR: Did you ever go fishing out here?

GB: No.

MR: Did you go to the movie theater?

GB: We went to the theater but it would either be in Long Branch or Red Bank or Asbury Park.

MR: Was this one open here?

GB: I don't think so.

MR: Oh, okay.

GB: I don't remember that we ever had movies on base.

MR: Do you remember any sporting events or teams that they had?

GB: We had basketball teams. We had softball teams. We had volleyball teams. The three of those.

MR: Good memories of those days?

GB: Yeah. Yeah. We had a color guard. I was part of the color guard. I had color guard. When we had different functions like at Fort Hamilton. We would go up there and march in the parade.

MR: So, you ended up going around in the whole New York area?

GB: Yeah. It gave us less time that you had to not work. (laughter)

MR: Sure. Tell me a little bit about you were in right after they integrated the military so you had many different ethnicities and races I guess at the same point in time. I should point out that the doctor was African-American. I assume that was kind of unusual?

GB: He was a good friend. Well, it was maybe unusual for the people from out here. Coming from the Midwest, you know, he was just another nice guy as far as we were concerned. He was one of my better friends. We were together a lot out here.

MR: He was an officer wasn't he?

GB: He was an officer.

MR: He was allowed to talk to you? (laughter)

GB: Yeah. That was his car. We would go out and he had a car. Helped us out and you know a lot of guys didn't have cars. It isn't like today in the military.

MR: Right.

GB: One of the guys in our barracks had a car. One of the guys in the (inaudible) units had a car and Dr. Long had a car. So, when we went we all went together and that was our social. Doc Long and I went. He liked to go to movies and he would call and say, "You want to go to a movie Gerry?" And I would say, "Sure," and we would go.

MR: What was his full name just so maybe we could find him?

GB: Doc Long. I don't know what his last name, what the rest of it was.

MR: Okay. L-O-N-G.

GB: L-O-N-G.

MR: And there were also African-Americans in your unit?

GB: Sure. Yep. Sergeant Bradley, the fellow he was my boss. This was Sergeant Lopez. He invited almost all the guys in here you can see to his wedding.

MR: Oh.

GB: And that was kind of unusual for us being all Caucasian going to an African-American wedding. He would have us over to his house. I am not sure if they lived in Long Branch. And he would have us over to his house for dinners at night. We socialized together. Do you remember him? Do you remember meeting him?

Unknown voice: I don't.

MR: Did you go to places in Highlands?

GB: There used to be a little, there was a bar downtown that made good pizza. I don't remember the name of it. And then right as you came off the bridge and came on top there was a little place where you could have hamburgers and malts and stuff like that. And I don't think it is there anymore. And those are places we just went in Highlands. We went to Frank's in Rumson a lot.

MR: You went there a lot.

GB: Yeah. (laughter)

MR: So, I'd say you think this was a fun place to work?

GB: Yeah. We had a lot of it was good it was tough being away from home, you know. Everybody was different. We didn't go overseas. We talked about that. I never went overseas but I felt very happy not having to go overseas.

MR: Did you serve your entire time here?

GB: Yeah. I was here almost eighteen months.

MR: When did you, when were you out of Fort Hancock?

GB: April 27, 1957. We were discharged from Fort Hamilton.

MR: Okay. So you went right up there and got discharged.

GB: I cut the orders. (laughter)

MR: Did anything especially humorous occur while you were here?

GB: We had a lot of people that had never seen snow. I guess that was unusual because we had people from down south that came up here and we had snow and they had never seen snow before in their life and that was humorous to me. They'd be all running around in it and we'd say, "Let's just stay in the building."

MR: Were there any storms while you were here? Did you have any flooding or anything?

GB: No. No. Nothing serious.

MR: Anything stand out in your mind about Fort Hancock?

GB: Other than it wasn't as much when you think about it or we were here it didn't look like it was as much of a military base as if you went like I was at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. I mean those were big military bases. This didn't appear to be a big military base.

MR: Well, how many barracks were being used when you were here? It must have been only a few.

GB: There were two line batteries and headquarters and then the MPs.

MR: It was a pretty small contingent in here at the time.

GB: Yes. It was more like a country club type atmosphere at the time.

MR: So, is there anything else you would like to say?

GB: No. Enjoyed it. It was a good eighteen months out here.

MR: Well, thank you very much.

GB: And I had never been back so.

MR: Well, thank you very much for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW