

Interview with Joseph J. Bruno
May 17, 2004
Pittsburgh, PA
Interviewer: Nicholas Ciotola
Transcriber: Fran Margiotti

[Tape 1, Side A]

NC: Mr. Bruno, could you just start by telling me your date of birth and where you were born?

JB: I was born February 8, 1925 up in Bloomfield on Cedarville Street.

NC: So you've been a Pittsburgh resident most of your life?

JB: Yeah except when I was in the army and a few trips I made. I was in Arizona last month as I told you. Born and raised in Bloomfield.

NC: Bruno is an Italian name. Can you tell me about your Italian ancestry? Who was it that was in your family that came from Italy?

JB: My mother and my father.

NC: What were their names?

JB: My father's name was Bruno and my mother's name was Orlendosi.

NC: Was your father Joseph as well?

JB: No, his father was Joseph. His name was Salvatore. That's how Italians went, father, son, you named the son after grandfather. But my father's name was Salvatore and my wife didn't care for the name Salvatore but we never had a boy so there wasn't a problem there. Because I was going to argue the point. We had all girls. You saw their picture.

NC: So your mother and father were both born in Italy, do you know which part of Italy?

JB: They were born in Agrigento, Sicily.

NC: When did they come over to the United States and why did they come over? Do you know those stories, did they ever tell you?

JB: They came over because they thought living was better over here. They had relatives living and working over here and there's a story there too. When they came over my father and his father were going to come over and go to work and save enough money to bring the rest of their family over. My mother's father and mother were coming over too, but my father's father had been dead. His mother didn't want to come over with him until they had everything settled. Everything for the whole family to come over. No, wait a minute, his father wasn't dead yet. He came over with his father with the intention of working and sending them over after they earned the money. He was here about six months, his father died in a mine cave in, outside of Greensburg in a little town named Luxor. Now he died and my father was here by himself with the people he came over with, my mother's father and mother. My father told his mother in Italy that her husband was dead but he was going on with the plans of getting her over here. She didn't want to come because her husband was dead so she wanted him to come back. Well, he didn't want to come back. He was going to stay here. He was boarding, he was living with my mother's parents in their house in Luxor. Well, my mother and father were together and ended up marrying each other. Then they moved to Pittsburgh. I told you he was in the mafia and was making his money by making moonshine.

NC: Was that in Pittsburgh or when he was in Luxor?

JB: No, when he was in Luxor. Then they came to Pittsburgh because there were more customers here. And the mafia wanted him here in Pittsburgh because he was a big man in the mafia at the time. So he came over to Pittsburgh with his wife and that's when I was born. And I had brothers and sisters after that.

NC: So your father started off working in the coal mines. Did he ever tell stories about the work in the coal mines, what it was like, what the conditions were like?

JB: No, all we know is that you went in when the sun was down and you came out. You never saw the sun. You came out when the sun was down. You went in early in the morning and the sun came up. You're in the mine all that time. Then the sun would come up when you were in the mine. You come up at night and the sun would be down. He would say you would go a week without seeing the sun. That's what he told me. Then like I said, he was making more money delivering

moonshine. Then my grandfather, who he lived with at the time, was the cooker. They called him the cooker because he would make the whisky. He knew the ingredients to put in. People used to come from as far as Cleveland and New York to get him to make the still for them and show them how to make the moonshine. He was pretty well known. He lived to be ninety-eight years old.

NC: That was your dad's father?

JB: No, my mother's father. My dad's father died in the mine.

NC: So your grandfather on your mother's side was involved with making stills and that was during the prohibition period, I'm assuming, when it was illegal to make alcohol. And your father then got involved in the business and eventually moved to Pittsburgh. Do you think one of the reasons he got into that business was that he wanted to get out of mines?

JB: Well, it could have been. One of the funny things that happened, on Sundays, when we were home from school, he would be down in the cellar with my grandfather and two or three other guys doing things we didn't know about. They would always be filling these bottles and cases and putting them on the side. These cases would reach up to the ceiling, they didn't have high ceilings. We asked my mother, "What are they doing?" She told us they were making root beer. Oh okay, good. What was funny when we wanted root beer, we had to go to the store to buy it. When we came home from school on Monday, now this was Sunday they were working, all the root beer was gone. We were kids we didn't know, but all I remember was when we needed root beer we went to the store and they were making root beer and we couldn't drink it.

NC: Was this in your basement?

JB: Yeah.

NC: Where you living on Cedarville at that time?

JB: No, we were living on Paulson Avenue, right outside of East Liberty. Do you know where that's at?

NC: I do.

JB: Paulson Avenue is where we lived. I remember that, it was 1932. I remember the year, you know why? There was an old car sitting on the street with a license plate, it was 1930 and this was 1932 and they couldn't drive it. It just sat there for months. That's why I remember the year.

NC: Were the people that were involved with making the moonshine, were they mainly your dad's friends, like other Italian Americans?

JB: Oh yeah most of them were from the same village in Sicily.

NC: What would they do once they made it?

JB: They sold it. Night clubs used to be their biggest customers. But they had people... I can tell you another incident. We had a store in Bloomfield on Liberty Avenue, a grocery store that we sold liquor over the counter. Of course we didn't, when my father was there and someone..., they would take them into the back and put it in a bag. Soon, one day this policeman walking the beat comes in. He says, "Hey Jack, can I see you a minute?" He says, "I know your selling moonshine". He said "I just wanted to tell you if you give me something I'll forget about it. Give me five dollars a week and I won't say nothing." My father told him, "Okay, let me think it over," He gave him the five for that first week. So about a week later he comes in and says, "Hey, Jack, oh my God, why you didn't tell me you were giving money to the lieutenant." My father told the lieutenant, about having to pay this other guy. "They shipped me out to Highland Park." It was like the boondocks. Now I'm not working in Bloomfield. I'm working out there. Tell them I don't want the money no more. So my father told them and he came back on his Bloomfield beat. My father said, "I had to pay him too." The lieutenant said, "No you pay me."

NC: So was that your dad's only job?

JB: Well he was a salesman. Because when we went to school they wanted father's name and occupation. He used to sell olive oil and cheese. I don't know how much he sold of it but that's what we reported. We had two restaurants in Bloomfield, grocery store and a pool room, all in Bloomfield.

NC: This is when you were growing up? This was in twenties and thirties and that period of time.

- JB: Yeah, in the thirties and forties. I was born in 1925 and went to grade school at Immaculate Conception until I went to high school. I went to Schenley High School.
- NC: Did your dad have connections with other figures in Pittsburgh?
- JB: Well, yes he did.
- NC: He seemed to have made a pretty good living for the family.
- JB: Oh yeah, we never needed anything. I'll tell you another instance that happened. I went to school and this lady come around one time. They wanted us kids to go around selling magazines, door to door selling magazines and we'd make money. So I came home and told my father, "Look I'm going to sell magazines." He grabbed them and said, "You ain't selling nothing.", "You're going to school to get an education." He tore up the things up I had to use He said "You don't worry about it. I'll take care of the money coming into the house. You're going to school and get an education." and that was it. One time, it was Christmas time. I was in High School and Christmas vacation they needed workers at the post office. I told my dad that I could go to work, and I told him it wasn't hard work, all I would do is deliver mail or sort it. I think they still do that because they would get a weeks vacation and the mail was heavy. He said okay to that. I worked in the Post Office during Christmas Vacation.
- NC: What do you recall about the Italian community in both East Liberty and Bloomfield? Was it a pretty close community?
- JB: They were close. When I got married she wasn't Italian, she was Irish. My grandfather was strictly against it and wanted to send me to Sicily to get a girl. I said no, I got a girl. We had a little bit of discussion not an argument. Well one night I took him up to the Pleasure Bar. Do you know remember the Pleasure Bar? "See those girls sitting at the bar. Chi sei una puttana." Do you know what a puttana is? Whore. I told him, "See that one over there, she's Italian, and she's a whore too." I'm talking Italian now. See that one over there? Do you think she's Italian? "Oh I don't know" he says. Well she's Italian and she's a whore too. There were three of them there, and I asked, "Now do you want me to marry one of them?" Well, that did it. So finally we got married and we had two kids. Everybody came over except my grandfather. We lived, you know where Yew Street is? We lived on Taylor Street and they lived on Yew Street. That's something else about Italians. Their parents never went into an old age home, they

lived with their kids. Anyway, my grandfather and grandmother were living with my parents. They're only a block away from our house. One day I came back from work, I had a good job then. I came home from work and my wife goes, "You'll never guess who was here. Your grandfather was here." After two years we lived there. "Your grandfather was here and gave the kids each a dime," she said. Well that broke the barrier and we were alright after that.

NC: The reason why he didn't come for so many years was because she was Irish?

JB: Right, she wasn't Italian.

NC: Sounds like there was a lot of animosity between the Irish and Italian community.

JB: Well I don't know if it was the community. I think it was just my grandfather, that he was hardheaded. ...He was ninety-eight when he passed away. He had all his teeth. ...He didn't drink water for thirty years. All he drank was wine, he made wine every year.... Everyone had his wine.....

NC: Where did he make it, in the basement?

JB: In the cellar.

NC: Were you ever involved in the process?

JB: Yeah we helped. Have you ever seen how you make wine, they have the thing you turn and squeeze it and it would come down. Sometimes it drips for hours.... Did you ever see in a backyard when they have those big piles of grapes, that's what it is. They would dump it out into the yard. The rubbish men take it away. You give the rubbish men a dollar & they take it away. Not a dollar. A bottle of wine. Oh yeah. They're waiting for it.

NC: Now would kids drink wine a little bit when you were growing up?

JB: Well, no, a little bit but not too much. I don't think they wanted us to drink it. See what happened one time, my grandfather is sitting on the couch watching television and starts coughing. My sister runs and gets him a glass of water and brings in it over to him. He spits it out and asks, "What the hell was that?" My sister said, "Well that was water." He says to my grandmother, "Get me a drink," and she gets him a glass of wine.

NC: Did your family, who came from Sicily, did they primarily have friendships with other people from Sicily? What were the relationships like between Italians from Sicily versus those from other regions?

JB: Well it was a little closer. Now, they didn't ignore them, they were friendly with them but the Sicilians were pretty close. Well they claim that's where the mafia was born and I think my grandfather was the one who started it. Oh God, he was something else.

NC: I'm sure he had some stories.

JB: They wanted me to go to Sicily when I was going overseas because they still had family over there but I never got a chance. I saw it when I was in Southern France in the Riviera. I saw it across the bay. I could see it but I never got to go there.

NC: Did your father ever make any trips back to Italy?

JB: Oh yeah. I got a picture.

NC: So you were born in Bloomfield in 1925. What are some of your earliest memories growing up in Bloomfield? Is there anything that stands out about the community that you lived in or your family life? Was it a distinctively Italian home, what aspects of the Italian culture were common?

JB: We had to speak Italian because my grandmother and grandfather lived with us. I can't think of anything else.

NC: Did your mom cook Italian food?

JB: Oh yeah every Saturday and Sunday we would have big meals.

NC: Was it a big extended family? For instance did you have any brothers and sisters?

JB: I had two brothers and two sisters. I was the oldest. My one brother and sister passed away. I got a brother and a sister still alive.

NC: So it was a decent sized family. Tell me about you going to school. You mentioned earlier that your dad was really adamant about you getting an education opposed to going out into the work force. What schools did you go to? Did you go to Catholic schools?

JB: I went to Immaculate Conception in Bloomfield and then I went to Baxter Junior High School in Brushton. Then we moved back to Bloomfield and went to Schenley High School. I graduated from Schenley High School. See I had to go to the Army; I turned eighteen when I was senior in high school. The draft board gave me time to finish school and then I would have to go to the Army. Well, I never got my diploma but then a couple years ago they had this situation for those ones that didn't. But I got my diploma. See it up there. Then I went to Duquesne. I was a football player. I got those here.....

NC: Is that after the Army?

JB: After the army. You know, they never played football in Europe. We won the first football championship that was ever played in Europe. Now they play, they have regular leagues of football.(Looking at pictures.....)

NC: So you were in high school around the time when World War II broke out, at the time of Pearl Harbor. Do you remember specifically where you were, what you were doing when the announcement came?

JB: I remember, I heard it on the radio. I was coming out of the show, it was a Sunday. We stopped at this drug store and it was on the radio and everyone was listening. I didn't know what they were talking about. But I remember that. Sunday we came home. The next day I went to school, to Schenley High School, everybody had to go into the auditorium and they had President Roosevelt's speech on the radio. They had all the kids listening to the president's speech. We went back to our room and the teacher said, "I know you kids don't understand but we're all, everybody in this room, is going to be involved with this war in some way or another." We figured what did she know? She was right. She was crying.

NC: At that time did you realize that you would have to go and fight this war?

JB: No, no I didn't. That must have been 1941.

NC: And when did you graduate from high school?

JB: 1943. I wasn't eighteen yet. You had to be eighteen or more to be drafted. Well I was eighteen on February the eighth 1943; I went down to sign up but they told me they would give me time to graduate which was in June. Well I'll tell you

what happened, our graduation exercise was at nine o'clock..... Oh God. I can't remember. Any how I had to report to the train station forty-five minutes after graduation started. I had to go over to P&LE to get to camp.

NC: What is P&LE?

JB: Pennsylvania and Lake Erie. Over on Southside.

NC: Where were you going to?

JB: I went to Fort Dix, New Jersey.

NC: After Pearl Harbor happened and the United States went to war, were you exposed to any sort of anti-Italian sentiment because we were at war with Italy? Did that affect you in high school?

JB: No. I had a personal experience when a guy called me Little Mussolini. I knocked him on his ass. I was little but I was mean. I was picked up for murder one time. This guy owed me money in Bloomfield... Everyone owned money, I owed money. I heard one day that he hit the numbers. I went up to this bar he worked at, right on Liberty Avenue, his name was Rudy Pacozzi. He was a bartender. I go, "Rudy, what are you going to do about that money you owe me?" He asked me what I was going to do about it. It set me off again; they had to pull me off of the guy. Now a week later, maybe two, I'm walking down the street and these two guys come up to me."Joe Bruno?" Yeah. "Where were you on this particular night? I told them I was at home. "You weren't down at the Ateletta Club?" That's where it happened. "You heard about Rudy". I said "Yeah, I heard about him. He killed himself in the club. "Well that's what everybody thinks but you I had a disagreement with him." Well... "He never paid you the money he owed you. What are you going to do about it?" Well what can I do now? "Yeah, what can you do now?" Then they asked me if I was related to Big Jack and told me I was in big trouble. Well I got evidence of where I was at. He actually did shoot himself.

NC: At the club?

JB: Yeah, he owed big bookies from New Kensington about five thousand dollars I think. They told him if he didn't have it by Monday they were going to come see him. Well this was on Sunday night he went down the basement at the club and shot himself. Rudy Pacozzi. You can check on it.

NC: When would have that had been, the fifties sometime?

JB: Yeah it had to be.

NC: So when you were in high school, did this guy call you Little Mussolini?

JB: No, that was in the Army I think.

NC: What was your reaction to that?

JB: I didn't like it. I let him know about it. Like I said, I wasn't a big guy, I wasn't a mean guy either but I didn't take no shit from nobody

NC: Tell me about how you came to be in Army? By the time you were eighteen you had to register for the draft and then you were drafted?

JB: Yeah. They gave me time to graduate from school, which I did.

NC: What branch were you in, the Army?

JB: I was in the Army. You had two choices. If you went to the Army you had two weeks before you went. If you went to the Navy you had one week. Because I had the two weeks I took the Army. That's how it ended up.

NC: How did your parents feel when you told them that you had been drafted?

JB: Well, what could they say? They didn't like it but they knew it wasn't anything I did wrong. Oh, gee. I have to get my cigarettes.

NC: Were they proud of you?

JB: Oh yeah. They came down to see me off at the train. It was the first time I ever saw him cry. My father never cried. They put me in the Medical Corps.

NC: Did you find out right away that you would be in the Medical Corps or was that after?

JB: No, at the boot camp.

NC: Tell me about where you went when you first got onto the train.

JB: We went to Fort Dix, New Jersey where they called it boot camp. You go through just getting ready for wherever you're going. I forget how much time it was ... about a month or two and they assign you to a different organization. I was in the 409th Ambulance Company and I didn't know how to drive. I never drove.

NC: So boot camp was mainly a physical activity, running and exercising and that sort of thing? How about firearms training?

JB: No, we had no firearms training. Then I didn't like that so I asked if I could be transferred to tank corp. The only thing that was open was the infantry and I took it.

NC: Why didn't you like the Ambulance Corps?

JB: I wanted action. They would teach you how to carry a stretcher and how to give shots. They gave you an orange.... I didn't go into the army for that, I wanted action. I volunteered and they sent me to the 63rd Infantry Division.

NC: After boot camp were you assigned to the 409th Ambulance in Fort Dix? Did you move on to something else?

JB: I think they just transferred me to a different camp.

NC: It was 1943 when you first went into the Army?

JB: Right.

NC: Did you know a lot of the men you trained with at boot camp or were they all from all over the country?

JB: No, they were all from Pittsburgh but I don't think I knew anyone. I just knew people from my neighborhood and they weren't from there.

NC: Where a lot of them from Italian descent?

JB: No, all different kinds.

NC: Were you nervous when you were leaving Pittsburgh for the army?

- JB: I was a little sad. I had never been away from home. I was a little sad on the train. In fact no one slept that night. Everyone was awake all night long.
- NC: Once you joined up with the 63rd Infantry Division, is that when you started getting training in weaponry?
- JB: Right, then one day I saw a bulletin board posting, they needed volunteers for soldiers to be a paratrooper. Well I had a cousin that was in the 101st and he came home on furlough while I was still a civilian. He was telling me how great it was, jumping out of airplanes. When they put that sign up for volunteers for the paratroopers, I signed up right away.
- NC: Had you ever been in a plane in your life at the point when you signed up?
- JB: No, never. So now I went down to Fort Benning, and four weeks later you get your wings and I was on a plane.
- NC: Is Fort Benning in Georgia?
- JB: Yeah.
- NC: Tell me a little bit about the training for paratrooper. That was kind of like rigorous regimen.
- JB: We had guys that couldn't make it. We had a lieutenant colonel, he wanted to be a paratrooper and go through the same training. He went through what they call stage A, B, C, and D. Four weeks. The first week is all physical. He went through it three times before he could pass the physical and then B,C and D is the fourth week that you jump.
- NC: What kind of physical activities would you have to do?
- JB: Climb a rope, climb over walls with no help. Do it yourself I forgot, there were different ways you could do it but it was strenuous. You went through a tunnel, it was strenuous. It was no thinking at all, just had to have a good body. I was eighteen-nineteen years old.
- NC: And what was the second week?

JB: Second week was the same thing but less strenuous. The third week was packing your chute. The fourth week was jumping. That was the first time I smoked a cigarette.

NC: When?

JB: When you're jumping and have your chute on and you're not supposed to have anything in your pockets because of the straps. So now we're in what they called the sweat shed, in this building waiting to go onto the plane. This guy comes down handing out cigarettes to the guys, so he came to me and I told him I didn't smoke so he passed me up. He gave everyone a cigarette to smoke while they were waiting. The third day I'm there this guy said, "Take it and give it to me." So I took it and when they left, that guy smoked two. The next day, I see everyone smoking and I thought I would give it a try. The guy came around handed out cigarettes, I took it and I lit it. That was a hell of an experience.

NC: Was that before your first jump?

JB: Yeah. The next week was five jumps, Monday through Thursday day jumps and Friday was a night jump. Then Saturday we had a big parade and celebration and we got our wings.

NC: How nervous were you on your first jump?

JB: Well, a little bit nervous. Guys tell you after your first jump, you become used to it. They're full of shit. You're nervous every time you jump because you don't know what could go wrong. But then in combat... I'll tell you a thing that did happen to me, when you go out of a plane you only have some much time to jump in one area.... Did you ever see they go one after another? Because if you miss your drop zone, you'll hit trees or water. One time I hit a barn during my night jump.

NC: You hit a barn?

JB: Yeah. I didn't get hurt.

NC: What did you hit, the roof of it?

JB: No. On the side. I didn't think I would be hitting anything. What happened the one time....I went outthe first thing you're supposed to do, you go out and

you're ...your chute opens...check & see...When you are jumping in training... you have an emergency chute, you're supposed to have that in case your chute doesn't open you use this in training. You're supposed to look up. So I look up and my chute was open so I am okay. All of a sudden, I'm looking down and I feel the straps are going limp. I look up, the chute... It's like a handkerchief. Here I landed on another guys chute and his chute was taking the air and mine wasn't. Mine started to fold. I started running; they tell you run just like its cement. I went off, I went down again.....It finally opened.

NC: You were running on top of it?

JB: Yeah. And I'm telling you it felt like you're on the sidewalk. I was running, finally I was off, I went down a little bit, then it... my chute.... See the air comes up and that's what hold the chute up and if you're on top of another chute he's getting all the air and you're not. I looked up-..Oh my God. It's all white. I started running.

NC: When you were in jump school, were there any accidents that were people injured and killed?

JB: Yeah. I don't know what happened, this one guy's chute didn't open. So he opened his emergency chute. Now here's what happens. Your main chute is here and your emergency chute is here. You're going down really fast. He fell and broke his legs. They teach you how to land; ...if your legs are stiff.. You gotta be... he must have had stiff like. Because he broke his leg. That's the only thing I experienced.

NC: When you do the practice jumps do you have all the gear with you as well or just the chute?

JB: Just the two chutes. In combat you don't have an emergency chute, if you don't land.... They drop you at twelve hundred feet..... It's so nice the feeling, you're coming down and you don't hear a thing until you get down close to the ground, you hear cars & people.... You don't realize it. Up there it is quiet as hell. The sound of the street.

NC: It sounds from your description that you were pretty comfortable doing this.

JB: Yeah, it was fun. Once it opened, you were alright. Like I said, you don't feel like it's easy now. You still have a little anxiety. What are you going to do?

NC: When you were going through the training, both the boot camp and the jump school, was any part of the training propaganda? Anti-German propaganda? More physical training....

JB: In fact, the only thing they taught us was how to kill. Kill a guy with your hands, where to hit him, how to hit him. They never said anything about the Germans, Italians or Japanese. They assumed we knew what the hell we were doing.

NC: So jump school was four weeks total?

JB: Four weeks, yeah.

NC: And after that you do your final night jump then you get your wings?

JB: Yeah, the next day you get your wings.

NC: And then you are assigned to a unit?

JB: Right.

NC: What was your unit?

JB: 82nd.

NC: What did that mean? That meant you got to leave Fort Benning, Georgia? And go to another camp?

JB: Right.

NC: Where do you go after Fort Benning? Do you remember? Eventually you went overseas.

JB: Right. I went overseas... We went on maneuvers in Louisiana. No that was with the 63rd. Then I came back after boot camp... ..I think I went to Fort Dix... We were expecting to go to another camp instead we went overseas. We replaced the outfit we were assigned to in England, South Hampton.

NC: Did many of the guys that went to jump school with you go with you to the 82nd?

JB: Oh yeah.

NC: So by then you developed some friendships with some of the other soldiers.

JB: Oh yeah.

NC: When would you have been overseas? If you first went into the service in 1943, was it late in 1943 or early in 1944?

JB: No, it was early 1944. I think it was February.

NC: I guess you pretty much knew at some point you would have to go overseas.

JB: Oh yeah. We were concerned. We didn't want to fight the Japanese. I mean, that's how I felt. They were fighting on islands and I didn't like water. That's the only thing I was thinking about. Fighting the Japanese and going over there.

NC: So for you it was a kind of relief when you found out you were going to Europe?

JB: Yeah.

NC: Tell me about the 82nd Airborne. Was that a pretty well known unit at the time?

JB: No, it wasn't too well known. None of them got well known until after things happened... Well, the one 102nd got a lot of publicity with Bastogne. The 82nd.. We never had that much, we just did what we had to do. A couple things happened to you but you don't like talking about them. I don't want to say nothing. I can't. I don't feel right about it.

NC: So you went overseas and went to South Hampton? What part of England is that?

JB: It's right across the bay from France, across the English Channel. That's where we're going to go. I'll show you the letter.

NC: How did you get over to Europe?

JB: On the ship. It was a French ship with an English crew and American soldiers. It was called *Ile de France*. It was a big luxury liner. It wasn't that luxury. We had five cots downstairs. First time... I didn't know there were elevators on ships. We were marching in, walking from one building to another, then we see elevator.

Next thing you know we're going down the steps. The elevator's in the ship. We're on the ship already. Didn't know that.

NC: What was the mood of the unit and your fellow soldiers?

JB: We were playing cards, having a good time. We made sure your equipment was A-1 , That was the main thing that you are concerned with.—your equipment.

NC: Tell me about what kind of equipment you had, just the standards.

JB: The standard was an M-1 rifle. Bayonet. We were taught how to use grenades in the states. ... They were with us but we didn't carry them on us. The main thing was a knife. Only paratroopers had them in case you got stuck in the tree and had to cut yourself loose. We had these special made boots to hold the long knife. I should have brought one home. I brought a sword home I took off a German officer. And I had a ring I took off a German officer. I had to shoot his finger off to get it. It was a swastika ring. SS Troopers..... You know what happened? Coming home on the train waiting in Grand Central Station waiting for the train back to Pittsburgh I took the ring off to wash my hands "Hey Bruno our train is leaving!", and I run out and left the ring there.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

NC: The sword was the sword of an army officer. And the ring was off of a soldier. ..An SS officer.

JB: An SS officer. Oh, they were surrendering left & right at the end.

NC: What happened when you first got over to England? What was your unit assigned to do?

JB: Nothing... We were just waiting to go on the ship. We thought we were going over on the ship to go over to France. We didn't know we were going to jump.

NC: Were you involved in D-Day?

JB: Yeah, that's what I'm saying. The week before that, we weren't allowed to write or tell anybody where we were at or what we were doing. All our mail was checked over and everything... The night before we were told, "Be ready. We're going to leave." We didn't know... We thought we were leaving at regular time by train or ship. We ended up on the planes at two o'clock in the morning. That's how the book came about, *The Longest Day*.

NC: So you didn't have much notice whatsoever.

JB: No, no notice at all. They don't tell you nothing.

NC: What was the role of the 82nd Airborne on D-Day? What were their objectives?

JB: We had to take this town called Sainte-Mère-Église and hold it until the land forces came. When we landed, when we got there, it was rough getting in there. A lot of guys were jumping, or getting lost. There was a little confusion. You're in enemy territory. It wasn't enemy country. But the soldiers are all enemy. You were leery of everything. Finally we got our group together. We went in. We took over the town.... I forgot... I think it was the 29th. I forgot the first division that came in.

NC: On this D-Day operation, this would have been your first combat? What were you feeling then? Were you scared?....

JB: It's hard.... You have to think, "Could I really kill someone?" But then you got to remember what they tell you, if you don't kill them, they'll kill you. That's the main thing. What the hell, I was only nineteen years old. (sighs)

NC: The jump happened at two in the morning. What kind of plane did you fly?

JB: A C-47.

NC: And about how many people would jump out of one C-47?

JB: Well, twenty-four. Two sticks. Twelve and twelve. That's why you have to go out right away. ...The landing zone... The French underground gave them a lot of information and they knew just where to drop you and everything. You had to get out of that plane real fast.

NC: So when you're on the plane flying, you have all your equipment together. It's all packed away? What about your rifle? It's slung over your shoulder?

JB: Oh yeah. Rifles, got a .45 too and a knife and bayonet. Oh God, yes. They made sure you had enough weapons.

NC: And what is the person that signals you to jump out of the plane?

JB: He's the jump master.

NC: He would signal you and say go...?

JB: There was a light right above the door. You can't be tall, how tall are you? ...They might not let you in. You can't be too tall to be a paratrooper because of the doors of the plane. This one guy, , that I knew from before was six foot two and he couldn't get in. He wanted to volunteer for it but he couldn't get in. He was too tall. This is the door...As soon as the light goes on the jump master is there. You're waiting to stand up and hook up. Ever hear that expression? Stand up Hook up. Put up the static line then the cord would automatically open your chute up and then just guide yourself in.

NC: Could you see anything when you jumped that night?

JB: No, no, it was really dark. You couldn't see nothing. The only thing.... I can't remember if you could see the water. I don't know if you could see water or not. We weren't near any water.

NC: You had a successful jump? You landed in the field?

JB: Yeah I landed in the field.The stick I was with landed together. Practically all of us landed together in an area.

NC: What's the first thing did once you hit the ground?

JB: Well, we got together with the other guys to make sure we were in enemy territory and we went up to this town. We got our lieutenant. Everybody was there

NC: Do you stow your chute right away?

JB: No, you left it. To get it loose, you just have to press this one button and the straps come off unless.... And that's why you have the knife, in case you have to cut them loose.

NC: Did you find one of your fellow soldiers right away? Did you have to look around for him?

JB: Yeah, we found each other right away.

NC: Was there some sort of signaling code that you could use?

JB: Oh, yeah the cricket. Did you ever hear about the cricket?

NC: Was it a device?

JB: Yeah, it was a toy, a device used to let someone know who you are.....

NC: And you would click it how many times? Just once?

JB: Just once.

NC: And then the person near you would click it as well?

JB: Then you would know we were the same.

NC: Did you have your rifle out at the time?

JB: Oh, yeah. As soon as you land.

NC: You went to Sainte-Mère-Église?

JB: Yeah. That's where we landed.

NC: And that was the objective, to secure the town? Was there any resistance in the town?

JB: No. A little bit but hardly any. It was a French town, don't forget. It wasn't German. In the morning they found out we were there and we had a few encounters then.

NC: So the Germans sent troops in?

JB: Oh yeah.

NC: And where were you at that time? Were you set up in a defensive position?

JB: I was in the ditch right outside of town with a couple other guys.

NC: What were your orders?

JB: Well, we were to go in as far as we could until reinforcements caught up with us. We went in. We were there for maybe seven or eight hours. We got reinforcements and we went back. It's hard to remember everything we did.

NC: Was there action against the Germans?

JB: Oh yeah. Don't ask me. They were killing us. I don't know....

NC: So the objective was to really just secure some of the town?

JB: Hold the town until the landing boats came in and took over and then we would be relieved. They really meant to be relieved. I never thought I would live to see the day.

NC: It was an important operation that had to be done.

[Break in Recording] (Mr. Bruno is very emotional) ...(Recording stops).

JB: It's stupid.....It's getting dark. When it got dark we didn't know what to do with them. We had nothing to tie them up with.

NC: These Germans were surrendering?

JB: Yeah, they were surrendering

NC: Is this when you were at the village?

JB: Oh, no this is later. This is near the end. One guy said that we didn't have a chance against these guys in the dark. Another guy said, "We got to get rid of them." And we asked, "What do you mean get rid of them? Send them back?" He

wanted to kill them. Not one G.I. agreed. Nobody. It's a tough thing to say. I can't see... I could never do it. Just kill someone because of that situation. I'll tell you, most them were young kids. I never told anyone, maybe a couple people today... I heard it did happen. Germans killed American prisoners but we never killed them. In fact, we had this prison camp..... We were watching them. Wasn't too much for them running out. The Germans did not come in because we were beating them every day. They didn't have no food to eat. So we had to watch not the prisoners running away but that people that were not soldiers coming in to get something to eat... I forgot what paper that was in...

NC: So you were over there from the time of D-Day until the end of the war.

JB: Oh yeah, even later. Remember I told you about the football team. We won the first football championship ever played. We were supposed to come home. The 82nd marched in New York in the Victory Parade. But the 508th stayed over there to finish the football season. Eisenhower asked us to be his honor guard because he had his headquarters there. We all had to sign a form that we didn't want to come home because we were all eligible to come home. We signed a form that we would wait until the football season was over because Eisenhower came and talked to us and asked us to stay and play football... No, it wasn't Eisenhower. It was our Colonel.....

NC: How did the football team come about? Was it an army football team that you organized?

JB: Yeah.

NC: And what position did you play?

JB: I was halfback.

NC: Who did you play against? Other groups in the army?

JB: Other army groups. We had a guy on our team that played for the Detroit Lions.

NC: Is this after the war had ended that you made the football teams?

JB: Oh yeah. Frank Ragonis....was his name. There were a couple other players on other teams that were All-Americans. Texas, Minnesota...They were in other outfits but they were there playing football. We signed a letter to play. You had to

have so many points to come home and we all had enough points to go home. But we signed it and stayed until we won the championship. Then we came home.

NC: When did you come home? Was it in 1945?

JB: Yeah, it 1945.

NC: Did you get wounded when you were over there? Did you get a Purple...

JB: I'll tell you what, I got the Purple Heart for this. I got burned here. See this scar here? I got burned by a flame thrower; it was our own flame thrower. We were in a ditch. There was a pill box we were going after. Now, this guy up a ways, shot his flame thrower toward the pill box and the wind blew it around. I had my head above the ... We was in a road—a little bank in the road and I had my head above there and he hit me right in the face. Now, I couldn't get the Purple Heart for that because I didn't shed blood. Yeah, but I got it for this, this little mark here.... I got it for that.

NC: Shrapnel from a bomb or grenade?

JB: A grenade. Probably a grenade. It went off. I think it was a grenade. That's how I got it. What else did you say?

NC: So they were pretty strict rules about how you could get a Purple Heart? You had to have blood shed. A burn wouldn't qualify.

JB: Oh yeah, you had to shed blood. That's how it read

NC: It didn't affect your face, the flame thrower? Just your chest?

JB: No, just my [chest].. See this scar here? Well I'll tell you what. There's me before I went overseas. See this scar here? It was pretty bad.... When we got home, everybody in the summertime would get G.I.'s but I couldn't get any G.I.'s because of that mark there. So nowI hope I'm not taking too much of your time. There's my wedding picture. See that nice head of hair I had? Know what it was? It's a wig. A hair piece

NC: So when you went over there you weren't married at the time?

JB: No, I was just out of high school.

NC: Were there any Japanese Americans in your unit? Any Hispanics? And Italians?

JB: No. There was Italians. Guido Mastrioni from Steubenville, Mike Cerra from Homestead. They were in my unit.

NC: Was there any type of code amongst the paratroopers where you were looked up to in the ranks of the military? Was it something that was pretty prestigious to be a paratrooper?

JB: No, the only thing is that we were the only ones that would get jump-boots. Everyone wanted them. But we were the only ones that were allowed to have them. I don't know if you know what jump-boots are. Jump boots and the...uniform.

NC: And you had these wings right? Which were a badge?

JB: You earned your wings.... They are regular wings. See them on this picture?..... You get them at the ceremony the day after you jumped.

NC: What was the food like that you would eat when you were overseas? Did you eat C-rations?

JB: Yeah, C-rations, K rations. One time we were bogged down in an apple orchard. There were fox-holes and German eighty-eights firing at us. You know what eighty=eights were? OK And lucky we were there because we ate apples day and night.

NC: You had run out of rations?

JB: Yeah and it was tough getting them. And after two days they came around and got us K-rations.

NC: You were eating apples for two days?

JB: Green apples. They told me that it didn't mean they weren't ripe. They were green apples. They were ripe. But they were still green, I don't know.

NC: When you were injured those two times was the medical care pretty good? They took care of you right away and bandaged you up?

JB: Oh, yeah. I had no complaints..... Actually nothing.

NC: What were your feelings about your commanding officers? Were they positive?

JB: They were good. In fact. (I forget his name) he lives in Fox Chapel. He was a Colonel. He lived in Fox Chapel. (What the hell was his name?) I went over & saw him a couple of times. He wasn't in the 508. He was in another regiment. But he was a good guy. I knew him pretty well. (What the hell was his name?) I can't think of it.....I get a little....

NC: What was the difference between C-rations and K-rations?

JB: There were C-rations and K-rations. C-rations came in a can and K-rations came in a box, it was like a dry food. Some you could cook with water and others you could just eat out of the can.

NC: Did you have to carry that stuff on you when you first jumped in? And until you could get re-supplied?

JB: Right.

NC: When you were involved in the D-Day operation, were you aware of what was going on back in the beaches, the Normandy Beaches?

JB: No, no. We were wondering, suppose they cancel the invasion. We would be out here, dead ducks. But they didn't. I doubted they would, that would be a hell of a thing having us jump and not come in. You know what I mean? It was possible, suppose a big storm came up. That was the main thing on D-Day, the weather. You had to have good weather when you jump. You can't jump in windy or cold weather.

NC: Blown off course. You had good weather that night it sounds like.

JB: Yeah the weather was all right. I'll tell you one thing. I would never go on a glider. Did you hear of a glider? If anything goes wrong there's nothing you can do. You have no chute or anything.

NC: Did any of the 82nd go on gliders?

JB: No, that was different. But they had them.

NC: I understand there were a lot of accidents on those gliders.

JB: Oh God yeah. They weather has to be perfect. The terrain has to be perfect. Say you're headed for a building, you might be able to move it a little bit, but you're going to hit it. I never heard about them hitting a building but I did hear about them hitting bad ground, trees and they couldn't do anything about it.

NC: Did your unit have pretty good morale?

JB: Yeah, they were all pretty young kids.

NC: What would you say the range of ages was? You were like eighteen at the time?

JB: I was nineteen actually. But I don't think anyone was over twenty-five. Some of the officers might have been older but not that much older. I don't even think they were thirty years old.

NC: What was your rank when you were involved in D-Day? Were you still a private?

JB: I was a private.. No... I was a private first-class but I didn't have a ceremony. They just told me I was private first-class. I was getting my mail private-first class and then I went to get discharged they told me I never got a promotion. I spent three years in the army and I got private on my discharge.

NC: Do you remember the sergeant when you served over there? Did he play an important role?

JB: Well actually, everyone played an important role. I can't think of their names.I can't think of their names.

NC: Everyone was important to the operations.

JB: Nobody had to give orders. Everybody knew what to do and everybody did it. It wasn't like the movies where the sergeant was mean to a guy and giving orders. Nothing like that. Everybody was sensible and reasonable. I can't say there's anybody that I didn't like. I really can't. Everybody was my friend. When I came home.... I forgot...I came home a couple of days after these other...well what happened was.... The day after I came home, they had a party over my house.

There was a knock on the door and these two buddies of mine came in. They had been home for about a week or so. My mother and father knew they were friends of mine because I wrote to them and told them. They got in touch with them and told them I was coming home and if they wanted to come over. One was from Homestead and the other, Guido Mastriano, was from Ohio. They both came over. They were both at my house when I came in.

NC: It must have been comforting seeing some familiar faces.

JB: Oh, yeah. It was. It was good. I came home and the train was pulling into the station. I see my mother with this woman standing beside her. I know my mother but I didn't know who the woman was. It was my younger sister. She grew up in two years. It was two years. She grew up bigger than my mother.

NC: Were you in touch with them when you overseas? You were writing back and you were receiving letters from them?

JB: Oh yeah. My sister still has letters I wrote.

NC: Was your family able to send packages to you and that sort of thing or was it more letters?

JB: It was more letters.

NC: Do you remember where you were when you heard the Germans had surrendered?

JB: Yeah. We were in this little town and we got a false alarm. They told us the war was over. So we were going into town, we were in France. We were going into (What the hell was the name of that town? J. C... I can't remember. I got a newspaper...) Anyhow we figured the war was over so we would go into town without our rifle. Every place you went you had to carry your rifle. The sergeant said, "No, you better take your rifle with you." Still. I'll tell you what; weeks after, we were in Germany then, weeks after the war ended we would find a soldier every morning, one or two soldiers, with a throat cut or shot or mutilated body lying on... And the war was over. Now I'll tell you another thing. I had a girlfriend. You know when I say I had a girlfriend, you know what it was for. A lot of them didn't have... She was nice. I was thinking about marrying her. But anyhow. I would take my rifle with me, my 45, and when we went to bed at night I would put a chair up at the door. She would say to me, "What are you doing that for?" I don't want to be surprised by anybody... which you know...." Oh no,

no”..... She really liked me. I’ll tell you how much she liked me. When I found out I was coming home she’s with me on the bus. All the German people were there, we’re on the bus going somewhere. When I come to where I get off, she got up in front of everybody and kissed me. She had a lot of nerve.

NC: Was she French or German?

JB: No, she was German. I was in Germany.

NC: That’s when you were in Germany. Was that after the war?

JB: Oh, yeah. I’m getting off to go back to camp to do whatever I had to do and she got up to say good-bye and kissed me in front of all these Germans. I said, “You better watch yourself got all these Germans.”

NC: So you were in a town when the announcement came that the war was over?

JB: Yeah, I was in Frankfurt. I’ll tell you what. That town, there wasn’t a building standing. These people don’t know what a war is. The French people, we would be going through a chow line and we had our mess kit. The kitchens over there. We’d be going through the chow line, then further on would be the rubbish over there. There would be a line of us throwing our food away. There would be a line of French people waiting to get what we threw away. That’s what I am saying. These people don’t know what war is. They don’t know. I had this friend from Bloomfield. Here’s what happened. I was in the mess hall one day. The guy says, “Hey Joe, go over and see the Mess Sergeant. Tell him I need sugar or butter or whatever he sent me for. I go over & say “Where’s your Mess Sergeant?” “Over there” He had his back toward me. , “Hey Sarge” He turned around and he was a guy I knew from Bloomfield. What the hell! He was in the same outfit, I didn’t know, different company. Any how I told him what he sent me for. After that I ate good. He was Mess Sergeant. Hell, I could get anything I wanted. Now, he told me he had a ring. He gave this German lady that came in, he gave her two pounds of used coffee grinds, he used them once, three pork chops and a pound of butter. He gave them to her. She gave him a diamond ring. Now when he came home, he opened a numbers joint at Penn and Main. Yeah, he had a book store and wrote numbers. I went to see him one day. He said, “Hey, Joe, Remember that woman in Germany that gave me that ring?” What do you think he got for that?... 2200 dollars. No .He got twenty-two thousand dollars.! It was a real diamond ring and that’s all he gave her. That’s what I’m saying. People here don’t know what it is to have hard times.

- NC: Was the 82nd Airborne involved at all in the Battle of the Bulge? Or was it not really.....
- JB: The Battle of the Bulge actually everybody was involved. What it was, the Germans made a last ditch fight to try to get us out of there. We pushed them back...killed.. That's what they call the Battle of the Bulge. It was no one certain battle. It was all over. It was one last effort for them to try to get out of it.
- NC: Do you remember where you were stationed at the time? Were you in a small town in France?
- JB: I was in Charlotteville.... It was a small town in France. But we were getting ready to go up there but we didn't have to go. Well, I'll tell you what... Did you ever hear about the 29th division, the 36th? They're the ones. They really took a lot of casualties. ...and ah..Who the hell was telling about the 29th the other night? I forgot. Someone was said something about the 29th taking a lot of casualties. I know, I know they did.
- NC: So your main role was in the D-Day operations? That was really when your unit was involved.
- JB: Yeah. See...Paratroopers were used to invade, not invade, but to go into enemy territory and take over. Like..You know. ...Holy Christ...Market..Market.. Market Garden...Do you know what Market Garden was in Holland? It wasn't that bad but it was still a jump operation. They say anybody that came out alive was lucky. I guess I'm lucky.
- NC: Are you still in touch with some of your war buddies? Or are they pretty much spread out?
- JB: No.. Yeah. The one I was in touch with mostly, was Guido—Guido Mastriani. Then I quit writing, I don't know what the hell happened. I really don't know what happened. Did you ever watch Jag on T.V.? I was writing to him. See those pictures I have up there? I was writing to him for about 2-3 years. Then I don't know what happened. I must be losing my mind. .. He used to write me and send me letters. Oh. I asked him if he could help write my book that's right. He told me he was busy. He was busy. His girl called me a couple of times. Here..See, I got these letters from him, from Jag. Anyhow, I lost contact with him too. I don't know why...Oh here...here...(sounds of paper shuffling) It's a letter I sent to

him. I had my daughter type it up and I sent it to him. I was writing back and forth to him for the last two years. Then I stopped. I don't know what happened. I should have kept in touch with him. I don't know what happened. Oh, Christ.. You know what...I think I am getting old. I don't remember half of the damn things I'm supposed to.

NC: So looking back on your experience in World War II, do you think there is anything else important to note? Was it something that was important to you personally and have relevance to you later in your life?

JB: No. The only thing is that a lot of the experience wasn't good. It's hard to explain. I don't know how...You don't like to talk about it...I don't know...(sighs) I wish I could help you more.

NC: Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[End interview]