

Interview with Carmine Botti
Date of Interview: March 15, 2004
Interviewer: James Zanella
Transcriber: Natalie Zitter

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

JZ: This is an interview with Carmine A. Botti, as part of the Italian American World War II Veterans oral history project, sponsored by the National Italian American foundation, and the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. It is March 15, 2004 and we are in Wilmerding, Pennsylvania. Will you please tell me your full name and date of birth for the record?

CB: My name is Carmine Anthony Botti. I was born July 16th, 1919, in Wilmerding, Pennsylvania.

JZ: Thank you for inviting me into your home.

CB: My pleasure.

JZ: Who was the first in your family to come to America, to the United States?

CB: Well I guess my mom and dad, my parents did.

JZ: Where did they come from in Italy?

CB: Agropoli, it's around Naples. I just forget whether or not it is north, south, east, or west of Naples. [It is] about, 40 or 50 miles from Naples.

JZ: Did they come together?

CB: Yeah. I mean, they were married when they came.

JZ: Do you know what year they came?

CB: No I don't.

JZ: And they came here to Wilmerding?

CB: I don't think, my father, I think he went to Connellsville first, and then from Connellsville he came to Wilmerding.

JZ: What did he do here in Wilmerding?

CB: He worked for the Westinghouse Brake Company.

JZ: And your mom stayed at home?

CB: Oh yeah, my mom stayed at home and he worked, they had 7 children; 5 boys 2 girls.

JZ: Were there a lot of Italians here in Wilmerding?

CB: Oh yeah. There was a section, like in every other town, they came over. They always congregated real close. That one street that I was in, I think three fourths of the street was Italians, and then there was another street, Anne Street, there was Italians there, you know, and then there were other foreign class of people: Lithuanians, Serbians, and the Russian Orthodox. But there was quite a few Italian families. When they came, they liked to congregate, to live, and raise their kids where the other Italians, the friends of theirs that they knew, I guess from Connellsville. My dad knew that they were there.

JZ: Do you know what he did in Connellsville?

CB: No I don't. I guess he didn't stay there too long.

JZ: Was your mom with him at this time?

CB: Yeah.

JZ: So where did you live here in Wilmerding when you grew up? Where at?

CB: Across town. On the north side of Wilmerding. On 302 State Street, that's across the town, yeah. But that street ain't there anymore. I mean they tore that neighborhood down for the highway. See the highway goes there. But the grade school that I went to over there... the building is still there. But there used to be the Italian Club, and then from the Italian Club they had a banquet unlimited, where they had banquets for after funerals and different kinds of banquets, some for weddings, some for birthdays, you know?

JZ: What kind of an Italian Club was it? Was it a Sons of Italy? Do you remember?

CB: I guess anybody could have joined. But then [to be in] the Sub-Alpine, you had to be like from the Northern part of Italy, but our club across town, any Italian could belong. Then there were a lot of social members too, you know, they didn't want to be regular members, same thing down in Sub-Alpine. They'd charge you 1 dollar, 2 dollars to be a social member, so this way they wouldn't be getting into any trouble.

JZ: Was there a lot of Italians from where your parents were from?

CB: Yeah, they were from the area of Italy, they came from Agropoli, near Naples.

JZ: Did you speak Italian?

CB: No. Well, when my mother was living we spoke Italian, but not that much. Then after she passed away, there was no one there to talk to in Italian. I know my older sister's kids, they used to come over the weekend up to their grandmother's. My mother couldn't speak English, and they picked up Italian real good. But as fast as they learned Italian, when she passed away, you know, they forgot it. But it was amazing to see how they picked up the Italian language whenever they was around my mother, you know, their grandmother. I mean whenever she spoke to them she spoke to them in Italian, and I guess they had an idea what she was saying and they remembered the words and they picked it up. I was even surprised. They learned it real fast.

JZ: You spoke Italian with your mother then, right?

CB: Yeah. I mean, whatever I could, I used to speak Italian to her.

JZ: Tell me about your childhood when you were growing up. Did you eat on Sunday, and have a big dinner, go to church...

CB: Oh yeah, with, especially my mom, she made sure we went to church on Sundays, and the family ate together on Sunday. Then after that she'd go and visit her friends and relatives, you know, and my dad, they used to, with the other fellows, friends of his, they used to get together and play cards and drink wine and reminisce I guess... that's what it was I guess, the weekend was a relaxation time. Then Monday came around and my dad would have to go to work again. But, I

guess they looked forward to the weekends; this way they would spend a lot of time in the neighborhood and with their friends.

JZ: Did you have a lot of relatives?

CB: The only relative I had was real close, was a common aunt in Turtle Creek. She was my father's sister's family, and that's what I'd call a first cousin. But then there was other people that were like, there was a woman, she was my Godmother, so I mean, Italian people usually called them their relative, you know? And the same thing with my bothers and sisters, there were ones that were with Confirmation, you know, Baptismal, they became real close with the family.

JZ: What church did you belong to?

CB: It was Saint Aloysius, but then they broke... and then when I got married I belonged to the Polish church, Saint Leocadia. And then when they broke Saint Leocadia church up, the majority of the parishioners, they could have gone to any church they wanted to but the majority of them went to Saint Jude the Apostle church now. See, they even changed the name of the Roman Catholic Church, from Saint Aloysius to Saint Jude.

JZ: Was that a predominately Italian church, then, when you were growing up?

CB: Well, we used to, yeah, I mean there was a mixture, like Irish, Polish... no the Polish had their own church down there. And then when I got married, I got married in a Polish church, and then I belonged, my wife and I, we belonged, was going to the Polish church. But that Saint Aloysius was all-denomination, Lithuanians, Croatians, Italians.

JZ: Did everybody get along?

CB: Very good, very good, yeah, they got along real good. You know normally, you don't. I guess at that time they were all the same age group, and they knew what, hardship they had, you know, when they came over, and they know what the other nationality had so they... but they made the best of it though, they got along real good. I know a lot of Italian friends, they were real... These Lithuanian fellows, they took them into them, you know? They just... they liked them so much that they watched over them, like it was one of the families. But today everyone's on their own. They're not as close today as they were years ago.

JZ: So everybody, all the neighbors would get along?

CB: Oh yeah, wonderful yeah. We never carried a key, the door was always open. Slept out on the porch, no one bothered us... today you got to have six or seven keys.

JZ: And an alarm system...

CB: Yeah...I mean, it's, when somebody would bake something, they'd bring it to the house, like a cake or something, bring some of the cake over. Sometimes they'd bake the next one for the ones they want. And then when somebody got sick, the neighbors would go out behind that family of whoever was sick, and helped out. They stayed up with the kids, waiting or whatever with the person who was sick; take turns and stand up besides the mother and the father staying up. But they, they were real close, you know? It's like one big happy family, the whole block. They helped one another.

JZ: So this probably helped you get through the Depression?

CB: Oh yeah, right. As a matter of fact, during the Depression the company provided a piece of ground for anyone who wanted to have a garden. And that they'd have free plants and then they'd go up and plant them. Like my dad, he used to work at Second Creek and I used to go up there and he told me, "Go up and make the rows." So when he goes up there in the morning, all he'd do is plant it, and then there was like a stream of water, and you'd get the water from the stream and water the plants. He planted whatever we needed at the house, tomatoes, peppers, lettuce...

JZ: So your house was right near the creek?

CB: No. We had to go up in the hill.

JZ: So you had a garden up in the hill?

CB: Yeah, they had a lot of open field and they planned it off for anyone who wanted it.

JZ: The Wilmerding government? Who gave you the piece of land?

CB: I think the Air Brake had something to do with it.

JZ: And they gave you also the free plants?

CB: Yeah, I mean we had to go down to one place that they had the plants. They'd tell you the plants are in. You'd get the plants, you'd get them, and you go up and plant them.

JZ: Did your dad work during the Depression?

CB: Yeah he did. They managed; they give a family, a fellow with a family like 3-4 days a week, or 3, whatever it was. Sometimes he had to change shifts to get those 2-3 days, whatever they gave them. But he liked second shift. He liked 3 pm -11 pm. I don't know why, but I guess he figured he could get something done. He'd get up early in the morning.

JZ: Your dad make wine?

CB: Yes, he made wine. Yeah, he made wine.

JZ: How about your mom? What did your mom make and cook? Do you remember, any traditions, anything special?

CB: Well I guess she made whatever the other Italian mothers made; they made cake from scratch, they didn't have no box cake. We used to get like, pig's blood free from the butcher, our neighborhood butcher. And she'd make those, like blood pudding. And to us it was like a delicatessen, it was something; we used to look forward to it, because we didn't have money to go out and buy a cake. So it was like I told you, unless my mother made cake from scratch... and then she used to make her own macaronis, and used to eat macaronis twice, on Thursdays and Sundays, macaroni. She'd make it on Thursdays without the meat and then on Sundays with. [She'd] go to the butcher and get a piece of rump and she'd cut in small pieces so everyone in the family could get a taste of the meat on a Sunday. I guess, I mean, that's about it. She did a lot of embroidering, my mother, yeah.

JZ: Did she sell them, or would she just do it for the house?

CB: You know, what we needed. She had a sewing machine. I guess every family seen a sewing machine, she used to use that to fix up the clothes, pants, whatever. Then after that, when she got older, she didn't do it anymore. She did it whenever she was able to do it and then when she couldn't do it she just gave it up.

JZ: Where did you go to school?

CB: I went in the neighborhood, I went up to the, I think it was up to 4th grade, and then from 4th grade we had to come across town here, and go up to finish 8th grade. And then from 8th grade we used to go... Well, Wilmerding went to Turtle Creek High School, and then they finally built one in Wilmerding. I was the last group of people from up...we was the last group that graduated from Wilmerding High School, and then... no, I went to Turtle Creek. And then when they built the school, we were the last ones to graduate from Turtle Creek, but the ones after that, they started the school in Wilmerding. That was in '37. I went there after we graduated our group; there was no one else who went to Turtle Creek and they went to Westinghouse Memorial High School in Wilmerding. And the ones from Wall, Pennsylvania, that's the town right next to us, they used to go to North Braddock, Scott, and then after Wilmerding they built a high school and they came to Wilmerding.

JZ: When you went to school as a kid, you spoke English at this time right?

CB Yeah, yeah.

JZ: So you didn't have any problems with the teachers?

CB: No, no problems at all.

JZ: During the Depression, did you work at all? Did you help out your dad or, I know, you were at school at the same time, but did you help out? Do odd jobs?

CB: Well, I remember selling papers. I used to sell, my brother sold for the Sun Telegraph. No, he delivered for the Sun Telegraph, he had a route, he used to go across town and then he'd go to Haderly [?], that was about ½ mile-mile down the road... no it was more than a mile, mile down the road. Then he had to go to the hospital, and then he was making more money than I was. I was making fifty cents a week selling papers up on the bridge at one of the gates at the Westinghouse Air Brake. I was selling the Press. Then after, like I said, he had to get operated on, I took that route job. I was making \$2.50 a week delivering papers.

JZ: The Sun Telegraph?

CB: Yeah, the Sun Telegraph. And then my dad, he managed, I mean, we never pressed him for anything. We realized he didn't have much; he had a big family, five boys, two girls, and I mean, what he made he just had to make sure that the kids were fed and had some clothes on them.

JZ: Were you the youngest?

CB: No, no.

JZ: Or, who was the oldest?

CB: My oldest brother, his name was James. He was the oldest one. And then there was my other brother, he's 92, 93, and then there's my oldest sister, and then my brother Lou, and then me, and then my youngest brother; he passed away, and then my sister, youngest sister. So there are only three of us living.

JZ: Did your dad ever serve in the military or anything?

CB: No, no.

JZ: So you graduated in '37.

CB: Yeah, in '37.

JZ: So after high school what did you do?

CB: Well I got a job in the Air Brake, and I must have worked there about 6 months. And then I was called to go into the service. That was in '41. And then from '41, I didn't come back, see, I was serviced. They had us on while we were in the service; when we came back to work, those 4-5 years that I wasn't working, it added onto my service.

JZ: So that has something to do with Social Security, right?

CB: Yeah, they made sure, I mean I guess they told the fellows whenever you come back your job's here, if you want to work here, and your service is added on to your, the time that you had before you went to the service.

JZ: What did you do at the Air Brake?

CB: You'd start out with laboring. Then from laboring, when they'd allow new guys in, they'd go up to laboring, and that would move you up on the piecework job, like a machine, or a bench, or whatever it was. I got on the drill press, small drill press, and then when I left for the service, I left from that small drill press. And then when I come back, I work in the store room, because they wouldn't let me... Well I mean, which was nice of them, they wouldn't let me operate a machine anymore, on account of my eye. They thought maybe, when you're drilling or something, you might lose the other one. I almost lost the other one the way it was; I got a piece of shrapnel right in between the nose and the eye, the right eye, the left eye's gone. I had four shrapnels in my face. Above the eye, the eye, above the eye, cheek, and right by the right eye.

JZ: I'm sorry. Did they take it out?

CB: Yeah, I think I still got a piece in my head, cause I cant take no MCI or... you know, whatever that test, and then they found out. This one guy found out when he took an x-ray, found that I still had a piece of shrapnel in me. I had 19 shrapnel wounds, I counted them one time when I was in the hospital, and I got from '44 when I got hit, I got out on discharge, it was on VJ Day, when Japan surrendered. I was on my way home. So from, that was in '45. I was in the hospital from '43, when I got hurt, until '45. I had 19, I figured about 19 operations.

JZ: So you were drafted in '41?

CB: Yeah. I tell everybody, I says, "Oh, you guys were drafted?" and I says, "I was selected." You know, they called it the Selective Service Act, remember that's what they called it. It's like the Service Act. I says I was selected to go, to come here (laughs). No, but I was a draftee though.

JZ: So you were selected before Pearl Harbor?

CB: Yeah.

JZ: What month, do you remember?

CB: I just forget what month it was. I think I was in basic, or the main camp. I really can't remember what it was. But once they bombed Pearl Harbor they took precautionary measures. They put the machine guns up on the roof of the buildings in the camp I was in, and they made sure there were no lights on at

nighttime. When I left the States, we went right into action. We didn't go to a country and sit around for a while. We went in right into action. We went to Africa right away.

JZ: Operation Torch?

CB: No, I just forget what it was called. There were 3 regiments in a division, each regiment was a combat team; they landed, one regiment landed in Casablanca, we landed in the north of Casablanca, and then there was land north of us. We landed in Port Lyautey and the other one landed in Oran. But that didn't last too long, about 2-3 days, but a few of the fellows got killed at the beach there. And then when I got wounded it was around midnight, it was nighttime. And it was dark; I got shrapnel wounds from a German hand grenade. I don't know how I got on the ground, whether I jumped off or whether I was blown off, because there was ammunition on the jeeps, small-man ammunition on the jeeps. The commander told me to show the jeep driver, I think he was from the ammunition one. He says, "Take the jeep driver up to your company area," and we never got there with the ammunition because we was blown up. Then from there I was on the ground. While I'm crawling to go to the company, he's lying where the company was, the German patrol, they got around, happened to look up and I seen him, and I guess they seen I wasn't gonna last too long, with all the blood coming from my face from the four shrapnel wounds. So they just left and I just kept crawling. But I got there, and told my, I think it was the sergeant, he says, "He get you too?" I says "Yeah German patrol, not through our lines." I says "That's who did it." I understand that they got the patrol after I had notified them that I had seen them, and that's who it was. I passed out as soon as I got to the line, and then I come to. And then until about dawn, they brought me back to the company headquarters, to CP, and they says, I think it was the officers, he says, "Why did it take so long to bring him back?" They said that they thought it was more than one patrol that's not through our line. Then I passed out, and I don't think I came to until about 11 days later. After that morning, when they was taking me to the field hospitals, and the evacuation hospital, then I stayed in a couple hospitals in the buildings. I was in Casablanca, I was in a hospital in Casablanca, and then I guess from there they moved me back to the states.

JZ: So this was in the desert, right?

CB: No, it was up in the hills of Meknassy.

JZ: In Tunisia?

CB: Yeah, in Tunisia, where I was hit. Like I says, I can't remember. I knew I was on the ground. But I don't know whether I jumped off or whether I was blown off. I just kept crawling.

JZ: Were you with anybody in the jeep?

CB: Yeah the jeep driver. But I don't know who he was or nothing. We never got to get into a good conversation, who he was, what his name was, and he must have come from the ammunition corps, because when they called in... see because they was using a lot of small arms ammunition to let the Germans know that the Americans were opposite them, and they must have been using an awful lot of them, then they wanted more ammunition, because they didn't want to be caught short. Them soldiers at that time, we had one Italian soldier, he was a sergeant, he made... all our officers were gone, they were shot, and he took over the command. He wound up making commission, field commission. He made it from the field from what he did out on the battlefield. And when you make it that way, you're making a commission the hard way. He just come in. We had one sergeant. He was from the ammunition company. When we landed in Port Lyautey, we was going up towards the fort, I happened to see this one fellow. He says, "What's he doing up here?" Here, he was a sergeant from the ammunition company giving us our ammunition. Somebody spoke up, he says, "He couldn't give out the ammunition; he had to be where the action was. He took it out on his own to go and fight." That's the kind of soldiers we had. When they thought they wasn't doing enough, they wanted to go do more. Maybe today if he had not been on this job, maybe he'd still been living all these years. But he just...

JZ: So it was like D-Day, you guys landed in Morocco, right?

CB: Yeah, we landed. Well we left into state and we went right to action.

JZ: Right into action?

CB: Right into action from the States. It was an awful lot of ships, because every time we'd wake up in the morning, we'd see ships, more ships than we had the day before, and then the next morning the same thing. We went in by landing barges, and then I was fortunate enough to be in the first wave because there wasn't any shooting at the time. But the ones who came in after us, they got the worst; there was a few of them dead down on the beach. I think we had twin brothers who were killed at the time when we landed.

JZ: Were there Germans in Morocco at that time? Who was there?

CB: No, I think the French. We got the Germans later. I think the French. But they didn't give us no resistance. We was always on the go. We never went and took a rest in a building; we always rested in a pup tent. You know, we'd put our pup tents up, rest, and then we'd keep going. We'd keep going forward, going ahead, but the French, to me, they didn't want to fight. They gave up right away. But the Germans, then when we came close to where the Germans were, then there was a pretty....

JZ: Were there Germans and Italians, or just all Germans?

CB: Even Italians didn't want to fight, there was Italians too, there was Italians there.

JZ: You remember seeing them?

CB: We saw where they was at, but when we went to where they was, where they were positioned at, they weren't there. They had left. One of the sergeants said there were Italians here. I guess they ran. They didn't want to have nothing here.

JZ: So you were in the infantry, right?

CB: Yeah, right.

JZ: So when you were drafted in '41, you left Pittsburgh. Where did you go after you left Pittsburgh?

CB: I went to the basic camp. That was in Camp Wheeler, Georgia. Then from Camp Wheeler, Georgia, where they had the basic training, I went to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. They had the 9th Infantry Division there. The home base was there, and then there was the 82nd Airborne was based there. Then there was an artillery outpost there. And then there was one area, there was a friend of mine, he was in the 2nd Armored, and they were, about, maybe 5 miles down the road. And when I heard that they were 5 miles down the road, then I knew he was in the 2nd Armored Division. I went down to see him, and they were getting ready, they were getting ready to go overseas too.

JZ: Tell me about basic training. What did you do there?

CB: They showed you how to use your rifle, you know, how to be a soldier; in other words, no fooling around and all that. We ran every morning, did calisthenics in the morning, and went on the hikes, 15-mile hikes. And then we went to Fort Bragg. They made us walk ¼ mile, run ¼ mile because somebody told us that the reason they was doing that was because the beach that we was gonna land on was a long beach, and they wanted us to be in shape. We did that oh, about every day. We'd run ¼ mile, walk ¼ mile, run ¼ mile, walk ¼ mile. But there was a lot of guys, during the first ¼ of a mile of the run, they'd step on the side [of their foot] so they couldn't go on any more. But they wound up going overseas with us anyways. They just didn't want to run anymore. Then the trucks would come and pick them up and take them back to camp.

JZ: So you were training, and you knew you were going to end up on a beach?

CB: Yeah.

JZ: And they told you that?

CB: Yeah, because they told us, "We got to keep you in shape to get ready when you make the invasion."

JZ: What division, you were the 9th?

CB: Yeah, 9th Infantry Division.

JZ: What'd you do for fun on the weekends or on leave?

CB: Oh, we'd just rest up, get together, start BS-ing, that's about all. All of them used to go to town. They used to go to Raleigh, North Carolina from Fort Bragg. I never went.

JZ: Stay around the base?

CB: Yeah, the camp, you know. Go down to the day room and BS sometimes. Sometime go to the movies on the post.

JZ: How was the food?

CB: Food was very good, very good. And on Saturdays, we didn't have to get up to do any work, do like calisthenics or anything like that... or was that Sunday?

Well, anyway, either Saturday or Sunday, the fellows they were... they loved to eat. They used to go to the mess hall, and when they'd come back we'd ask them what they had and if it were anything worth while getting up for. We used to get up, because otherwise, we'd stay in bed. I think that was on a Sunday. Well, when they had good breakfast, we got up and went. But when the breakfast, we didn't care for it, we didn't go. We'd stay in bed. And they would go up to the PX and have something to eat. Well then there was lunch time, when people would eat lunch and dinner.

JZ: How did you get along with the other guys?

CB: Good.

JZ: You didn't have any problems because of your Italian descent?

CB: No, no, no, no, no problem. Hey like I says, we was all there for one purpose: to be a soldier and fight whoever we was supposed to fight. This one fellow... they was sending fellows home, before we went overseas; he had a chance to go home. And this one guy was down in the orderly room, and he knew there was room for one more, and he knew that I hadn't been home yet. So I'm walking down the company street going towards the... was that? Yeah, I was walking down, and he was coming up. And he says, "Hey Botti! They're going to call you and ask you if you would like to go home on a furlough week." Hey says, "I know you don't have any money; tell them you've got the money, tell them yeah." He says, "I'll get it for you." And he got it for me. He was a Jew fellow from Chicago. He happened to give me enough, so much that when I came home, I got him, and when I got back, I gave it back to him. I mean that's how they were, they helped one another out.

JZ: Very nice. So you came home for a couple days?

CB: About five days or a week I think it was. Whatever time they gave me, it went real fast and I just, if it wasn't for that fellow I probably would have never got home, you know. I mean we left in '41, and '45, that's when I come back. But once you're overseas in the service, you don't know what day it is, what month, what time of the day, because we're not interested in that. Time don't mean nothing. When they told you to get up, we got up. When they told us it was chow, we figured it was around lunchtime. But we never kept track of the days like we do here, like March today, or whatever. They never talked about the days, or weeks, or months, or whatever.

JZ: So what kind of equipment did you have? Of course you had your M-1...

CB: Oh yeah, you had an M-1. You had a bayonet. Then you had a pup tent. You had to carry it with you, and blankets. That was like a full-filled pack. A mess kit; you had one for the food and one for the water.

JZ: I guess the pack was quite heavy.

CB: Yeah, it was heavy.

JZ: So when you were going to Morocco, you left from Fort Bragg or did you go up the... did you leave from a port up there?

CB: Yeah, let's see... was it Norfolk, Virginia? I think it was from Norfolk, Virginia. Like I says, I didn't pay much attention to all those things, you know, like where we left from, the name of the ship was and all that.

JZ: You were just taking it day by day.

CB: That's right, day by day. Yeah, we went straight over, and went right into action from the states.

JZ: Excuse me, we're gonna take a little break.

CB: That's fine.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

JZ: So you went to Macon, Georgia for the basic?

CB: Yeah, Camp Wheeler, Georgia.

JZ: So, how was, real brief, when you were in Morocco, how was the local population, like the civilians in Morocco?

CB: Well, they told us they didn't want one person to go by themselves. They says to make sure you have somebody with you because they never knew what was

gonna happen. They see one guy, whatever the Moroccans were gonna do. But like I says, I mean, we didn't spend any time, I think, in town, because we was always on the move. Our outfit was always on the move. We used to see them, as soon as we'd move out of our bivouac area. Then we'd see the Moroccans come over and then they would dig up the ground where we had threw our garbage and clean up cause they'd dig it up and get what they could salvage from it, you know? That's the only time we'd seen what the Moroccans did. But, like I says, in town, we never stayed around too long to go into town, because we was always on the go.

JZ: You were always on the go?

CB: Oh yeah, always on the move.

JZ: This was all desert, right?

CB: No, it wasn't desert, mountainous, hills, a lot of hills, mountainous. We used to see a lot of Moroccans out in the hills, you know. But they never bothered us.

JZ: They never said much?

CB: No, nothing. We just kept going. And then I, during the day, we had those army coats. A lot of the fellows would throw their coats away because it was too heavy for them to carry when it was warm. But they could have used them at night because the nights were cool. But they were sorry afterwards that they threw their coats away.

JZ: So a lot of guys, did they get rid of some of their equipment on their...

CB: Yeah, but not the main equipment, they got rid of the, the coats, the things that they didn't need.

JZ: So like you said, not a lot of resistance up until Tunisia.

CB: Yeah, up there.

JZ: So like you said, afterwards, you came home, you came back here to...

CB: In 1945 I came back.

JZ: After you were wounded you went to...

CB: I went to different hospitals, yeah. Field hospitals, evacuation hospital, and then I went to Casablanca; I think they moved me up to Oran. Then we left from there, came back on the ship and went to Fort Dix in New Jersey, Tilton General Hospital. I forget how many months I was there, or years. Then I went to Staten Island, New York. I think I was operated on in Tilton. I saw a fellow's stomach, in Fort Dix, in Jersey; he had a hole like this in this stomach. I used to go see him everyday, but then afterwards, I didn't get to see him. I think they moved me out. I don't know whether he lived or not. That penicillin came out during the war too. When I was in the hospital, I happened to see a lot of nurses and doctors around patients; I told them nurses, "What are they doing there? I see a lot of commotion going on." They said that they were trying a new medicine. It's called penicillin. They'd give it to a patient. They never gave it to them twice in the same spot. They give it on the cheek, on the arm, on the next arm, shoulder, and then the other cheek. Then they'd go around, because they didn't know what kind of affect that penicillin... but it was a wonder drug, a wonder drug. And that's what they tested on these patients. And then they finally wound up giving you, that was like a powder form, they had like a powder form. I think they wound up making it in liquid in which they gave you a shot. I think they had a powder form, from what I understand. Powder form and then the needle.

JZ: Did you get a lot of shots when you were going overseas?

CB: I can remember maybe one or two shots. Maybe one, they had to give you shots. When you go to another country, they had to give you something. Or either that or pills; they used to give pills too, I guess. I think on the ship, I remember, I think the officer was asking this one soldier if he had got a certain kind of pill, and I don't remember whether he says yes or no.

JZ: So tell me about when you were told you were going to get the Distinguished Service Cross in the hospital room.

CB: Well, the nurse, like I said, she was more excited than I was. She made sure that I had hospital clothing on. I went down with hospital clothes. She made sure that I was cleaned up and everything. And we went down to the hospital ground outside and there was a little service there; to me it was just a small service. They presented me with the Distinguished Service Cross. And I got it and brought it up to my room, and I guess maybe the next day or the same day, I don't know, I had to send it out for them to get it at home. You know, you're young, 22, 23, 24

years old, what do you know about certain things in the army. A medal, you figure, is just another medal, but I didn't realize that there was a Distinguished Service Cross that was the second highest. When I got the Purple Heart, it was just the Purple Heart. You get that when you're wounded. Then they give you Infantry Badge with a rifle on it. Combat Infantry Badge – that was another medal. They just gave it to you, put it on the side. Then when I sent the other ones home, I sent that one too.

JZ: Who presented it to you? Was there a general or...

CB: I don't know who handed it out at the hospital. Like I says, all I remember was, I was out on these grounds, the hospital grounds, and there was a few people around. Maybe a lot, I can't remember whether it was a lot or a few, but they presented me with this Distinguished Service Cross.

JZ: This was in '44?

CB: Yeah, in '44. I got that in '44.

JZ: And so it was VJ Day when you went home from the hospital?

CB: Yeah, that's when they discharged me. They figured there was nothing more they could do for me, so they gave me a discharge. But I was in the hospital from '43 up to '45.

JZ: How many total operations?

CB: I figured about 19 operations I had.

JZ: Nineteen? And that was mostly to remove the shrapnel?

CB: My eye was pretty bad; they were trying to fix it up where they could put a glass eye in there. There was a lot of operation on the eye. And like I says, they cut this up. I remember afterwards they thought they took everything out, and pus was coming out. They figured there was more shrapnel in there, so they cut it open again, and cleaned it all out. Up here, they did some skin grafts by the eye, right up here by the eye. They did some skin graft there. They took a lot of skin grafts from my arm here, skin, and put it in the eye to make it soft. I guess the eye was the main thing that the operation was for. They used to give me ether. When I got ether, I used to get sick as hell.

JZ: And that's... alcohol?

CB: No, yeah, ether, during the operation, but then they used to give me an intravenous, and I never got sick; there was no after-effects after that. So when I used to know I would be getting operated on, I'd go in the nurses office and I'd see my name. I'm getting operated on and I'd see what they were going to give me. And if I'd seen ether, I'd go see the doctor. I says, "Can you give me intravenous instead of ether? The ether gets me sick." And then they told me the ether, it all depends on the length of the operation, that's when they use the same thing with the penicillin. There was a length of time that the operation needed; they used to give me ether, the same with the penicillin. But I think I only got ether once or twice, and the rest of the time I got intravenous. But that was, there was no sickness. I used to get sick, throw up from that ether. Oh my.

JZ: Did anyone from your family...

CB: Yeah my dad came. My father came to see me up in Fort Dix. He came by himself.

JZ: Did your brothers serve too?

CB: No. No. I had. Well I used to, when I was able to get around. I went to see some, they said they claimed there were relatives of mine in New Jersey. It wasn't too far from Fort Dix.

JZ: What was your rank?

CB: When I left, it was PFC, Private First Class.

JZ: So after you came back, you remember hearing around VJ Day, and the atomic bomb, or anything else about the war being over?

CB: I'm pretty sure... we heard about the atomic bomb. I think I was still in the service at the time when they threw the bomb in Hiroshima or whatever that island in Japan or... I knew when I left, even soon as I left camp to come home, I already knew that Japan had surrendered. The news was out at the time.

JZ: Whatever happened to the 9th Infantry Division? Did they keep going?

CB: Oh yeah, they kept going. I mean after the invasion of Africa, understand, they were made the 9th Division again. They got together and they start moving up; I don't know, I never kept track where they went after that. They probably went to Italy, or probably went to France. I mean I don't know.

JZ: So when you came back, what did you do after you went back to Westinghouse?

CB: Yeah, I went back to Westinghouse to work. I had a fellow from Wilmerding, he was in another regiment, he was captured by the Germans. He's dead now though. I think he, we left the same time. He was in the 39th, I think, regiment. I was in the 60th. Then it was like the 47th too was another regiment in our division.

JZ: When you came back did you mention the Distinguished Service Award?

CB: No. I didn't mention nothing. I had even forgotten about it. I had sent it back; I thought it was just like another medal. I didn't mention it to nobody until...maybe I did mention it to one person, maybe years ago, but I don't remember. When fellows would talk about their experience in the service, I just never said anything. I just listened to what they had to say and that was it. I think maybe about 3 years ago, I thought it's about time that I let it out that I got a medal.

JZ: You just didn't want to talk about it and keep it to yourself?

CB: Yeah. If anybody says, "What's the reason why you just come out?" I says, whatever you say it is, that's what it is. Because I just didn't. I don't know why I didn't mention years ago. I know if I had mentioned it years ago, the people then at that time would have had... I don't know. I just didn't. This way I just thought was better, the way it happened.

JZ: By just moving on?

CB: Yeah, I just felt...

JZ: So you went back to Westinghouse and met your wife?

CB: Yeah, worked there, and got married. I got pension in '82.

JZ: I don't remember if I asked you, but do you belong to the VFW?

CB: Oh yeah, I belong to the American Legion. I don't belong to the VFW. And the DAV. That's part of the American Legion.

JZ: And what is that?

CB: That's...

JZ: [People with] disabilities?

CB: Yeah, that's right, disability. It's like an organization within an organization, but the American Legion.

JZ: I hope you don't mind me asking, do you get disability from the government?

CB: Yeah, yeah, I get it yeah.

JZ: From the veterans?

CB: Yeah, I get disability.

JZ: Tell me about your recent induction in the...

CB: Yeah, over there, in the Hall of Valor.

JZ: The Hall of Valor, and that's here in Pittsburgh?

CB: Yeah, that's in Oakland, on Fifth Avenue in Oakland. It was 31 people that was, got the medal. There was somebody that was there, either brothers, sisters, nephews, uncle, you know, the ones that passed away, they represented the ones that were supposed to get the honor. And it was nice. They served us chicken, roast beef, potatoes, and a vegetable side dish. And then they had a salad, and a fruit bowl and coffee, cake. I mean it was really nice. That food, it was good.

JZ: So how many people from your family were there?

CB: I had 27 altogether. I had my sister-in-law, and I had my sister there. But the rest of them were nephews and nieces, from my other brother's and sister's families.

JZ: Did you bring your medal? And they made this...

CB: This is identically the same thing, it's a duplicate. One is staying down there, and this one belongs to me. Some of them had two or three of them they brought home.

JZ: And you bought this one?

CB: I just bought this, yeah.

JZ: So this is down in the Soldiers and Sailor's Memorial Hall?

CB: Yeah. The one like that. There were 31 down there, identically the same one. Their thing is different, the reading is different. They had one person, we didn't have to get up and say anything, but there was this one person, he read this citation, he had the citation. He read them all, and then they got up and stood besides him on one of this like a tripod, and took a picture. And then they, and then there was guys dressed in their army uniforms, big guys. They got them and put it on the tripod on the side of the wall in the hall we was at on both sides, on one side and then the other side. I guess afterwards they took them out and put them where they were going to be permanent. Yeah, I mean they had a nice program.

JZ: When you came back, as an American did you feel it was your duty and you were proud?

CB: Well, yeah, it was a thing that I was sent over there to do, and I thought I did it, and came back. I mean, I never get down on it. It was like another ordinary thing that I had to do.

JZ: We don't understand today, like, since you were an Italian, did you feel more American, or... you were American, you know, but, did your heritage play a part?

CB: No, I never thought of it.

JZ: Never thought of it?

CB: Never thought of it.

JZ: So you were an American. How did your dad feel and your mom?

- CB: Well, I never asked them what they think. I guess they were proud. I guess they were proud that I went over there and I come back home.
- JZ: I guess because my generation, we think, “Oh, we’re Italian.”
- CB: No, because then you were running into all kinds of nationalities. And I guess they, we never talked about nationalities. I can’t remember. But if we did, we used to keep it to ourselves. It’s like I told you, that Italian sergeant became a field officer; he made it by doing his duty on the field. And here I guess we knew he was Italian, and he became a First Lieutenant by doing what he did on the field. It made us feel good. But we never mentioned it to anybody else about anything else about these Italians. In other words, there was lots of harmony with the soldiers; we were just close to one another. They, like I say, nationality or religion never...
- JZ: You say the Jewish fellow from Chicago gave you the money.
- CB: Yeah, gave me money to come home on. He said “I know you don’t have any money.” He said, “I’ll get you the money to go home.” So he gave me the money, come home, and when I come back, I gave it to him.
- JZ: Everybody just got along, everybody stuck together, and worked together, no?
- CB: Yeah, yeah. They, we helped one another out. I mean, whatever help was to be needed, we’d just help them out, you know?
- JZ: You think it had something to do, growing up during the Depression, and everybody being just...
- CB: Yeah, I mean, during the Depression, that didn’t get us down either because we were kids at the time. ’29, let’s see... 1919, I was ten years old in 1929. I guess my oldest brothers and sisters, they just, they felt it more because they were older. I guess you know what Depression was. Well, like everybody, even the people around us that lived in the neighborhood, they were in the same predicament we were at; the same shoes, everybody was poor. And everybody was the same. There was no one who showed that they had more than the next person.
- JZ: Same way we are in the service.
- CB: Yeah, I mean that’s right, we were the same. We were just like one big group.

JZ: A lot of the guys were from around different parts of the country too?

CB: Right. They were New York, New Jersey, McKeesport, the fellows. A lot of time when they'd get a package when we was in the states before we went overseas, the package, they'd call us over, and we'd all share that package with them. Whatever the mother or the sisters or brothers put in there. That's how it was. This one time this fellow's brother came over to see him and he brought a big box of goodies. He brought fruit, he brought cookies, cakes, you name it, I mean, it was in a box. It didn't last too long, (laughs)

JZ: Did your mom send you anything?

CB: Yeah, cookies, that's what they did. But in the hospital that was one big room, people used to send boxes of cookies, whatever it was, they put it in the room. It wasn't addressed to any particular person, it was just for the hospital, you know. So I guess that was the only thing they could do, the hospital just put it in the room, and I don't know what they did after that. I mean surely they gave it to somebody. I guess if you went in there and asked for a box, one of them boxes, you'd go ahead and help yourself. The people were wonderful.

JZ: Anything else you would like to say?

CB: Well, I can't think of anything else, I thought, do you have any other questions you want to ask me?

JZ: You did a wonderful thing and served.

CB: Thank you.

JZ: And you made it... you should be very proud of yourself. So, again, thank you.

CB: Thank you for having me.

[End Tap 1, Side B]

[End of Interview]