Interview with Louis LaCivita
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Stove Township
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Transcriber: Fran Margiotti

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

LL: I was born on May 14 1925. I was born in the big city of Wilmerding, PA. I grew up there. I went to Wilmerding High School and I lived there until about I was a week old, until the service when I got recalled after World War II in 1953 for the Korean War. And I stayed in until 1961. Then I married Philomena. I met my wife when I was working as a detective in Kaufmann's. I met her there, she was running the elevator. We got married and moved out here. She liked it here. This is where she is from.

JZ: Well back up a little bit. You know who came to the United States first? Your parents from Italy?

LL: The first one that came over here was my uncle from Wilmerding. During World War I, my father and three of his brothers were in the Italian Army. The younger one, he took off and came to the United States because he did not want to go to the army. So when he got here they drafted him and they put him in the American Army. He did not get away with anything. Anyhow, he was in the American Army all the time after World War II.

JZ: So your father was in the Italian Army? He was up in Northern Italy.

LL: After World War II they came over here, my father and his other brothers. And they settled in Wilmerding, East McKeesport, and Trafford.

JZ: What part of Italy was your father from?

LL: My father comes from Province of Campobasso. But they migrated to a town near Foggia called Bovino. It's one of those towns up on a mountain. What they did in Italy was buy tracks of land and they would clear them and make charcoal and sold it, which was their family business. So that's how they ended up in the Foggia area. During World War I my grandfather passed away so the business went with him because those guys were in the service and that's why they came over here.

JZ: What year would you say your father came over?

LL: About 1920.

JZ: Was he married when he came over?

LL: No, my mother is from Dunbar, PA. Her people come from near Naples.

JZ: And when your father got here what did he do?

LL: He worked at a railroad. He was with what they called car repairman. They made box cars in Pitcairn.

JZ: What's your earliest memory of your childhood in Wilmerding?

LL: I remember my mother died when I was eight years old. That was in 1932. I was not quite eight years old when she died. I remember the layout of the funeral, the snow, the whole works. So that's my earliest childhood memory and from then on I have pretty good memory. I might be 79 but I still got it.

JZ: During the Depression, your mother passed. How did you and your family get by?

LL: My grandmother came over from Italy; she must have been about 80 at the time. She took care of us until she died in about 1940. I think she was 88 when she died. By that time I was 15, 16 years old, we were pretty well up in there. And in about 1942 my father remarried after his mother died.

JZ: What did you do during the Depression? Did you go to high school?

LL: I grew up during the Depression; I was in a class of 1943 at Wilmerding High School. In those days they called it Westinghouse Memorial.

JZ: What were any of the Italian traditions that your grandmother did, your father did that carried on from Italy on Christmas or Easter?

LL: We grew up as Italians; we did not grow up as [Americans]. Those days I had to speak Italian. I could never ask my brother, pass the bread, I got smacked, I had to say it in Italian. My grandmother would think we were talking about her. So we talked Italian all the time in the house. When I went to school I had to learn to speak English.

JZ: Was that tough for you at the time?

LL: Kids are resilient. When I was in Germany, from 1957 to 1960, I used to weekend in Italy because I was with the military police. All my buddies wanted to stay on the good side of the police sergeant. They would call me, "Hey, Lou we're going down to Naples, want a ride?" And we would go down for the weekend. I found that you need schools in the southern part of Italy, where my mother came from. They came from a place called Agropoli, which is about 25 miles south of Salerno. There's the Gulf of Salerno and they were right at the tip of that. First, second graders in school, they were teaching them German, French, and English besides Italian. Out there, second graders were speaking four

languages. Over here they send the kid to college and can't teach them to speak American.

JZ: Does your family have any feelings toward Mussolini? Did your grandmother talk? Did she know Mussolini when she came over?

LL: Well, they thought he was a great man but that he goofed up when he tied up with that nut in Germany. That was his big mistake, cost him his life. He did a lot for Italy, a lot more than the King did. The King was the King, period. But Mussolini did a lot for the country and if he hadn't. But there is a lot of politics over there that I don't care to get into now. I know why he went with Germany, I knew what backstabbers England and France were. They did the backstabbing in World War I.

JZ: I guess you were in high school when the war broke out, right? What was your reaction to it at the time?

LL: December the eighth of 1941 I went down and enlisted in the Navy.

JZ: And how old were you then? You weren't quite 18.

LL: I enlisted in the Navy. The whole gang of us did. I had to bring some papers home for my father to sign. I didn't tell him what the papers were for, I told him it was just for school.

JZ: I guess he couldn't read English?

LL: My brother told on me. I took a hell of a beating. He said, "You're going to go over there and get killed, I'll kill you here." Anyhow, since I was eighteen I went into the service.

JZ: So you joined, not drafted.

LL: No, I was drafted, but I volunteered for the draft.

JZ: What did your dad think of the war? Americans fighting in Europe?

LL: He was too crazy about it. Those old-timers were pretty staunch patriots for America. They didn't talk too much about the war itself. I never heard my father complain or gripe about it. You know and I know, Roosevelt didn't treat the Italians very good in this country.

JZ: Can you explain that?

LL: You don't know about la storia segreta.

JZ: The camps.

LL: They knew about them.

JZ: So these were internment camps for the Italians. What do you know about that? How many people were interred?

LL: One hundred and twenty-five thousand.

JZ: These are both American born Italians?

LL: They had their children in the services and they had them in these camps. Roosevelt wanted to get rid of all first, second and third generation Italian and ship them back to Italy. And they claimed he was a saint? He was no saint.

JZ: Where were these camps at?

LL: North Dakota, Minnesota.

JZ: And what was the basis, how did they say, same with the Japanese, you're an Italian National? You're members of the Fascist party?

LL: Same as the Japanese. They had the Japanese in those camps. I forget how many Japanese Americans were in the service, they got Congressional Medals of Honor and all kinds of medals. Still their parents were in these camps. Guys like Joe DiMaggio's father and mother were in the camp.

JZ: Do you know anyone personally here in Pittsburgh?

LL: No.

JZ: But during the war you didn't know that, it was after the fact. Did you feel American more than Italian?

LL: I was an American.

JZ: Did your dad identify as American?

LL: My dad was an American citizen. He became an American citizen when I was about five years old.

JZ: Was your family ever treated unfairly in Wilmerding?

LL: The only resentment I had at the time was I wasn't allowed to join the Boy Scouts because the Boy Scouts in Wilmerding were sponsored by the American Legion. They wouldn't allow us to join because our fathers were in the Italian Army not the American Army. He couldn't belong to the American Legion. That has always been a point of contention to me with the American Legion.

JZ: Has the American Legion ever recognized this?

LL: That was only Wilmerding, I didn't know about any place else. I belong to the American Legion. I'm a member of the Disabled American Veterans. I'm a member of the Military order of the Purple Heart. It was those guys in Wilmerding, that was their ruling. If you didn't belong to the American Legion, your boy couldn't belong to the Boy Scouts. So every time we ran into a Boy Scout, we would beat them up.

JZ: You were drafted in 1943? Do you remember the date?

LL: I left for the service August fifteenth I guess.

JZ: You went down to Pittsburgh for your medical exams?

LL: Yeah. I went down to Oklahoma.

JZ: What base was this?

LL: Camp Gruber. The 42nd Infantry I went to. Then they shipped me to England of June of 1944.

JZ: So this was right after D-Day?

LL: Yeah I went over to join my 9th Infantry Division in Saint Louis. I got shot when I was in Germany. I spent a year in the hospital.

JZ: When you went to Oklahoma, were you all gung-ho? Ready to fight?

LL: I was a good looking soldier, what can I tell you.

JZ: At Camp Gruber, what was the training, infantry?

LL: Machine gun. It was water cooled heavy. 30 caliber machine gun. It weighed 92 pounds. I was first gunner. I carried the tripod that weighed 52 pounds and my buddy carried the gun that weighed 40 pounds. There was another guy that carried the ammunition. They were big long belts and if I remember right about 250 rounds each.

JZ: Is that where you were in basic, in Camp Gruber?

LL: From there until I got shot, that's what I did.

JZ: Tell me about what you did in Camp Gruber, what was a typical day?

LL: We learned to shoot the gun, we marched, and we went on 25 mile hikes.

JZ: Was it all deserts?

LL: No, mountains, hills in Oklahoma. We were what was called the Cookson Hills, the nearest city to us was a place called Muskogee, Oklahoma. And the Cookson Hills is where we trained in the woods, having a lot of fun.

JZ: While you were getting trained, was there any propaganda? Any problem being Italian?

LL: No, not in the Army. We were everything there. My commander was Polish. My second gunner was a Jew. There was no distinction over there. My second gunner was a guy by the name of Jules Conning from Gloversville, New York. He was just as Jewish as I was Italian. I remember when we met, I said "Conning, Conning, what is it, what are you?" He tells me he's a Jew, I go, "I didn't ask you

your religion I asked you your nationality." Oh, German. Okay, now we know. Conning, know what that means. King. That was his name. We're still in touch to this day.

JZ: How many men were in this machine gun crew you were in, three?

LL: There were eight men because we had five ammunition carriers.

JZ: Now each soldier would each carry their own rifle. An M-1. And you carried the tripod?

LL : Oh yeah, they were all armed. I had a .45 caliber.

JZ: When did you learn you were going overseas?

LL: Couple months before D-Day because we went from there we went to New York, then New England. There was a lot of time involved there.

JZ: You took the train?

LL: Yeah.

JZ: Did they tell you right up that you were getting overseas or just tell you to get on the train.

LL: Yeah, yeah they just told us.

JZ: What were your feelings?

LL: Hurrah! That's what we trained for. I wouldn't do that now. There would be four guys, me and three guys dragging me.

JZ: You left from New York?

LL: Three weeks on the water. Three weeks from New York to London.

JZ: What was it, a cruise ship, an old Navy ship?

LL: It was one of those liberty ships.

JZ: Were you part of the 9th Division at this point?

LL: No, I still part of the 42nd. I was a replacement, is what they called it for someone who didn't make it across the water.

JZ: Would you have preferred to be sent to the Pacific?

LL: No, that's one thing I said. Thank God I got sent to Europe instead of the Pacific. All that island fighting, that was tough. My buddies over there had it rough, a lot rougher than we did. At least the people we dealt with when we weren't fighting were the locals, they were white. They didn't have cannibals like they did down at Port Borne or the rest of those islands.

JZ: When you left New York, you went to London?

LL: Somewhere north in England, then we took a train down to London. The London area is where we were at. I was in a place called Bath, and in the town they had a statue of Lord Nelson, the guy with one arm, one leg and one eye. Trafalgar Square. Well this is where he was from, and they had this statue of this man, half-man.

JZ: It took you three weeks to cross the Atlantic, did you ever come under attack by U-boats or put on warning or did you have to put on any life vests?

LL: Can't remember of any.

JZ: What was the typical equipment did you have besides the .45 or the tripod, what were the other items?

LL: In my packet I had my blanket, my raincoat, a knife, a bayonet and of course half a dozen hand grenades. Oh, and half of a tent.

JZ: Real little?

LL: Well, no two of them together two guys could sleep in them. You always had to find another guy to put the two of them together but most of the time all we did was wrap up in them. More or less, lay it on the ground and get in it with a blanket and wrap everything up like a cocoon. It was too much bother to be putting up a tent every night.

JZ: I imagine all you guys once you got into combat in Europe ditched all that stuff.

LL: No, well you had to sleep. You had to have it.

JZ: What did you do in Oklahoma for fun?

LL: We had the U.S.O. Shows there, and we had the social service clubs with pool tables and ping-pong table. But half the time you were too tired to go to those places, you come back from a 25 mile hike you wouldn't even feel like playing pool. All you wanted to do was take a shower and get some sleep. They would wake you up at four in the morning.

JZ: Going back to England, how long were you in Bath?

LL: I was only there couple weeks and we headed over to the coast of France.

JZ: When did you hear about D-Day? Were you still on the ship, did the military inform you guys? How did you first find out about it?

LL: I guess I was in Bath when I heard about it. Of course we were all cheering, but we did not realize how much causalities were involved. You don't think about that because nothing is going to happen to you, it's going to happen to the other guy.

JZ: I guess you had to think like that.

LL: That's the way they teach you to think. See that's the difference between the American Army and the German Army. Every guy in the American Army figured nothing was going to happen to him, it's going to happen to the other guy. If the sergeant got killed it didn't matter someone else would take over. But the Germans weren't taught that, when the sergeant got killed they were lost, they didn't know what to do any more. They would throw up their hands. That was they thing we always tried to do was the guy that had the stripes, knock him off and the other guys would be lost. They couldn't think for themselves. They were machines. Every man in my squad could do my job, and I could do their job. It was the same way with the sergeant that ran our squad. Half the time we told him to go to Hell and that I was the boss, I was the gunner.

JZ: Who was your rank, PFC?

LL: Yeah.

JZ: Did you have any interaction with the British when you were in Bath?

LL: No.

JZ: So after Bath, you got onto another ship?

LL: Yeah we got on one of those things to cross the English Channel and I joined my division at Saint Lou. That was the day we were bombed by 4,000 of our own planes. The sky was black with planes.

JZ: How were you accidentally bombed by America's own planes?

LL: The way I understand it that there were some kind of banners or flags or some kind of markers that they supposed to bomb south of these markers but we advanced past the markers, we were in the area that was supposed to get bombed. We went too fast.

JZ: So this was at Saint Lou?

LL: That was the day I told those guys that if I survive this and I have to come back into the service I'm going to come back to join you. Yeah there were a lot of planes. It looked like a black cloud, they were all planes.

JZ: So you must have had explosions all around you?

LL: It was the worst thing I ever lived through.

JZ: Were there Germans shooting at you?

LL: That was the only thing that was bothering us, hadn't seen a German yet.

JZ: So this was the day you landed?

LL: The first day of combat, that was my baptism.

JZ: Did you land on one of the D-Day beaches?

LL: See, all the fighting was over on the beaches. If I remember right, it was Omaha beach but don't hold me to that.

JZ: When you got off shore, you started going inland?

LL: Yeah, we went by jeep to where the 9th was in Saint Lou.

JZ: So how long did that take you?

LL: Not long, it was only a matter of twenty miles or so.

JZ: So you were in your jeep when the planes came?

LL: No, I already was already up there. I already had my hole dug. I never came out of that hole.

JZ: You were in a fox hole the whole time they were bombing?

LL: Yeah.

JZ: How close would you think the bombs were to you?

LL: I saw all these people get killed. I saw guys get blown out of the holes. A bomb would hit and you would see a body fly in the air. That's enough to scare the hell out of you. You know that guy that is trying to get rid of the "Under God" in our Pledge of Allegiance? He wasn't there. There were no atheists in the fox holes

that day. Everybody was praying to God. If you weren't one before that, you became one there. We always said there were no atheists in the fox holes.

JZ: How long did that last, a couple of hours just because you advanced past a certain mark?

LL: Yeah they had these things, like banners they would lay down. That's where we were supposed to be on each side of the banners. But we had overrun them.

JZ: Were you able to call in?

LL: They didn't have the sophisticated communications that they have these days. They had a radio that weighed about a hundred pounds that the guy had to carry around. Today they have them in their back pockets.

[End Tape 1, Side A]
[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

JZ: So after your day of baptism of fire, what did you do after that?

LL: Well we fought through Normandy. We went into Belgium and into Germany. One night I heard some activity in front of me. I called into headquarters to find out if we had anything going on out there, any patrols out there and he said, "No." So I picked up my rifle. I didn't want to fire my machine gun at night because it's like daylight when you shot 250 rounds it's like daylight around you.

JZ: Oh, so they could have seen your position.

LL: Yeah, so I picked up a rifle and I shot at where the noise was coming from. I got out of the hole to see what I hit, and someone shot it. I got hit. I was lucky. That's when it got daylight around me because after he shot me I turned my machine gun

on him. I got shot under my left knee. I spent six months in a cast from my toe all the way up to here. I got hit November the fifteenth.

JZ: This was November of 1944? So you were in Germany by this time?

LL: Yeah I was way in Germany. I was in the hospital until I was discharged and sent home in the last part of September of 1945. I was in the hospital all that time.

JZ: Were you involved in the Battle of Saint Lou?

LL: Yeah.

JZ: I've heard of that, Saint Lou was a city and you had to get the Germans out of that city.

LL: Yeah that's why they were bombing us over there, they were bombing that. The hedge rows were a rough place. We had to fight one hedge row to the next.

JZ: So it was countryside with hedges?

LL: Yeah, like I have hedges all around my house. Well that's what they had all around there. Acres. I guess to keep the cows in. They didn't have fences. They had these hedges all over the place. We had to go from one to the other. Each one might be a hundred feet from mine and the next guy and we had to clear it all out. The Germans were on one side, we were on the other. And like idiots we were shooting at each other. Now we're buddies, now we're friends.

JZ: After that you went into Saint Lou?

LL: Yeah we went straight through it.

JZ: How long were you engaged with the Germans? What would you do, set up the tripod and help fire the machine gun.

LL: I would throw my tripod down and Julie would come down and stick the gun in it. Another guy would hand me a box of ammunition and I would load it. We would fire it in the general direction of where the Germans were. One time I was firing at a target that was five miles from where I was at, I didn't even see what I was firing at.

JZ: They would travel that far?

LL: Yeah, over and down. I still have my World War II notebook with the targets of what I was firing at. Here, I'll show you.

JZ: It says 600 rounds a minute. It was a .30 caliber Browning machine gun. And in that too was water, and you had to put water in there too?

LL: Oh yeah all the time you had to put water in there. Otherwise, you run 600 bullets through there in a minute and that thing would be red hot. The water would be boiling; you could make coffee with it. It held about two gallons of water.

JZ: So there would be some guy that would pour water and that would be his job?

LL: Yeah, he kept a can full of water.

JZ: And he would have to carry it?

LL: He carried it.

JZ: Where would you guys find water? I guess it would be tough, sometimes you couldn't find water.

LL: Well, there would always be water behind us in the kitchens. The kitchens came behind us. They weren't too far from us.

JZ: You guys eat K-rations or C-rations?

LL: C-rations or K-rations. Still to this day I can't eat baked beans unless they are cold. I don't like them hot, I like them cold. I got used to them that way.

JZ: How would you say in combat, you didn't have time to think, you reacted?

LL: That's right, you did it instinctively.

JZ: I guess the first time you were nervous.

LL: Yeah, I guess.

JZ: How would you say the Germans, were they tough?

LL: Sure they were tough but they were robots. They were not taught to think for themselves. They were taught to carry out orders. If the sergeant told them to shoot ten times, that's what he would shoot. If there were fifty guys coming towards them, they would shoot only ten times because that's what they were told.

JZ: When you were in Saint Lou, were they dug in?

LL: Yeah, everyone was dug in. Sometimes we would use each other's holes.

JZ: How would you say when you were in Saint Lou, constant fighting, firing your machine gun all the time?

LL: No, not really.

JZ: How long was Saint Lou?

LL: A couple days. It wasn't bad. There were worse fights than Saint Lou that I was in.

JZ: Did you catch any German prisoners?

LL: Me, no. I never captured any. We didn't take prisoners. What was I going to do with the machine guns?

JZ: So you were still part of the 9th Infantry Division?

LL: Yeah, up until the day I got shot.

JZ: So after Saint Lou, you went to Paris and up in that way. Was Patton in charge of the 9th?

LL: No, Omar Bradley. Best General they had in the United States Army.

JZ: Better than Patton?

LL: Better than any of them.

JZ: Better than Eisenhower?

LL: Better than Eisenhower. Eisenhower compared to Omar? No.

JZ: What made Bradley better in your opinion?

LL: He was a human. We had to take a hill for instance. He figured it how we could take that hill without anyone getting hurt. He worked his way around it to get to it. Whereas, guys like Patton it was your blood and his guts. They didn't care about you.

JZ: What about Eisenhower?

LL: Eisenhower. He was a phony as a general and he was a phony as a president.

JZ: So I guess fighting the Germans got a little easier after D-Day and the liberation of Paris, did it go a little faster?

LL: They saw that the end was coming. Their last hurrah was the Battle of the Bulge.

JZ: Were you every bombed by the Germans?

LL: Yeah all the time. You're in a fox hole, no one would bother you. I think while I was in Germany, a funny story in a way, I dug a hole for my machine gun placement, of course I slept in there. So we were outside of this town, it had one of those baby farms that the Germans had all over Germany. They had these young girls and they would bring in their heroes in. The girls would service them; they would have babies for Hitler's youth. So this was one of those towns. I went into the house and took the mattress out of the bedroom and brought it down to my hole so I could sleep on the mattress instead of the ground. Now the next day, I don't know what made me do it, I rolled the mattress up and tied it with a rope. I was bringing it back into the house again. I came out of the hole with this thing in front of me; a bomb went off and blew me back into the hole again. Not a scratch on me but that mattress was all torn to shreds. If I haven't had that mattress in front of me I would have blown to Hell. I would have been gone. But that mattress saved my life. I always said God takes care of drunks and fools and

told me to bring the mattress back and that's what I was doing. I don't know whether it's tragic or funny or what it is, but that's one thing I will never forget. I can still see that mattress all shredded up with stuff all over it.

JZ: How far did it blow you back?

LL: It blew me right back into the hole again; I was just getting out of the hole. I got religion that day. Believe me. Even my Jew friend got religion that day when he saw me blown into that hole.

JZ: Were a lot of guys near you? Were you in the front line?

LL: Yeah this was the point.

JZ: Where this building was?

LL: It was behind me.

JZ: Speaking of religion, was there a Chaplin that would come by?

LL: Yeah the priest that was with us would have Mass out in the field. He would set his crucifix on the hood of the jeep; that was the altar that we would be standing around watching him. I went to Mass in German churches. I went to Mass in French churches.

JZ: You didn't fight in the Bulge?

LL: No, I was already shot. I was already in the hospital.

JZ: Where you in Germany at this time?

LL: Yeah, I was in that baby factory.

JZ: And what was the name of this place?

LL: Schevenhutte.

JZ: So this is right before the Bulge? Before you got shot?

LL: Well the Bulge was after I got shot. If I remember right, I was in the hospital in a cave were they had brought me. When the Bulge started, they brought me from there to a hospital in Paris. I saw Paris through a back window of an ambulance. And from Paris, I went to England. They operated on me in Paris.

JZ: Got the bullet out?

LL: No, they didn't have to get the bullet out. It was gone, it didn't slow down. Felt like someone hit me with a baseball bat knocking me flat on my face because I was standing when someone hit it.

JZ: So was there a medic that treated you there?

LL: The medic, I'll tell you about this guy. He lives in Masontown, PA, his name was Walter Vicinelly. Walter was a medic, he came over and picked me up and threw me over his shoulders and he ran about three miles with me hanging up there to get me to battalion aid station were they could work on my leg. That was 1944, this is sixty years later, and he and I are still the best of friends.

JZ: He ran three miles with you on his back?

LL: Yeah and I weighed 200 pounds.

JZ: He got you back, and then you went to Paris? Did they operate on you there?

LL: No, they just wrapped me up and get me to stop bleeding. They didn't have the facilities to operate so they shipped me back to Paris.

JZ: It shattered your leg?

LL: My whole leg was shattered. The tibia was all shattered and above the knee where it was hit. I was cast from here all the way down to my toes. It took me a year to heal, so they did a hell of a job on me.

JZ: I can see the indent but it's hard to even notice that anything happened.

LL: You could tell. I have an artificial valve in my heart, a steel valve in my heart. You can't tell. I got a foot and a half of my colon missing, can't tell. God takes care of me.

JZ: Where did you recover in England for a year?

LL: I was in England in a place called Leeds. I was in the hospital there for, November to April, for six months. Then they shipped to the States and I went to Stanton, VA for about two months. Then I went up to Long Island until I got discharged in the last part of September 1945.

JZ: The whole time you were being rehabilitated too? So they took the cast off?

LL: Yeah, they put me to work driving an ambulance in Long Island after they took the cast off. I had to have something to do, I couldn't just play around.

JZ: Did they ever talk about sending you back to Europe?

LL: No, by the time they took that cast off and threw away crutches the war was over in Europe.

JZ: So I guess you were relieved?

LL: No, I was sweating out going to Japan. Luckily the war ended over there and they sent me home.

JZ: Did you hear that they dropped the atomic bomb, what did you think of it, the power of this new weapon?

LL: I said, "Great. They should have done it before."

JZ: On the Japanese?

LL: I don't want to use the word brainwashed, but you're psyched-out against the enemy. They're the enemy. Pretty hard to sympathize when they throw an A-Bomb and kill a half of million. Thank God they didn't bring it over here. In doing that, how many American lives did they save? To invade Japan and hit those shores, there would have been a lot of causalities. And probably a lot more Japanese than did die, a lot would have been dying.

JZ: Describe coming home? You were in Long Island and took the train to Pittsburgh? No parade?

LL: Parade? No. We didn't have anything. There was no welcoming party, you just went home. I got home on a Friday and Monday I went to work at Westinghouse.

JZ: When you were wounded, were you in contact with dad and your family?

LL: Oh yeah, I wrote them before the army. I wrote home and told them they would be getting a telegram from the army telling you I was wounded but don't worry about it, I'm okay, don't get excited.

JZ: Isn't the army supposed to be the first one? They're always going to the door.

LL: Yeah well when there's ten thousand other people it takes awhile to get to everybody.

JZ: So you received the Purple Heart. Did you get the Purple Heart when you were in the hospital? Tell me about that.

LL: Yeah I got the Purple Heart when I was in the hospital. The colonel came around and pinned it on me and gave me a kiss. As far as I was concerned, the Purple Heart was worth five points towards getting a discharge. You had to get so many points to be getting out of service.

JZ: Explain that point system to me. The more points you had the faster you got of the military?

LL: Yeah. You got one point for every month you were in the service. And for every month you were overseas you got extra points. And for every citation or Medal you got there was extra point. Now the Purple Heart was worth five points, some were worth two, some were worth ten. But the Purple Heart was worth five points. Now I had another one, Combat Infantry badge, it was worth five points. And I got ten dollars a month for my pay. The Combat Infantry Badge, I got that while fighting over there.

JZ: Did you think this system was fair?

LL: I imagine. Yeah, we never questioned it. We figured these guys with all these points and there were some guys that have been over there for three years and never went home. They should have been the first ones to go home. I forgot how many points you needed to go home.

JZ: When you got home, you went right back to the Westinghouse?

LL: Yeah, yeah. I had to go to work.

JZ: What was it like returning, being a civilian? The transition?

LL: I was very resilient, didn't bother me one way or another.

JZ: You adapted?

LL: Yeah real fast, I had to. You know the old saying, "If you're dealt a lemon, make lemonade." That was me, whatever was happening I accepted it and went on with it. Never any regrets for what I could have done or should have done. I did it, made a decision and that was it. Never worried about whether I made the right decision or not, I made it, you live with it. I got out; I had to go work in the Westinghouse. I didn't like it. I hated the Westinghouse. But until something better came along. I became a policeman. I spent forty years in the law enforcement one way or another. When I worked for the railroad I investigated fraud and embezzlement. I was a special investigator for the railroad. I worked out of the auditing department. We investigated the contractors and vendors and the people that did business with the railroad to make sure that there weren't holes.

JZ: Did you go to school for this, after the war?

LL: Special Investigators course and I'm an accountant. I studied accounting at Duff's Business College.

JZ: When you became a police officer for what department, Wilmerding?

LL: Wilmerding, yeah. I was there for seven years.

JZ : This was right after the war you became a police officer?

LL: Yeah. I got called back. All my buddies, we belonged to the Air Force Reserves.

JZ: How did you get into the Air Force Reserves if you were in the Army?

LL: Well, all the cops belonged to the Air Force Reserves, air police battalion at the air base up here. So a couple of my buddies talked me into going. We used to go up for once a month for a weekend and we would have a nice weekend together. We go away once a year for two week's vacation, so I went with them. It was fun. Then, during the Korean War in 1953 I got a letter asking me to come back to active duty. I didn't have to. I could have told them, "No, I don't want to go." Because I had the Purple Heart and I had three kids. But the politicians were starting to get on my nerves on the police department; it wasn't fun anymore to be a cop. If I arrested somebody, I would have fifty politicians on my back.

JZ: Did you go to Korea?

LL: No, that's why I laugh. They shipped me to Africa.

JZ: Africa. Where at in Africa?

LL: I was in Morocco. I was there for about a year. Then I came home and went to school and studied special investigations. I was with the O.S.I. for a while and I

got a chance to go to Germany for three years so I volunteered. That was three years I had my family with me, it was nice.

JZ: So your family came to Germany too?

LL Yeah.

JZ: Then you were an active member of the U.S. Air Force?

LL: Oh, yeah. I was staff sergeant. It was like being a Chief of Police in Pittsburgh.

JZ: Where were you based in Germany?

LL: Twelfth Air Force Headquarters. Ramstein. And part time I ran a youth center.

JZ: For the American kids?

LL: Yeah.

JZ: Back in Germany, how did it feel to get back after ten years after the war?

LL: The people were great.

JZ: A lot of changes?

LL: Oh yeah. Well, I wasn't in the part of Germany I fought in. I was east of where I fought. So I didn't see any of those people but the ones I dealt with over there. I remember I had one guy that used to take care of the equipment in the boy clubs I was running, the youth center. He would take care of the pool tables and ping pong tables, I used to buy my supplies off of him. He was an old Nazi Colonel. We turned out to be friends, no hard feelings. In the Air Force at that time, we

were allowed to wear our combat unit patch on our shoulder. So even though I was in the Air Force, I was allowed to wear the Army combat badge that I wore all my medals. He knew I fought in Germany, no problem.

JZ: No problem with getting along?

LL: No, we got along good. Most of the German people knew Hitler was a nut. This Colonel was the guy I met that admitted he had been a Nazi. Everybody else would say no. Then asked me, where did you fight during the war? I would say, right here in Germany. Where did you fight? They would say Russia, nobody fought in Germany, they all fought in Russia.

JZ: You came back after three years in Germany? Return to the police force?

LL: No, I went to Texas for a year. I was on the Mexican border for a year before I got out. Then I came home and didn't want to go back to the police force, so I became a private detective. I worked for a bunch of law firms, doing all kinds of causality investigations.

JZ: Tell me about your involvement with the Italian American War Veterans and how that combat organization got started?

LL: The Italian American War Veterans started were started in 1932 in Connecticut and spread out from there. The post in Pittsburgh was Allegheny County Post #1. Its members included people like, Judge Musmanno and a few others. After Musmanno died the post kind of disintegrated.

JZ: This was after the Second World War?

LL: No, Musmanno died in the sixties if I remember right, sixties, maybe later than that but after he died it fell apart. Early in 1980, I was the National Vice

Commander of the Military order of the Purple Heart. I was in Florida for a convention; some guy from New Jersey asked me to support him for one of the offices. I said, "Well tell me about yourself, what am I supporting?" He told me he was the Senior Vice Commander of the Italian American War Veterans in New Jersey. I said, "Italian American War Veterans, I never heard of them. They in Pennsylvania?" I ask. They used to have a post in Pittsburgh but it died.

JZ: When was this?

LL: This was in the eighties this guy was talking to me. So I said, that interests me if there is an Italian American organization I would like to know about it. I told him to have somebody contact me. Sure enough, some guy from Youngstown to talk to me, he was the National Commander of the Italian American War Veterans. He was a judge in Mahoning County court, Judge Lipari. We talked. He asked me if I would revive the organization here. It was a challenge. I took it, but the rest is history. Judge Lipari was the one that got me involved in the Italian Americans. We formed in about two weeks, I had over fifty members.

JZ: You just told guys you knew?

LL: Yeah, World War II guys. Then we got too big, too many members, couldn't keep touch with everyone so we split.

JZ: How big were you then?

LL: Two, three hundred. We formed a post in New Kensington, McKees Rocks, and Coraopolis.

JZ: And you said Penn Hills as well?

LL: Well that was Post #1. Then I formed this post, Post #32 in Pittsburgh. So we had Post #1, 29, 30, 31, 32 and 33 was up in Scranton.

JZ: So real quick, Post 1 is Penn Hills. New Kensington is what? This is 32, McKees Rocks.

LL: New Kensington is 31. Coraopolis is 29. 33 is in Scranton. 25, 26, 27 and 28 are up in New Castle.

JZ: New Castle and everything, they all fall under your jurisdiction?

LL: The state commander now is David McMullan.

JZ: David McMullan is the state commander of the Italian organization?

LL: Yeah, all you have to have is part Italian.

JZ: Each one of these has a commander?

LL: The commander of post 32 is named Wilhelm.

JZ: And you are the?

LL: I'm Adjutant.

[End Tape 1, Side B]
[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

JZ: We were talking about the Italian American Veterans. You edit the *Torch*. And that's goes to everybody, all national members?

LL: Yeah. I put out 6,000 of them every month.

JZ: Were you the one that started?

LL: No.

JZ: How long have you been editor?

LL: I've been editor since 1992. They never had a *Torch* like I put out. They used to send out a piece of newspaper with nothing in it. I got into a big hassle because when I started this *Torch*. In 1950 I edited a sports magazine in Westinghouse valley. We operated for about a year and then went out of business. When I was in Africa I edited the base newspaper, so there was a little newspaper man in me. Not enough to do it professional but as a hobby. When they asked me to take over the *Torch*, I said fine but it's got to be run my way without any interference. So I started and put a little bit of our heritage in the magazine. Every magazine has a little bit about our heritage. I do a lot of research. I try to put a lot of pictures in, they like to see their pictures in the paper. How many can you identify?

JZ: They're all famous Italian Americans. Frank Sinatra, Joe DiMaggio. Who prints this, you print this right here at your house?

LL: No, I get it done at the Type Craft Printing Company at 23rd Street, South Side.

JZ: They do a nice job. Hollywood verses Italians.

LL: There's a lot of history and daily stuff that they should know for now about the organization. The guy that I get that information from is a man by the name of Richard Cappozoli. He was the Commissioner of Police in West Chester County in New York, and Superintendent of schools in West Chester County. He wrote a

couple of books. I get a lot of information from him. I get a lot of information from the Italian studies from New York.

JZ: And how is he involved?

LL: He's my friend.

JZ: And he's a member of this club too?

LL: No, he's not a veteran.

JZ: You had to serve in the war to be a member?

LL: You had to be in the service. When they started out you had to have served in the war, a World War I or World War II vet, then they took in the Korean War. Now as long as you have Honorable Discharge from the service you could get in. The World War I vets are all gone. The World War II vets are just about all gone. I'm one of the youngest ones they have, World War II vets, and most of them were older than me.

JZ: You said you started in 1932 in Connecticut by Italian soldiers that fought for the Americans?

LL: They were Italian American War Veterans, not the Italians. They were American veterans. I've got a lot of old histories lying around here. You'd have a Hell of a time reading it all.

JZ: Yeah, it's a lot to read. Would you say now today after sixty years, do you see yourself as Italian American?

LL: I'm an American of Italian heritage. I always tell these people be proud of your heritage but better be worthy of it. Anybody can say I'm an Italian American, be worthy of that name. Don't be ashamed of it. I'm an American, I shed blood for this country but not ashamed of my father or my grandparents.

JZ: Were you ever ashamed of it?

LL: No, never. I grew up loving it. I got into a lot of fights over it.

JZ: You think the image of Americans of Italian decent has changed since World War II? Did it make us more American? Did you feel more American?

LL: Hollywood is doing its best to keep old image alive that all the Italians belong to the Mafia. Guys like Steven Spielberg, should be made an offer he can't refuse and ship him back to Israel where he belongs. I know one thing, if they came out with a program about the Jews like he did with Italian, they would shut down the country.

JZ: What program is this?

LL: The Sopranos.

JZ: Spielberg was involved with that?

LL: Sure. Now he's got another one he's pushing about a shark that is supposed to be a Mafioso of the ocean, all the fishes are his. It's a cartoon thing, animation. All the mobster fishes have Italian names like Guido and stuff like that. If they did that about the Jews this country would be in an uproar. Do it about the blacks and see what would happen. Jesse Jackson would have a fit. But the Italians, they tell me, anybody calls me a dago, drives me crazy, I go crazy, I will not take it. They

tell me why don't you get with it, quit being uptight, it's only a movie, only a cartoon. It's not just a cartoon. They're maligning us. I can't see it.

JZ: Tell me about how you got the monument at the Veterans Hospital in Highland Park.

LL: Well, people in different parts of the country have monuments. Like in Connecticut they have a beautiful monument for the Italian American Veterans. They must have needed to raise hundred and thousands of dollars to build it. It not only is a monument dedicated to the people but it has all the names of the Italian American Veterans of that era. In Minneapolis they have a monument dedicated to the Italian American Veterans that's about twenty feet high, it's an obelisk. So I thought we should have one for the people in Pittsburgh. World War II there was 26,000 Italian American Veterans here in Pittsburgh.

JZ: Probably one of the biggest in the country, no?

LL: Pennsylvania was one of the biggest Italian American populations in the service during war. But trying to raise the money was gigantic, I was ready to quit, I couldn't raise the money. Finally, the guy I had contracted with to build the monument, I couldn't raise the money to do what he wanted to do for me. So out of desperation I went down West Park monument works in McKees Rocks. I talked to the kid that runs the place. He asked me how much money I had, and I told him. He said I'll see what I can do for you. He contacted the company that he buys his granite and marble from, they had these pieces of stone they had cut for another project and it fell through. They told him he could have that for a small amount of money. You see the size of that, it's over six feet tall, almost seven feet tall and five feet across. He gave it to me for what I had and he said, "I'll donate the rest." The labor was free. He didn't charge me for the labor, didn't charge me for the engraving or anything. The deal we made was that they shut down Highland Drive and haul it over for free.

JZ: It's a nice monument, I'll just read it, "They came as immigrants, they served as citizens, they died as Americans. In honor of all of our fallen heroes lost but not forgotten. Thank you for giving us the freedom of realizing our dreams." This was just installed last October in 2003?

LL: Yeah.

JZ: Any final thoughts?

LL: No, I think you should talk to Walter Vicinelly, because he's a real hero from the war. And Dominic and a couple guys that had some experiences they could tell you about. Like Frank Sicilia, he was a ranger during World War II, he's got some stories he could tell you.

JZ: Anything else? We just have to continue to fight for our image.

LL: All I'm saying is be proud of your heritage. Be worthy of it. What the Italians have done for this country is immeasurable, we go back a long way and its too bad we have Black History month, Chinese History month, and the big deal over here is Saint Patrick's Day where everyone gets drunk. It's incomprehensible because there is so much of it that people don't know about it. They don't teach it, they tell you about it, they keep it a secret. Why?

JZ: Unfortunately. Well thank you for keeping the heritage alive through this magazine.

LL: I'm going to give you a couple books I want you to read. My buddy's book, it's called *Five Centuries of Italian American History*. It should be a textbook in the schools.

JZ: I thank you for the interview.

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[End of Interview]