

A World War II 'noncombatant' spent the

Edward Barry defused tons of unexploded munitions

EDITOR'S NOTE: In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, Lawrence Township Memorial Committee, in cooperation with the Ledger, will feature a col-

umn each week during the anniversary year profiling a Lawrence resident.

"I was a noncombatant," Ed Barry

insists as he describes his four-year, eight-month hitch in the U.S. Army during World War II, "and I never fired a shot at the enemy".

While that may be true, he did face far greater risks with the 31st Ordnance Bomb Disposal Squad than many combatants, as he personally removed fuses of unexploded bombs, neutralized booby traps and oversaw the removal and destruction of both enemy and allied dangerous munitions.

Edward J. Barry, Jr. was born in Trenton, N.J. on April 10, 1919, attended Blessed Sacrament School and graduated in the last coed class of Cathedral High School in 1936. His father, a Trenton police captain, insisted he continue his education and he entered Rutgers University, graduating in 1940 from the College of Agriculture.

On Feb. 19, 1941, he enlisted in the Army and after basic training was assigned to Ft. Knox. He applied for officer candidate school, and was graduated a second lieutenant of ordnance in April, 1942. Vice President Henry Wallace's son was in his class, and the vice president personally presented the gold bars to the new officers at Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Md. Ed remained there as an instructor in ammunition, which included small arms up to 105mm artillery, and as the war escalated, volunteered for bomb disposal training to form new squad of disposal experts and technicians.

VETERAN PROFILE

Nicholas Loveless

"Each bomb disposal squad consisted of an officer in charge and six enlisted men," Ed continued, "and the 31st Squad was formed on Aug. 14, 1943, and I was the commander. In Nov., 1943, we were put on the alert for overseas shipment along with 24 other squads, and headed for Camp Shanks, N.Y., then boarded the US Mexico, a former cruise ship, on Dec. 4. Thirteen miserable days later we landed at Swansea, Wales. We traveled by train to Boughton, which was in the Sherwood Forest near Nottingham, where I was promoted to captain. We saw plenty of the king's deer and imagined we saw the

ghost of Robin Hood. We spent the rest of the winter there and received training in British and German bombs and fuses in the meantime."

In April, 1944, the 31st Squad moved south to Dorchester, a short distance from the English Channel, where it worked with the British Royal Engineers, and took part in the disposal of almost every type of German aerial bomb that had been dropped in the vicinity. Here they first encountered the German "butterfly" bombs that were dropped on a British Armored Force camp nearby. It was a bomb for which they developed a great respect. They also worked on phosphorous incendiary and high explosive bombs that had

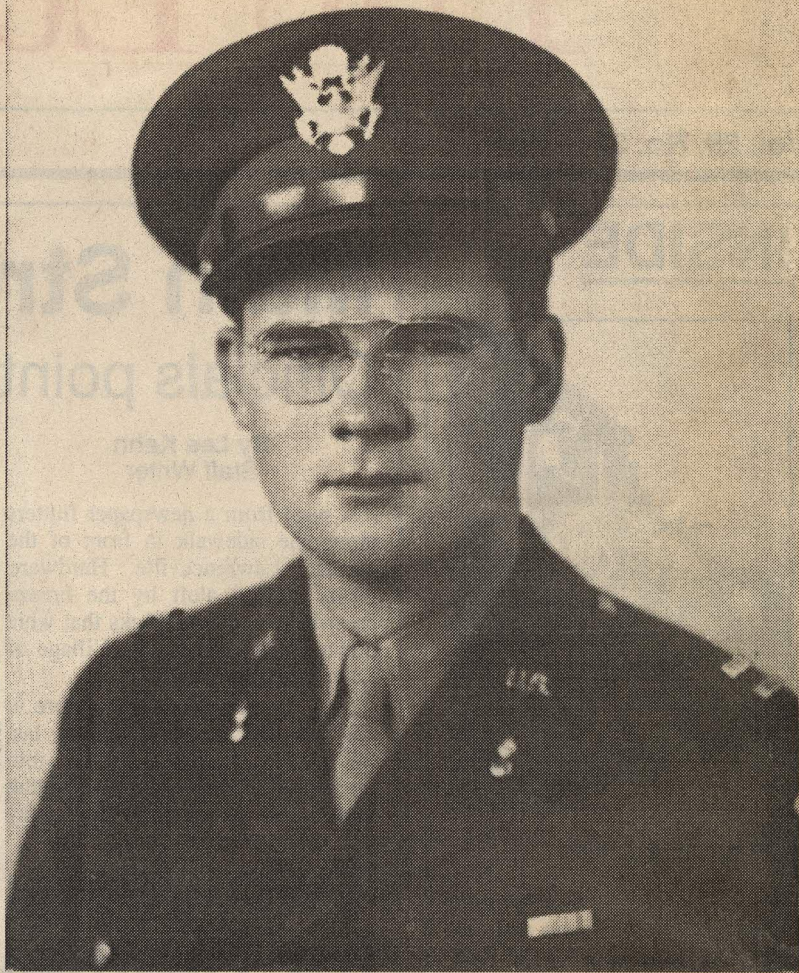


Staff photo by Holly Marvin

Edward Barry participated alongside other Battle of the Bulge veterans during this year's Memorial Day Parade.

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war chasing bombs



Edward Barry in a photo taken in 1944 as he served in the European Theater defusing bombs and neutralizing other ordinance.

been dropped on American and British camps that were gathered for the coming invasion. On D-Day, June 6, the squad began excavating an unexploded 1,000kg German high explosive bomb that was dropped on a camp at Broadmayne. The squad dug down 25 feet in the soft white chalk, and it was Captain Barry's job to go down into the hole to identify the bomb and remove the fuse, after which it was safely hoisted out.

"Our squad left for France on July 21 and landed at Omaha Beach," Ed continued, "and it took several days to unload. The first night we could hear a terrific barrage and feel the ground tremble, and soon learned that it was the beginning of the breakthrough at St. Lo. While looking for supplies we needed, I met Ed Hoffman, and old classmate from Trenton, who later became the publisher of the Trentonian newspaper. Our first job was on July 27, when we defused a German 31cm projectile, and later the same day, defused an American 500-pound bomb in the peninsula. On July 29, we were sent to St. Mere Eglise where there had been an explosion in an ammunition depot, and we cleared it of all damaged and dangerous ammunition and dumped them in the sea. As the First and Third Armies pushed across France, we followed close behind them, clearing ammunition from towns as we went, including Lemans, Chartres and Rheims. At Chateau Thierry we had been exploding recovered bombs, the crater going deeper each time one detonated, and about eight feet down uncovered a WWI French artillery shell, the jawbone of a mule and other remnants of what appeared to be a World War I bunker of some kind."

The Battle of the Bulge found the 31st Squad south of Namur, Belgium, and on the fringes of the fighting, passing elements of the First Army in retreat. They were not engaged in the actual fighting, but removed 145 tons of German small arms ammunition by boxcar to avoid its recapture by the Germans. The squad spent the rest of the winter in a requisitioned house and were busy cleaning up German and Allied mines and ammunition in the Ardennes area before moving to Bonn, Germany. After removing 13 bombs set as demolition charges in a tunnel near Ahrweiler, they were called to dispose of 643 German butterfly bombs at Rangelar Airport, making it seem like the Fourth of July as 100 were detonated at the same time.

The end of the line for the 31st Squad was at Fulda, Germany, as VE Day was declared. They had disposed of 103 bombs of all nationalities, 643 German butterfly bombs and 486 tons of German and allied munitions. They did the job they were trained for and expected to do, but there were few decorations. It was considered that coming through without a casualty and a whole skin was the best decoration to carry home from any war.

As the squad was broken up, Ed returned to the U.S. in October and was discharged. He had been awarded the Bronze Star Medal for "performing his hazardous duties efficiently and safely, in constant regard for the lives and property around him, which contributed immeasurably to the vital ordinance mission."

Ed returned to Trenton after his discharge and joined the N.J. National Guard at Vineland while working as head farmer at Leeburg Correction Facility. He then went with the Farmers Cooperative Association as a sales representative, and finally with the Purchasing Bureau of the State of New Jersey, where he retired in 1992 after 18 years service. He settled in Lawrence in 1947 and has lived at 15 Forrest Avenue since that time. Three of his five sons served in the military: Edward as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam and Panama, William in the National Guard, and Thomas in the Army Reserve. Michael is presently an attorney, and Robert a physician practicing in Florida.

Ed and his wife Margaret have always enjoyed doing things together and enjoy the much slower retirement pace. Ed is a past commander of American Legion Post 414 and a long-time member, and has been an avid hunter and fisherman all his life, appreciating what the outdoors has to offer.

On occasions he reflects back on his experiences in World War II still maintaining he was a non-combatant, and technically he may be right, but his record proves otherwise.

The Veterans Memorial Committee is asking veterans from World War II and other conflicts to provide a photograph in uniform, along with their name, present address, branch of service and unit, where and when they served, their principal assignment and summary of their service. Their individual experiences or un-

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Veteran_____

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photographs will be returned. Families of deceased veterans are also encouraged to submit articles. All materials should be sent to The Lawrence Township Veterans Memorial Committee, P.O. Box 55966, Trenton, N.J. 08638. Inquires may be made by calling 882-9108.

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