

Interview with Angelo Cestoni
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Pittsburgh, PA
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[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

AC: My dad lived there. And he brought me here; they put me in the army in 1939. He made the proper papers and I came over in 1939. I came over like a package; I had a tag on me.

JZ: Really?

AC: So I came to New York, and there were two people that took care of me, took me off the ship. But I didn't have a visa, so I had to go through the regular check-out line. I didn't have any American money, and my dad didn't come up to get me. He lived up in Ford City. There were two people, a man and a lady that took me, and took me to a hotel. They wired my dad for the money, the train money to come to Pittsburgh. So that took about three days for the money to get there. This was 1939 now. Finally the money came and these two people come and put me on the train to Pittsburgh. And you should have seen me, trying to ask some of those people I was on the coach with, to tell me to get off in Pittsburgh, but I could not understand. I never spoke English, I never heard a word.

JZ: So what year was this?

AC: 1939. I got off the ship up in New York. So we pulled in to Greensburg, two o'clock in the morning. And the conductor comes to the coach, and he's yelling, "Greensburg, Greensburg." It sounded so much like Pittsburgh to me that I almost got off. So I said I'll take a chance, I'll stay on. So we went from Greensburg to Pittsburgh. And they came through, yelling "Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh." So I said this is where I'll get off. So I got off, and everybody got off there, at two o'clock in the morning got off the train, and walked off in to Pennsylvania Station. I know what I was doing. I had my little suitcase about that big [gestures], with nothing in it. I walked out of the train. People were getting into cabs, others walking down the streets of Pittsburgh. So there was a cab, so I jumped in and gave the driver my address. There were sixteen miles to the outside of Butler. So he said "Wait a minute!" He got out of the cab, and he took my only identification I had.

JZ: What was your identification?

AC: Name and address, and the location to my dad's. So he went in to the station, and he wasn't coming back. So I said, "What the hell is going on?" So I got my suitcase, and I went in; he was talking to this guy sweeping the floor. So he saw me, and he called me over. And he said, "You're going to wait until seven o'clock in the morning, and it will cost thirteen dollars."

JZ: Did you speak with this guy in Italian?

AC: Yeah, yeah.

JZ: Did you understand him in Italian?

AC: Yeah. I went to school over there, and I was sixteen years old. I said no because I didn't have enough money on me. My dad just sent me enough for the trip. And my dad was going from the station, to Pennsylvania Station, looking for me. He knew I was coming in. So I grabbed my little suitcase and I went over by the bench, put the suitcase down, and I lay down. I was going to go to sleep. As soon I laid down, there comes my dad's boss from the side door, and he hollers at my dad, "There is your boy." He had a goofy suit on, like a bail bondsman. They got me and took me in the car, and we went up to Butler. That's where we lived.

JZ: When did your dad come here?

AC: 1909.

JZ: 1909?

AC: He made three trips over there. First one when he got married, and then back over there. And then he came over in 1923, that's when I was born. Then he came over in 1928, that's when my brother was born.

JZ: What was he doing here?

AC: Coal mining.

JZ: Up in Butler County?

AC: All over the place. He worked all over these coal mines.

JZ: So when he picked you up at the station, you went to where he lived?

AC: Yeah, he worked in a coal mine up there.

JZ: Was that Chicora?

AC: In Ford City.

JZ: Okay, because I have relatives in Chicora.

AC: Do you? My dad's boss's wife, she use to pick me up where we were living and she use to take me to church in Chicora. He enrolled me in to school up there in Ford City. I was sixteen years old. They put me in eighth grade because one of the boss's sons spoke Italian. So they used him as an interpreter. I didn't know what I was talking about, and I went to school for one year up there. I just sat down, that's all I did, and drew pictures. June came, everybody was graduating. I go home and my dad says, "What did you learn anyhow? Did you learn anything in school?" I said, "Shit, I didn't learn anything." So he said, "We better get out of here." So he came down to Rural Ridge, and he got me a job over there, he got a job over there. We stayed with some people over there, Italian people. My dad knew a lot of people at Universal. So I asked him, "You think you can give me a job over at the cement plant in Universal?" He said, "We'll go over and see." So we went over there and I got a job just like that. They were hiring then, because of the war going on. That's 1940.

JZ: Was your mom here at this time?

AC: No my mother, sister, and brother were still over there.

JZ: Still in Italy.

AC: During the war even, I was over there when I landed. But they were still over there, my mother, brother, and sister. My sister got married in the meantime.

JZ: What was it like in the Veneto when you were growing up?

AC: Very poor. Everybody was very poor, everybody but the rich people. There were a lot of sharecroppers. They worked the farm. The owner would get half, and the sharecropper got half. Lots of them farms over there.

JZ: And you're from, what's the name of the village you're from?

AC: Belluno.

JZ: Belluno and how big is it?

AC: There were a lot of houses there. But I was born in Feltre, a town about eight miles north. Anyhow, I came over and got a job at a cement plant. I was a laborer. I started there sixty-three cents an hour. I was there eight months, and they drafted me in the army.

JZ: And that would be '41?

AC: '41, yeah. When they drafted me in the army I wasn't even a citizen. You know where I got my citizen papers?

JZ: In the army?

AC: In Texas. I was down there for two years.

JZ: Was your father an American citizen?

AC: Yeah. 1934 he had his citizen papers. Anyhow, they drafted me in the army. I went to Fort Meade, Maryland. From there then we went to Texas, Camp Wallace. I took basic training and anti-aircraft out there. Then I stayed there, and everybody after thirteen weeks, everybody was shipping out. Whoever was going to radio school, whoever was going to artillery... I trained on a 90 millimeter gun and aircraft. Everybody shipped out except me and a little Jew fellow from Montana. I could not speak the language that well.

JZ: Not at all?

AC: I couldn't read or write. So we lay around the base for about a week. I told the boy, "We better go over to see the old man." I wanted to see what he wanted to do with us. I was afraid he was going to make us take basic training over again. That would have been a hell of a job. So we went over. I knocked on the door, and walked in. He said, "What can I do for you this morning?" He was a nice guy. A nice guy. I said, "I was wondering what was going to happen to me and my buddy, because everybody got shipped out except us." "Well," he said, "You

can't speak, you can't get around too well, you can't speak the language too well." He says, "Just go back to the barracks and we'll call you when we need you." So I did, and he told the other fellow the same thing. So I went back to the barracks, and four hours later he sent another man over, and that man said, "He wants to see you." So we went over there. He said, "We're going to get a new bunch of trainees for thirteen weeks, and the supply sergeant back there will need some help. You two guys go back there and help him." So he had a corporal and a mailman for the battery area. So he went back to his office and then came back about an hour later and said, "Come here." He took me over to the corporal's desk in the supply room. He said, "You work for so and so, and see what you can learn." This was on a Wednesday. He says, "Work for him for a few days, and see what you can learn." So this corporal had all these guys who went out, addresses written down in a file and he had all the names of the new guys coming in. So on Friday he came in and says, "Cestoni, the mail is all yours." I says, "Sir I didn't learn nothing!" He said, "Well you're going to learn something. If you need any help, corporal so and so will help you out." I said okay, and I was there for the whole thirteen weeks. He made me PFC, and I was taking care of the mail, and he had everything written down. When the guys were going out, he had all the new addresses and where they went. He says, "If you get their mail, just scratch their address out, and put it down below for their new address. Then put it back in the bag, and take it back up." And so I became a mailman.

JZ: And this is in Camp Wallace, Texas?

AC: Yeah, Camp Wallace. That was the last of the training center. They broke up the outfit and different guys got sent to different outfits. It was about five of us that got sent to the 99th Division.

JZ: How did you get by, since you didn't speak English really well? How did you communicate the best you could?

AC: After I was in there for a while, I had to learn the language, because I couldn't speak to anybody unless I spoke English. I couldn't speak Italian to nobody in there. We got sent to the camp in Texas, the 99th Infantry Division. And there I wound up in the 81 millimeter motor platoon.

JZ: And what did you do?

AC: I helped two or three guys to operate the gun. Then our section sergeant got hurt, so they moved our section sergeant up and I moved up to first gunner. And the old

man, the captain, says to me one day, "If I gave you a test, Cestoni, do you think you can pass it and be a first gunner?" And that's what I wanted most in life, was to get a call for corporal. So I got out of KP duty, I got out of guard duty, all they had to was corporal of the guard. He said, "We can try, set the gun up in between the barracks and come over and tell me when you're ready. I'll get a guy to move the sticks for the setup." So I setup and went over and called him, he came over and says, "All right, start." Boom, boom, boom, boom. And he said, "You're now a first gunner, Corporal Cestoni." So I was a first gunner until we got over in Harare Park in Germany. Our section sergeant got hit. The first jet we seen in Germany in Harare Park, it was like a little plane.

JZ: A German jet?

AC: A German jet came over. He was thrown out of the army personal mines. We lined up in a god damned open field. And we crawled under some of the tanks we were with, under the jeeps. Our section sergeant got hit, again. So they took my squad leader again and made him section sergeant, and I became the acting squad leader. So I had to dig no more gun emplacements. I had to carry no more guns, but I was still the first gunner on a gun. We went over, the boss of Massachusetts, and I spent my 21st birthday on the train going to Boston. So when I got up there, the only thing I'd hear was my dad and some girl. They use to write to me.

JZ: Did your mom know that you were in the army?

AC: I'll come to that in a minute. I was going to Boston and we were on the coast, and the captain came through, and he liked me. He liked me. I stopped him and said, "Hey captain, today I'm 21 years old. When I get up to Boston can I get a three day pass to go home to Pennsylvania to see my dad?" He said, "Oh no, we are on shipping orders, no passes, no nothing." So we went onto the ship and then we landed in South Hampton, England. They put us in a camp over there. He came through the barracks; it was three weeks before D-Day, and he said, "Cestoni, how would you like to go to London on a three day pass?" I said "Sir, I went broke coming over here playing blackjack on the ship. I don't have two pennies to rub together." He said, "I'll give you the money, I want you to go on a three day pass to London." So it wound up that he gave me the money. He gave me fifteen pounds, which was the equivalent of four dollars a pound then. And he said, "I want you to go to London and spend three days, and then when you come back we'll see what's up." I went to London for three days, and then I went back. I meet a kid from the Air Force, me and him running around for three days together. We didn't even get a hotel room. We stayed at the USO. We split the

USO. We went back, and D-Day came, D-Day plus four, we went in to the harbor. Not Normandy, in Le Havre, France.

JZ: So the Americans, did they land in Le Havre, no?

AC: No.

JZ: That was with the British.

AC: But it was right over, we went in and no one got shot. They already took some of it from the other side.

JZ: Oh, the Germans had already pulled out.

AC: Yeah.

JZ: What were your thoughts going on, when D-Day was going on?

AC: No thoughts. We were there, and it was just one of those things.

JZ: What were your feelings?

AC: I was in 36 months, 14 months over there during the war. And I never served another act of duty.

JZ: KP, or...

AC: You know I got penalized. We went in Le Havre, and four days we were in the secret line. We got behind, and they took Paris and went on. We went up to the secret line. We were leading the 9th Division. They took them that far, and our division would lead their division. There was nine inches of snow. We pulled in around this time at night, and there were guns, and holes in the ground. We had to place tents in the nine inches of snow. Until the next morning the guys pulled down, and we pulled in for placement. And the holes in the ground, this was in the pine forest. We had to set up in an open field, we had to sleep in quarters, and they had to sleep in quarters, in the woods and pines. We were there holding the line for about four weeks. They set up a kitchen there. We had hot food everyday, and we use to go out on patrol to check here and there.

JZ: So you were with a molder crew?

AC: But it was always about 3,000 yards back from the rifle company, from the front line.

JZ: What kind of personal arms did you have? Did you have an M-1?

AC: I had a .45 pistol.

JZ: Just a .45?

AC: Yeah.

JZ: Did you carry ammunitions? What did you do?

AC: I had to carry the tripod, and the guy carried the tube, and another guy carried the base plate. With the base plate that weighed 46 pounds. We were there all those weeks, and they had a kitchen set up made out of logs. They had the regular hot water, garbage cans. We had hot food for the whole three and four weeks. And our captain, that guy that liked me. He would stand in the kitchen watching the KPs washing those cans, those garbage cans out for the next meal. And a mortar shell comes in, and goes right through his chest.

JZ: Wow.

AC: They took him back and they told me he was dead before they even got him back there. The man that was under him took over, and I had a hell of a good first sergeant. He's still living. He lives down in Florida.

JZ: Yeah?

AC: So the on the 16th we were in the holes before daylight arrived, at five o'clock. We knew something was coming. Man, there was shells coming, and mortars, all kind of shit. Everybody grabbed their guns. We went out to the gun emplacements. The guns were across the street. It was still just getting daylight, and here comes the first sergeant. I was the only guy left that could fire a bazooka. He said, "Cestoni come on, come with me." He took me down to the CP, and he had an ammunition bird down there, a carrier. He said "Go down to the jeep, get the bazooka out of the jeep and all the shells and report up here." We had twenty jeeps to carry all those guns. So I went down to get the bazooka and the two

rounds, and this kid from Ohio was there. He took us over along the pines to the CP.

JZ: What is the CP?

AC: It's the company headquarters. He talked to the squad leader of the rifle company, and he took one of the rifle men out of there, one that was overlooking one of these open spots in the woods. And he told that kid to go with him. He said, "You two dig a hole big enough for the both of you." Because the original hole wasn't big enough for him, so we dug the hole big enough for the both of us to get in. But the bazooka didn't fit in there. For me it was too long. So we threw out some dirt to fit the bazooka in there. We got down there in the hole, and it started to get daylight. The fire from the artillery was coming in. It was still a little dark. You would see flames go up, and pine trees go up. We looked down the road. There was a crossroads down there, 400 to 500 yards from where we were situated on a dirt road. There was a bunch of Germans down there throwing their arms around. We could see them from where we were. Pretty soon those big tiger tanks were coming up the road. They were coming up and there were three of them. About twenty soldiers were along each side walking the ditch. There was another shot fired. They were as close as from here to that house. But nobody fired a shot; they knew where we were, and we could see them coming, but nobody fired. So this kid said, "Hey Enzo give it to them." They were going very slow because they didn't know where we were. So I fired, and a big splash of fire went up in the air. And it was making a noise. It must have knocked the track off. But they were still firing a machine gun of the top of that tank, and then everybody broke lose. Thirty caliber machine gun, the air crew, and we had rifle companies; everybody was involved. They were shooting out eighty-eights, that had eighty-eight guns on it.

JZ: Okay, on the tiger?

AC: Yeah. They were shooting into those god damned pines out there. You would see those pines go up. One of those pines went down along side a hole. So this kid loaded the bazooka up with the second shell he had and he says, "That's the last one Angelo." The way things were going, I rose up to shoot another one, and I felt something hit me, and there was blood coming down my field jacket. So I went, "Hey Pino, am I hit bad?" He said, "No, no, do what you were doing." It went through my ear, and it burned the ear when it came out. So he said, "Do what you were doing." I didn't even aim that sucker, and I raised it up and went, "Boom." I said that we're going to need to go back, to see if we have any more shells. I said, "Let me back there, I'll go." He said, "No, no. I'll go." So I stuck my steel

hammer up. I told him, "Don't run, crawl out." He got up and started running. He didn't go from me to you. "Boom." He got his face in the snow, and I watched him for a little bit. He wasn't moving. Pretty soon here comes a guy crawling from the direction where the CP was, where the gunning placement was. He came crawling out and said, "You need any help?" I said, "No, get your ass out of here. I'll get mine out of here, if we can do it." I raised up to see what the hell was coming. I see a German running over with a tripod, another one brought the machine gun over, and another brought the ammunition. From here to the door. I said, "That son of a bitch." They were setting up. So I went boom, boom [motions like firing]. I got the ammunition carrier, and I got the other guy. Then I went down because hell broke loose. They knew I was there, and my buddy was laying there in the snow, in nine inches of snow. He's laying there in the snow, and he wasn't moving. So this guy that came crawling out said, "How about your buddy?" I said, "My buddy is out of here, I've been watching him for about two, three minutes. He never moved." He said, "I'll grab him and drag him out of here, and you get your ass out of here." So he took him, and took him down to the CB, to the aid station. Down over the hill they had the aid station dug in on the side of the hill, looking away from where the Germans were coming. So the only way I could get out of there... I stuck a steel hammer up again on the bazooka shell container. This was alongside the tree that fell. They didn't shoot it, so I said, "I'll take a chance." But I crawled out of there; I had two shirts on, the field jacket, because it was cold.

JZ: Right.

AC: When I got back to the CP, it was from here to the open pantry up here. I had no more clothes here.

JZ: None.

AC: I walked in the CP, and I passed out.

JZ: You were still bleeding now from...

AC: Oh yeah.

JZ: And that was your only wound?

AC: Yeah.

JZ: What were you thinking, what were you feeling?

AC: You don't feel it. My opinion, now I don't know about other people, but we had a job, and we were there to do a job, and we thought nothing. We looked at it as a job, like going to work eight hours, do your job and that's it. We never gave it a thought.

JZ: In combat there was no time to think, or feel. Just to react, right?

AC: We were shooting an eighty-one when they moved across the road. They brought the rifle guns when they moved across the road. We were shooting eighty light shells and a motor in eighty-one, that was three inches in diameter let alone. Then we had white phosphorous, and when that sucker hit, especially if it hit three birds, it was a good chance they were in the pines. We were shooting them. We saw them go straight up and then come down, and then go off. You would see a big cloud of smoke over there, and then you would hear those Germans screaming. The white phosphorous was designed that if it got on your skin, hands, or neck, the more you scratched it, the more deep it went, and the more it burned. I got back to the CP, and another guy took me down to the aid station. I walk in the aid station, with them guys helping me. I was all banged up. And there was my buddy; they had him up on a stool.

JZ: He got hit?

AC: In the head. You could put an egg from where it came out.

JZ: Wow. That was the guy in the fox hole with you.

AC: Yeah, the guy loading the bazooka.

JZ: So he made it, did he make it?

AC: Oh yeah, he was alive. They took care of him, and they took care of me. And when all this went on, there was a guy that came in. He said, "If anybody can walk, they off and walk on back." They were withdrawing. When I knocked that tank out, the other three could not get off the road. They were afraid of the mines, so they could not come any farther. This gave the whole company a chance to get out of there; otherwise they were going to go down that crossroad. Anyhow, they said, "If anybody can walk, take off." So I came out, and there was a guy sitting there on a log. I didn't know what was going on. He got shot through the mouth,

and it came back through his ears. It busted both of his ear drums. He could not hear anything. He was on a machine gun, so I grabbed him, and there was a team of four guys on a jeep, ready to take off back to town. So I put him on the hood of the jeep, and I went in the back. I put my foot on the tailgate and the other over the railing on the jeep. And when I put my foot up, some guy sat on my leg. And he said "Take off." We went down the road and went down along the hillside. There was a T down there. We had to turn left to go back to safe territory. That guy made that bend, that T, on two wheels, with all those guys on that jeep. There was a man going on the side of the hill, a German with an automatic gun. He made that bend and I got my back to it. He didn't hit any of us on the jeep. There were potholes on the damn dirt road, and everybody was like "Go, Go, Go," and I said, "Stop, I got to get my leg out." So I went on, we went back to the town, and they passed me up again. They had the ambulance going to Lyon to the hospital. They had all the roads shut off, the Germans. We could not get out.

JZ: Was this the night of the Bulge, the Battle of the Bulge?

AC: Yeah. That was on the 16th. We went back in, and they passed me out and they sent me downstairs to the cellar with another guy. My hand to God, I'm telling you the truth. And we are down there and it was getting dark. We heard a lot of commotion, a lot of jeeps and trucks leaving the town, a little town. And we're down in the cellar. We didn't know what was going on, and I said, "Hey buddy, we better go up and go see what's going on." We go up there, and there was one last vehicle out of the town. The next morning the town belonged to the Germans; they took it over. We made it back to division headquarters. They took us. I stayed there six days, until Christmas Eve. The whole room was full of crippled GIs, but I was still walking around. So this one day, one of the persons came up and said, "Cestoni, they finally opened the roads up, you can go back to the hospital." He put a tag on me, and I was walking down the sidewalk in the little town, and here comes a guy with a whip. And I looked at him and said, "I know that son of a gun." I didn't know how many from our company were left, or anything. I said, "Where the hell you going?" He said "I'm looking for a company motor board." He took care of the motor vehicles. I said, "I know where they are at, they are on top of the hill, and I'll go with you." Then the medic said, "Hey you can't go with him, you need to go to the hospital." I said "No way, I'm going the other way." So yeah, I never went to the hospital. I went up there and out of 158 of us, in two days there was 33 of us left. I got up there, and a couple other guys were up there and some drivers from the jeeps, they had some jeeps left over. Christmas Eve they were bringing up, they finally stopped the Germans up. They dug in and set up. So we went up there. They told me that I had to go back

with my outfit. I was well enough then after six days. So I took six blankets, all new clothes, and I went up where they were digging in on the side of the hill. They brought me up there with a horse and a sled, to the crew and the guns, so I went up with them. I went up there, and the number one squad where my guys were supposed to be, what was left of them, they had a hole dug in. In the ground with logs over it, and then with pine and snow over it. A little hole was left. They could get in and out. There were four in each hole, in each gun emplacement. So I went over to the first squad where I belonged, where I was supposed to be. I said, "Do you have enough room in there for one more?" They said "No, get the hell out of here." I go to the nest emplacement, and the same thing. I said, "You guys kiss my butt." I got a shovel off the jeep and I dug a hole in the ground about that deep. [gestures] I put three blankets down, and three on top of me, and I went to sleep. I woke up the next morning and I had covered my head up with them blankets. I had to rip them from me breathing through them. I could not get that god darned thing open. So I got it open, and we got all new guns and everything. We were there for about a week and a half, and then they put a fence on. We got up and took that ground where we got pushed out, and some of those guys had pictures of their girlfriends and wives up on the little shelves. They went back and got those pictures; there were three guys who never made it out of there, and they got shot right in the emplacement. We went through there and then we got a two day's rest.

JZ: So by this time you were pushing the Germans back?

AC: Back by the Rhine River by then, all through Belgium, and into Germany. We had a little river to cross; we were supposed to cross this little river. And there was no way that we could get it to support our artillery, in order for it to go across that little river. We didn't, but they crossed on canoe boats, regular rowing boats. On the way in, the guys used to raid every little town we got to. They used to raid those houses in the middle of those little towns. They had a sack full of Kodiak in every jeep that we had!

JZ: Wow.

AC: So we were there for about a day and a half before we decided to cross. I was the only guy who wasn't drunk. The lieutenant came to me, and said, "Cestoni. Come with me, we have eight guns over there. We are supposed to give them support to go across the river tomorrow morning."

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

...So I helped him with all eight of those guns. He almost kissed me. He said, "Thanks a lot." The next morning across the river, we get over and it took us about a week and a half to two weeks to finish that up.

JZ: So you crossed the Rhine River, was this at Remagen?

AC: Yeah at Remagen. There was a railroad bridge.

JZ: Okay.

AC: And the tank went over, it was probably a half hour ahead of us. We then went over. We carried our gun for seven miles. From the top of the mountain, down across the river, and the bridge, atop to the other side.

JZ: Did you meet any resistance? The Germans?

AC: We didn't, but the tanks that went through, they cleaned them up. We got up there, we got held up. The German jet was coming over, trying to knock our bridge out.

JZ: The jets?

AC: No, just a regular fighter plane.

JZ: Okay.

AC: They had to have so much anti-aircraft to protect that bridge. It looked like a stream of fire going up, every time a plane came up. Eight to ten hours they had a pontoon bridge setup, with tanks and trucks and everything was going across. It was just below that railroad bridge.

JZ: Okay.

AC: We went on, and we got in the Ruhr pocket. And we were there for about ten to twelve days. And they finally closed in. There was a division that was all trapped in there. Our division was one of them.

JZ: When you say Ruhr pocket, they had you surrounded?

AC: No. They had enough soldiers there that if they wanted, they could have kicked the shit out of us with a baseball bat. But they gave up, so we finished, and the rest went on in. They were still going. One day, all that day, and all that night, and that next day. There were enough soldiers that came through there where we were, they were all prisoners going back.

JZ: Surrenders.

AC: And there were tanks and everything else. But from the section where we were, we could hear the other 84th Division from the other side of the Pocket. The artillery was going off. We knew it was going to soon come in. They closed in, and all those things got out of there. We then kept on going; we finished up in Bavaria, Germany. That's where the war ended. We had to join the tank outfit, but Christ, they were going through there. We pull up to a little town and they said, "All right, pull off the road." They called in the Air Force; they were giving us a little resistance. About four passes, they said, "Move out." There was a big pile of smoke going up. It knocked their objective off, and those guys moved out.

JZ: What did you think of Patton? Did you like him? Was he a good man?

AC: Well we didn't hear too much about him. We knew he was commanding general of the tank outfit, but we didn't know him. We didn't get *Stars and Stripes*. We didn't get anything.

JZ: No *Stars and Stripes*, nothing? No news?

AC: No, you didn't get anything up there. We got in on the other side after we left the Ruhr pocket. We were back in that little town for three days, and that's when we went down to join Patton's armor outfit. We rode for two days and one night, in the rain, in the back of those god darned jeeps. And the rain was pouring down. To go from one section to the other. We got down there, and there was no problem.

JZ: Nothing?

AC: We go along the road; you would see a pile of dirt, the tank would come along, and they are there trying to knock tanks out. He would be laying there. A lot of

places we saw the people come out of the house, to drag them guys in the house. The German soldiers.

JZ: The German soldiers.

AC: Yeah, they were dead, they were finished.

JZ: What did you think of the German soldiers?

AC: At that time, the best trained men in the world.

JZ: Yeah?

AC: Yes.

JZ: Who made them the best trained, the discipline?

AC: The discipline, and everything. We pulled up on top of the hill. There were two emplacements that they had dug in on the side of hill, on the back of the hill from where we were going, and we finally took their territory. We crawled in some holes. They had bread as hard as a brick. We pulled it out, we couldn't figure out how the hell they could eat it. They probably broke it with a knife or something, and suck away at it. But it was part of army life. When the war ended, you had to have 75 points to come back to the state of the division.

JZ: How many points did you have?

AC: 73.

JZ: Oh man!

AC: I wound up in a depot in Belgium. To go over to Japan, to go over to the Pacific.

JZ: They told you, you were going to the Pacific?

AC: The replacement center.

JZ: Okay.

AC: We were there waiting there for a ship to go over there and the war ended in Japan. It must have been ten thousand GIs waiting for that ship.

JZ: In Belgium?

AC: In Belgium. To go to [Newport?], Belgium, to then go to Japan. And I always said, "Man can live through one war, but he can't live through two of them." You should have seen that town the night they declared the Japanese had surrendered. They toured that town, for all the GIs that were there. They were so happy, so glad. We went from there; they sent us to one of those cigarette camps, Camp Lucky Strike.

JZ: Okay, I heard of that.

AC: You heard of that?

JZ: Yeah that was the camp before you went back to the States right?

AC: Yeah, yeah.

JZ: Was that in France?

AC: Yeah in France, right alongside the town line. I was there for about five weeks waiting for a ship to come back to the States.

JZ: Five weeks?

AC: We didn't have a job. We lived off coffee and donuts.

JZ: Really?

AC: Honest to God. To pass the time, we used to go along that shore, the Chunnel. The Germans had them field boxes built in. You should have seen the concrete in them bunkers. Pathetic. They would be as big as this house, solid concrete. Just a little opening overlooking the Chunnel, but there were no more guns. They took them out of there when they pulled out of there, I guess. So I got sent to the railroad battalion. I was attached to the railroad battalion. I went up to place the guards and I got soaked to the ass. I went in to the guard house and I went to sleep. About a week or two later, I started to cough, and sneezing, and we got a ship to come back. I had a sore throat, the coughing, and the sneezing; they used

to send me to the medics. They gave me two or three aspirins, and sprayed my throat. That's all. It took us eight to nine days to come back. We came back on a banana boat. We pulled in to New York.

JZ: What did you say, banana boat?

AC: Yeah.

JZ: What's that?

AC: A Sea Cat, one of those small ships.

JZ: Oh yeah.

AC: They sent us to Fort Meade, where we were to get separated two weeks before Christmas. There was thirty-three of us that went to the aid station for check up. Thirty-three went in, thirty-three came out, and they said, "You guys wait out there for a little bit." Out of thirty-three guys, guess who they called out – Cestoni. I was looking to get home. I went in, and the commanding officer there at the desk said, "We found a spot on your lungs, and we don't know what it is. We've got to take another X-Ray." I went in for the X-Ray. I came out and he read the X-Ray and said, "There is something wrong; that spot should not be there. You can't get discharged." This was on a Friday, so they didn't accept no patients in the hospital on Saturdays and Sundays. So they sent me over to some bag over there, to stay there until Monday, and go get admitted in the hospital. I go in the hospital. They take me down for a TB ward, and if you had TB they checked you out. I got to talk to some of those guys that were in there. They said, "If you got TB, they will send you straight to New Mexico. You'll never see home." This was for a cure. Just think that I spent there the whole weekend, and two more weeks. So I went in to the hospital and they put me in a ward, in the TB ward. They gave me a test, and checked this, and that. I got better in two weeks.

JZ: Thank God.

AC: The day before Christmas, before Christmas Eve, the medical officer came around. I was the first bed near the office. He said, "Cestoni. How would you like to have a three day pass?" I said, "No way, I'd liked to get discharged." He said, "We're not sure about you. I want you to go up to the aid station and get an X-Ray and wait for it to bring it back." They would read it and do a report on it. I came back. I went up there and took the X-Ray, and then the girl put the X-Ray in

a brown envelope. She typed outside on a little piece paper and they read it up there I guess. It was in the morning, and I got cleared up in the next fifteen days. I had to go from across the road up there, down to the boardwalk. I was jumping up high. [Laughs]. I was so happy, because as a kid in the morning I would in Italy. I went in, and I put it on his desk, and said, "It looks pretty good Cestoni. Maybe you better go home and then come back for a check up." I said, "No, no, no, no. I want to go home, discharged." He said, "It's up to you, you know. If you go home and catch another cold in the next two months, you'll be back in the same booth." I said, "Don't worry about it, Angelo will take care of it." So I got discharged. I got home Christmas Eve.

JZ: What a perfect Christmas gift.

AC: Yeah. [Laughs]. This girl that used to write to me, she lived in Homewood, her and her dad came down to pick me up, down at Pennsylvania Station. I went with her a couple more months, and then we broke up. Then I meet that lady right there, two years later.

JZ: Where was this at, here in Pittsburgh?

AC: Yeah in Larimer Avenue.

JZ: Oh yeah.

AC: Yeah. She lived off Larimer Avenue, on 40th street. A little dago. A little Calabrese.

JZ: Calabrese [Laughs].

AC: What's your first name?

JZ: Jim Zanella.

AC: Jim, I put fifty years in with her. And you couldn't have found a better human being. She waited on me head to foot, she raised three kids. I worked everyday. We had our first kid, and I said, "We'll need to learn how to live off what I make." Because over in Italy, that's how they put up with it. Now I got three daughters, and grandkids. You see that kid over there; he got three years in to CMU.

JZ: Great, good for him.

AC: And we raised him, me and my wife.

JZ: Did you?

AC: My daughter worked at Western Psych, she got a job down there. She got thirty years in at Western Psych. She had the baby, and she would come home. Three months later she came over, and her mother was in the kitchen. She said, "Mom do you think you can watch John for me while I go back to work?" I know my wife couldn't say no to nobody, so she said to me, my wife said to me, "What do you think Angelo?" I said, "You're going to watch him, it's up to you." I was working a shift over at the mill, so we watched him for five days a week. We went away on vacation, we took him with us. We have a camp up in Brockway. We used to go up to camp every Fourth of July. For 38 years me and her went up to camp, even when our kids were small. She made some friends. I made some friends up there, very good friends. I put in fifty years in with her. My father came up with brain tumor, in three months time he was gone.

JZ: Sorry to hear that.

AC: So I got three daughters, and they all live around here. The second daughter, I've been going to her house since my wife passed away every Sunday, for dinner. She cooks up baby ribs, and chicken, and sauce, and baked potatoes, and this and that. On Sunday I come home with two bags, every Sunday. [Laughs]

JZ: Have enough to eat for the week.

AC: For the whole week. My wife, it's going to be six years on June 23rd, and I don't know how to turn that oven on. I've been living here by myself ever since. Time is numbered. What the hell you going to do?

JZ: Well you raised a wonderful family.

AC: I said years ago, in my small way of doing it, living, I could not afford it. I worked in a mill, I raised three kids, and I paid for their shack. I did what a lot of guys probably never done in life. I hunted small game. I hunted deer, bear, and turkey. I played golf; I used to play twice a week. I fished trout. Did you see the one up there?

JZ: Yes.

AC: I got one bigger than that down in the freezer. This guy that was supposed to mount it for me five years ago and it's still down there. I like to fish trout for about eight, nine weeks. Then they call me, and they want me to go play golf. And I bowl in two leagues.

JZ: Yeah.

AC: But like I said, my scale of living, I could have died twenty years ago. And I lived a good life.

JZ: You sure did. Good man.

AC: I retired. They shut the place down there, US Steel mill, and I was 57 years old. I told my wife I was going to retire that fall in August anyhow. I was going to take my pension; I had 40 years in. They asked me if I wanted to be transferred down to Homestead Steel, or National Tube. I said, "Hell no." So I took my pension. I began at 62 with Social Security. In our way of living we had more than we could spend.

JZ: Tell me a little bit about when you got your Distinguished Service Cross. Were you still a soldier?

AC: I didn't tell you that? After the Ruhr, when we got pit stopped, we had three day's rest. My hand to God now, we were in a little town living in a house. We chased the Germans out, and we were living in the houses. And they decided to award me that Distinguished Service Cross. So they had a battalion formation one day, and all the guys in my platoon, in my company, had to participate, the battalion, and the rifle company, all of them. So they said, "Everybody wash, clean them up, get ready. We are going to have a formation tomorrow for General so-and-so. He was supposed to come down and award Cestoni that Distinguished Service Cross." They gave me new shoes, new boots, new everything. Them guys were going to kill me. [Laughs] Look what we go to go through, all because of you. So they had a formation out there, and I was out there. They put me out in the front of the formation, and this General with all these big shots came down. And I had to stand before them. They ordered to advance over to him, and he went "zoom, zoom, zoom," and he put it on. There it is up there.

JZ: It's up there, yeah.

AC: But yeah, they were going to kill me that day. So they gave me the medal, and I took it with me and I sent it home to my dad.

JZ: You sent it home, yeah.

AC: Yeah.

JZ: Did your father get in contact with your mom, and your family?

AC: I was in army occupation for four months in Germany, before they decided to send that division back to the States. That's when I got sent over. We were in Germany for army occupation. They had a big school; the whole company was in there, our company in that school. Every weapon was coming, machine guns, and motors. And one day I got a letter from my GI, he had his own ABO from down in Italy. I opened it up. It was my sister that wrote the letter. But he put it in one of his envelopes, through his ABO, and it went to my ABO, and I got it over in Germany. I found out that all three of them, my mother, sister, and brother... my grandfather was still living, he died at 96 years old.

JZ: He was a farmer?

AC: Yeah, he had cattle. But during the Depression my dad wasn't working, he couldn't send any money. Then he got in an automobile wreck, he was in the hospital for 19 months, right up when the Depression started. So my grandfather kept us. He had to sell the farm, he had to sell everything. He lived until the day he died, anyhow. Some lady bought the farm, and mother and dad, and my sister were living in it. My brother was 19 when he came here, in '47. I brought mother and brother over. My sister got married over there. She had two kids, so my dad said, in 1955, "We might as well bring her over, she's writing letters crying that she misses the family." So we brought her and the two kids, the two girls, and her husband over. She's still living; she lives down on Frankston Road. Across from St. Bart's church. But she's three years older than me. She's 84 years old. She's like a machine and I'm telling you.

JZ: Tough, right?

AC: John?

John: Oh yes.

AC: You know what I call her. I say “You’re the Devil.”

JZ: The devil.

John: We think she was running around at 45 years old. She moves.

AC: And she smokes.

John: Like a freight train.

AC: She comes here and she says, “Can I smoke?” I said “Yeah.” John and Jim across the street, they come in, they smoke. What the hell. I quit smoking 28 years ago. But my wife never smoked, and the same year I quit smoking, she was coughing like a horse. I quit smoking, she started coughing, for about six, seven years, longer than that. Yes she was coughing, from me, second hand smoking.

JZ: I don’t want to get off the subject. But did you ever experience any... since you were Italian, did you ever experience an anti-Italian? Where they sometimes called you names, like discrimination?

AC: I was in the army 36 months, and the only time they called me by my name was on pay day. You know what they called me – Dago.

JZ: Everybody?

AC: Everybody.

JZ: And how did that make you feel?

AC: It doesn’t bother me.

JZ: It doesn’t bother you?

AC: No, no, no.

JZ: Okay.

AC: You know how a Dago began, do you?

JZ: No.

AC: Tell him John. There was a guy who came from Italy.

JZ: Okay.

AC: An old timer, he got a job picking shovel, digging ditches. And somebody asked him, "What did you do today Vince?" How he said "I worked pretty good, but a Dago." He meant the day went, the "Day - go." So Dago came out. That's how that Dago name stuck to people's head. But they never bothered me. There was a young fellow, a German; his dad ran a beer distributor up here on Universal. He was over in Germany during the war. He was a Hitler youth. In 1950 his dad brought him here, his dad had a bit of money. This German, I told him, "You German, you're lucky I didn't catch up with you over there, whenever you were a Hitler youth." He was 17, 18 years old by the time the war ended. I said, "If I would have caught you over there, I would have shot you." He became one of my best friends. I worked with him, we fished together, and we hunted together. We also associated family together. He lived over here on Jefferson Road. He married that girl over there; me and my wife used to go over a couple times a month. When I came from Italy, his wife she was that big. I worked for her dad. He ran a chicken farm, a greenhouse to grow tomatoes and corn. Summer time, the first summer I worked for him, and the second summer I worked for him. He paid me a dollar a day, and all I could eat. But it was better than what I was getting over in Italy. I was ten years old, I had to go out and work for the share croppers for just a piece of polenta and a piece of cheese.

JZ: That's it?

AC: That's it. Many times I'd walk in our kitchen, walk around the table, and walk back out. Believe me. But things turned out differently. I feel pretty lucky. I got over here, and I went over there, and I did what I had to do. I came back in one piece, and I raised a family. God I'm used to living down here with the old German fellow. He worked down in Verona. His dad was a tax collector in Penn Hills for years. And he was in the army, came out, and then went back to Edgewater. His dad passed away. He was the only son. So he got that whole mess, all that money. He quit working, and he went up to Muss, we use to loaf up at the Muss. We played cards, and bowled, or something. And many times he told me, "Angelo for being a foreigner, to come over here with nothing just with your shoes on, I'm proud of you. A lot of people in this country can't say what you can say."

JZ: One last thing. You were growing up in Italy; were you a member of a Balilla, or one of those Fascist things?

AC: We had to wear a black shirt to go to school.

JZ: Okay.

AC: But I only went to school for three years. The same teacher that taught my mother over there taught all three of our kids.

JZ: Really?

AC: Yeah.

JZ: Taught over in Italy?

AC: Over in Italy.

JZ: Came here?

AC: No, no. My mother went to town one day, to shop at the store. And she seen the teacher. She said, "Hey Giovanna." My mother's name was Giovanna. She said, "That boy of yours, he learned nothing, you might as well keep him home." My mother, I came home, she grabbed a broom she said, "What's the matter with you? You are supposed to go to school." So she told me what the teacher told her. I said, "Good." She said, "Keep him home." I said, "Good, I'm quitting school then." That's the last time I went to school. I only went to third grade over there. So I came over here, and I learned how to read, and write a little bit; I got a little trouble with the spelling. The spelling is tough here, over there the way you pronounce it, is the way you write it.

JZ: Right, right.

AC: Over here I was telling John, they got so much red tape in between everything. Like Philadelphia, it's spelled with a P. Over there it would be with an F. Philadelphia. A lot of them are like that, silent.

JZ: I just want to say thanks for you service. You raised a wonderful family. You worked hard, compliments to you.

AC: You can ask my neighbor, I raised three good girls.

JZ: Anything else you want to say?

AC: My youngest daughter, she got two kids. She had a job bartending at a couple different places. She has a big mouth. This last job, the owner and his wife broke up, they got divorced. This disintegrated the business. My daughter told me, Gina, my second daughter, she says, "Terry, her mouth is getting her in trouble, dad." So I gave her hell this one day. She comes over every Thursday. Changing the bed, washing the clothes, cleaning the bathroom. Every Thursday she brings lunch for me. I said, "What the hell is the matter with you? Can't you keep that mouth of yours shut?" She said "Dad, you can't plant corn and get tomatoes. You told me that years ago. You plant corn, you can't get tomatoes." [Laughs] That's the way life is.

JZ: Well thank you very much.

AC: You're welcome.

JZ: I enjoyed talking with you, and learning so much. Again, thank you for your service.

AC: I hope this gives you a good status.

JZ: Thank you very much. Ti ringrazio tanto.

AC: Thank you.

[End Tape 1 Side B]

[End of Interview]