

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH MAURO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

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RIDGEWOOD, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Mr. Joseph Mauro on March 17th, 2011 in Ridgewood, New Jersey with Andrew Provinsal, Sandra Stewart Holyoak, and Joseph Mauro, and later Elaine Cigolini will be joining us to perhaps participate as well. Thank you for having us here.

Joseph Mauro: My pleasure.

SH: Can you tell me where and when you were born?

JM: I was born in North Bergen, New Jersey at home in a house on July 27th, 1919.

SH: We are going to begin by talking about your family history. Can you tell me your father's name and where he was born?

JM: ... My father's name was Felix Mauro and he was one of six boys born to my grandmother, Josephine Mauro. ... He was the last one to come over here. ...

SH: Your father was a sergeant in the Italian Army?

JM: In the Italian Army, yes, and he also was an interior decorator and a painter, and he had a trade. ... When I would walk with him in the streets people would call him master because of his trade. ... It was the Depression days, and we had it very, very bad. ... I was one of seven children in the family. I have five sisters, [and] my brother Al. ... We grew up poorly, things were very bad. ... Gasoline was only ten cents a gallon and cigarettes were ten cents a pack. Name brands were two packs for a quarter in the A&P, and you couldn't even afford them, that's how bad [it was]. ... [I remember] growing up in North Bergen until the third grade when I moved to Fairview. ... I remember somebody giving me a pumpkin for Halloween and I brought it home. My mother was so thankful and happy, she cooked it for us ... and we had that for food. In my days growing up, I would make a wagon out of a discarded carriage in an empty lot, and I would use that for numerous things. My mother would bake bread and I would get a wagon full of wood. ... She would only charge twenty-five cents. She'd have wood in the oven, bring it to an oven where they bake bread, everyone did that, and they only charged a quarter. My duties were, coming home from school, look out for ... discarded coal, and people were throwing empty lots. ... After the rain the black coal would come out from used burnt coal and I bring it home and use that. On my wagon, I would go down to Hudson County Lake, and there's a big park in that area, and look for wild dandelions to bring home to eat. ... We were very, very poor and I was so poor that even the principal at school had to give me and my brother, brought him to a store to get his clothes to go to school. ... With all that in mind, I got to be twenty-one years old, and we moved out. I was in the Civilian Conservation Corps twice, earning thirty dollars a month, sending home twenty-five dollars to my parents. In fact, they'd pay you in canteen checks, five dollars was my pay. ... Twice I had to do that. [Editor's Note: The Civilian Conservation Corps was a New Deal program during the 1930s designed to provide employment for young Americans.]

SH: Can I ask where you served with the Civilian Conservation Corps?

JM: Yes, the first time I went in I was seventeen years old. ... I was in Lewes, Delaware [in] mosquito control. ... I was there six months and you're allowed to come home or stay. I came home. Second time, it happened when I was around twenty years old. I was very, very poor. I had the misfortune, had an accident in someone's car. I only [just] received my license. I had painted his house. I became a painter, my father taught me how to mix ... oil based paints then, not latex as it is today, and I would paint small jobs he would get. ... I would go with him, he would show me how to mix colors. I became a very good painter and when I got a job working, they would give me only two dollars a day. ... It was very rough. ... This fellow [wanted his] basement painted and I did so. He was an elderly man, and I did a day-and-a-half and I tried to charge him seventeen dollars and he wanted to pay me. He said, "Come tonight and when my wife comes home, I'll pay you." In doing so, I noticed there was a car, it was a '31 Nash in front of the house, new tires, and I asked him whose it was. He said it was his, it was given to him by his sister in law. He said he put new tires on it. I asked if I could borrow it, I had my license. ... He said, "Sure you can, you can tonight." So I did borrow his car, but I wanted to pick up somebody, take him for a ride, chip in for gas, and bring the car with gas so I may borrow it again. In doing so I picked up three of my fellows, good friends of mine, and we were riding it along. I'm up at Bergen Boulevard in Fairview, there's a highway, newly made highway in Fairview. So, we were riding along and a new Ford goes by me and as we're talking, passed me up. We had the roof down in that Ford convertible and one of the fellows in the back [says] "You got to pass him." ... In doing so we had race. I'm racing at seventy miles an hour, I pulled out the choke, and pushed it in again, and on the avenue side, the left side, a truck is coming on, and it was only a two lane highway. I passed him up all right, but as I passed him up, I turned so sharp--I wasn't a very good driver--and it hit the hydrant and the water came up in the air. ... I turned over five times. The first time I turned over the roof came completely off, and the two fellows on the opposite side of me in the back went flying through the roof and landed on the highway. ... On the fifth turn I turned over, both doors opened on the left side on to the sidewalk and my head scraped the sidewalk. ... Two ladies were on a porch, they were talking, they were crocheting, they both fainted when they see me. The engine started burning. ... My feet were crossed up and my hair was over in front of my eyes and scraping the sidewalk. ... I couldn't get out. ... My friend get out in the back, he was a very nice guy, very good friend, he hardly ever cursed, he was just saying, "Son of a gun, dope, you shouldn't have done it," but he's the one that told me, encouraged me [to]. So, I get out of the car, the motor is burning, I can see it's on fire, I'm looking at it, and ... I get all pains on me and I notice that people come over, thousands of people came over watching it burn, both sides of the street. A young officer that come over to me, he said, ... "Were you driving the car?" I said, "Yes, I was." ... He said, "Where's your license?" As it was, I had no wallet, I had it in my back pocket, so I put it on top of the sun visor and when the roof come off, everything blew [away]. So, he said, "Who owns the car?" ... His name is Sam Haffron, but I didn't know it was that, we just called him "Sam the Jew." ... So I said, "It was Sam the Jewish guy." "What are you kidding me, you stole the car, kid?" I said, "No, no," I said, "the license blew up." He wouldn't believe me. I said, "Look, ... I'm in pain." ... They brought me across the street to a doctor's office, waiting for an ambulance ... to come. ... When [it] came me and Frank, he was a friend of mine, and we went into [the doctor's] office, and he put medicine on his back and he's screaming and pebbles are in his back. ... The other two, I found out later on they landed on their rear end, had all pebbles, their pants ripped, and the lady sewed them up. So, I thought they were dead, I was afraid. ... I was so happy that they survived. ... They brought me in the hospital on a stretcher to get me down. [They asked], "Is

he dead?" I said "Oh, no, I'm not dead." ... They brought me to ... Englewood Hospital. In doing so they x-rayed me, they put me in a room, and they were working on me. I'm in a private room now, and one of my friends found out that I had an accident, he came over to see me. As he opened the door, I asked him how he got in, he said he borrowed his uncle's car. Well, I ran out of the hospital, I get dressed, and went home. He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "My father can't pay for this hospital!" So, I ran home. To my amazement when I got home in front of my house, the stairwell was full of people, oh my God, people in front of my house, and I get in the kitchen and the reporters are there asking me questions. ... I had lied, I told them that I got a blow out. ... I lived on the second floor, and here was that guy Sam the Jew in the middle steps, with crowded people on the steps, saying, "Don't believe that kid, I had new tires on that car," and I said, "No, no," I denied everything. ... I had to pay for that car so that's why I joined the CCC again, second time. I was up in Branchville, New Jersey and we would chop trees down for six months. ... The wood was so beautiful, transplanting trees. Then, I was a truck driver there with a dump truck and the rack truck. ... I was there six months and I come home, I come home because my sister is getting married, I could have gotten out to Colorado, Montana. ... I enjoyed it, but I came home again. A lot was going on, they paid for the rent of my mother. I think rent was in the neighborhood of thirty-five dollars. ... I was discharged after that. ... My mother saved seventy-five dollars for the car. ... I said, "Sam, can I talk to you?" He said to me, "Keep away from me, you little guinea, keep away from me," and he's cursing me out. ... I was mad, I get up, I said, "Look, I have seventy-five bucks I was going to give to you, now you're getting nothing now." My sister was getting married, I had nothing to buy a suit. ... [laughter] It wasn't far from that when, it was on a Sunday morning, we had our dinner on a Sunday. It was a beautiful day, it was ... December 7th, 1941, we had the radio going, and when President Roosevelt announced that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor, we were so afraid, everything was quiet upstairs ... and the family downstairs too. The windows were open, and I could look out and not a sound on the street. It was as if someone had killed everybody, ... we were so worried. I knew I would have to go into the service. ... I was deferred twice, as the main support of the family. My father was sick, he couldn't work anymore, he used to work with Works Progress Administration, WPA, and so I was deferred twice. The third time they said you have to go in. So, I tried in the Marines, they wouldn't take me, my teeth weren't up to par, and the Navy wouldn't take me either, but I was drafted into the Army. ... I was inducted in the Army August 22nd, 1942.

SH: You have the tattoo to prove it.

JM: I have a tattoo on my right arm because we were down at Camp Gordon, Georgia. We had our basic training. ... I went out, we had to have a mark of identification because they didn't expect around ten percent of the Army to come out alive. ... Incidentally, that tattoo only cost three dollars, [laughter] shape of a heart, and on it says "Mother." I didn't have a girlfriend, I had a lot of girls but no steady girlfriend, I couldn't afford a pack of cigarettes. ... During the basic training we trained infantry training, infiltration course, guns, and everything, but then they said, "You'll become semi-mobile." They said they were going to make mechanics, so instead [we were] studying how many bones in the human being--two hundred and eight. I felt like a doctor, twenty-two bones, head bones, fourteen head bones and eight facial, something like that. Then, I became a company aid man, ... run the first aid, and litter-bearer, which we did which came in handy in combat. ... I became a truck driver later on, but we had a very heavy infiltration

course, oh my God, we had very heavy training. We went on twenty mile hikes a day, thirty mile hikes with a double horse row ... on the back ... on Tobacco Road, original Tobacco Road in Augusta, Georgia and you would see how fellows would faint. They couldn't take it, and I made sure I would come home. ... I walked the last five miles on my arches. ... I didn't want to drop out, I had to prove to myself that I could make it. ... We had to go on a hike ... and I got back into the barracks, one of the last round of guys, [I had] two big blisters, one on each foot, the size of an Easter egg. ... They patched it on, I felt so comfortable afterwards. ... We had basic training ... and we can get a furlough going home. One of my friends, Calvin, was getting married and I was going to be an usher in his wedding. ... When I came back from the wedding I was driving a jeep for headquarters. ... I was driving the jeep for headquarters before I went home on my vacation, exactly right. Then, when I come home I went to the county school to become a mechanic and I did. Out of forty men I was the second highest, "98.2" average, knowing about ... first and second echelon maintenance. ... Once you go to school, you have to train to become a technician. [I was] hoping I'd become a corporal which had never ever happened to me. ... After my furlough, after I come home, they had given me a two-and-a-half ton truck to drive [and] someone else was driving the jeep at headquarters. ... I was on a detail that had to go out to town. ... They gave me the trip ticket. When I came back I stopped at the post exchange, which everybody did. ... I went to get a pack of cigarettes and doing so the truck was gone, they stole it on me. I had to walk five miles or more back to the company and tell them what happened. They were furious and mad and made me sign a statement of charges to pay three thousand dollars for that. How in the world could I ever pay that? ... It was around three days they found the truck out in the field, and only gas was taken out of it. Some civilian or an Army fellow probably saw the trips. ... They said, "You left the truck unattended." ... Army vehicles had no keys in it. ... I had my mechanic ... certification. ... They never did give me that, and I was really mad about that. ... It even happened in combat one time. I was coming home through "Buzz Bomb Alley," that's Liege, Belgium. ... Germans were flying the buzz bombs flying over, and when they were out of gas, they just come down and blow up. ... Every time they arrive, you would hear that buzz, you would see it. It looked like as big as a car, and the fire coming out of the back, and you hear the noise, you would see it. Once you hear no more noise, I would jump and hit the ground because you don't know where the buzz bombs would come down there, and take cover. ... Doing so, going through Liege, I happen to be coming home on detail, I had dysentery. I had to go to the bathroom, ... so I had to run to the nearest woods ... to relieve myself. Coming back there was an MP or security guard, Military Police, checking out the thing. [I said], "No that's my truck." "Well, you left that truck unattended." I said "I had to, ... it was necessary." I told him, so he didn't care, then I cursed him out. I said, "I just came from the front ... to supply." ... I never ever got my corporal's rating, until at the end, I'll tell you about that in a little while.

SH: Let us go back to Augusta, Georgia.

JM: Augusta, Georgia, yes. We had about ... a year-and-a-half [there]. ... We had maneuvers in Tennessee as well, for three months, and doing the maneuvers, if you didn't dig your foxhole deep enough, you get crushed by a tank [or] a half-track. ... We had a lot of casualties. ... We were stationed in Shelbyville, Tennessee, and have people come from Massachusetts to see their loved ones who were in the hospital. ... Then, while we were on maneuvers, ... they sent me on a detail to get supplies, and I was captured by the Red Army. You were the Blue Army or the

Red Army. We were captured by the Red Army and for a day they kept me and it was really rough treatment they gave you, real rough treatment, that's what you would expect if you were in combat. ... It was bad, I couldn't wait to get back. They called a truce on a Sunday, and ... I drove back. I had two officers in my truck and six guys, we were getting some supplies for ... officers. So, that was in maneuvers in Tennessee. ... While we were on maneuvers I had two fellows, good buddies of mine, twins, Tony Bonanno and Joe Bonanno. Tony Bonanno was in my outfit. ... His brother was in the Air Corps, they were twins, and at that time they never kept anybody together because of the Sullivan brothers. We had five sailors in one battleship, and the ship went down and ... they were killed and they didn't want that to happen again. [Editor's Note: The Sullivan brothers were killed on November 13, 1942 when the cruiser USS *Juneau* was sunk by the Japanese torpedo.] ... You could send for one if you want to, which he did, so Joey came over. He became a very close buddy of mine, Joe Bonanno. After the war too, he also bought a used Army vehicle, a truck, and he started hauling scrap iron for the brokers of the foundry, and he made a successful business. He had around eight or ten trucks. I became his best man when he got married and he was an usher at my wedding when I got married. His brother Tony, I was his best man too later on, but while we were in service this here one time when we were in Tennessee, in a pup tent. That pup tent, every soldier has a half of a tent, and you put them together, you make a pup tent. We woke up in the morning in Tennessee, and he looked all disfigured to me, I said, "What happened to you, Joe, you look bad?" ... I woke up [with an] ear ache, oh my ear was hurting. ... [He said], "You know what, I'm going to go to Dr. Schwartz." ... "My ear hurts me." I said, "I'll come too." ... We went into the tent, and Captain Schwartz was there, he looked at Joe, "Hey, what happened? Come over here." He looked at him, "What's that in your field jacket?" He had a little baby rabbit, he got rabbit fever, and ... that's what was wrong with him. He asked me, "What happened to you, Mauro?" "My ear is hurting me," I told him. He put me on a chair, and looked at it. Looking at me as he's walking around, he put drops in my ear, my left ear. Oh my God when he put drops in my ear I jumped and grabbed him by the wrist and I cursed him up and down, he's running around the tent. He said, "I'm going to have you court-martialed!" ... I was really mad, and it stopped, all at once it stopped. I said, "Captain Schwartz, it stopped, it stopped." He's really cursing. [laughter] ... "Get in that chair again," he looked at me, he said, "Oh my God, how did you ever get in the Army, you have a perforated eardrum." I said, "Oh, my God." ... Since then, I don't know whatever happened, ... but I never got an earache again in my life, that's the honest truth. [laughter] ...

SH: Let us finish talking about your training in the United States. What was Fairview like when you came home on furlough?

JM: Oh, it was wonderful to see my parents when I come on furlough. ... I had a '32 Oldsmobile. ... My brother Al, ... when I was in the service, he used the car and he was in the eleventh grade. He quit high school, he joined the Navy and became a chief petty officer ... in the USS *Foster*, a destroyer escort. ... We were happy, more money was coming into the family. Another sister of mine had quit high school too, and she went work close by in a dress factory. Another one had gotten a job at Bendix, Army work. I don't know if she was a riveter [or] whatever she was doing up there. ...

SH: Had your father recovered from being ill?

JM: No, he was still sick. No, he couldn't make it. In fact, when I came home, he died at the age of sixty-five. It was the first year I got married. ... Elaine was born, she was only about three months old when he died. It was hard. When I came out of the service, I got the job at Ford Motor Company. ...

SH: I want to ask about your family. You talked about your brother Al. Are you the oldest in your family?

JM: No, my sister Josephine [is the oldest]. That's when I was in the CCC. I came home to see her get married. It was on my niece's birthday, she was two years old, Millie. ... They came down to see me off in Edgewater, and I forgot what school it was in Edgewater, where they had two busses taking us out to Newark. ... I always played the harmonica, I love music, we never could afford a piano and an instrument, but when I was shining shoes as a kid a harmonica costs twenty-five cents, a Marine Band [brand]. I knew how to play it, I still could play it real good, and she told my mother, "Play the harmonica when you're gone Joe, please play *You are my Sunshine*," and it was sad, I remember that. ... I did that, and I went away, I went into the service.

SH: When you finished your training then in Augusta, Georgia, where did they send you next?

JM: ... After Georgia, we were shipped ... to Camp Kilmer. ... We had a four hour pass. ... We were going overseas, and [they said] don't tell anybody. So, being that I lived close by, around sixty miles from Camp Kilmer, Tony Bonanno, ... one of his brothers, John, came down, picked us up. ... He lived in Bloomfield, and I got a ride to Fairview. ... They come up, and they were having supper at the table--my sister Josie and my brother-in-law Nick was up there too--and I got home in time for supper. "Joe is here!" They were so surprised and happy that I was there. ... I told my sister Josie, I give her my last will and testament, I had to give her that, and said, "I'm going overseas, keep your mouth shut, don't say a word please." I said, "I'm going to go, don't say a word to nobody, just say I came home for one day for a couple of hours or so." I had supper with them and then had to rush right back. We went back to Camp Kilmer. ... The trucks took us to Hoboken, got on a ferry boat to go across. ... We only crossed on the ferry boat, and the ship we were going on, the *Aquitania*, the sister ship of the *Mauritania* and we were last with the medics, going up there. Well, my God, we're not even on that ship, we took off right away, in about several hours we took off, as we're going outside the Hudson River, we were addressed over the loudspeaker, ... "Secure everything." As it were, we were four high in bunks, ... everything is strapped on to us. We were being chased by a sub right out of New York Harbor, and the big ship was zigzagging back and forth and back and forth. I put on the "Mae West," it was a life preserver--they called it a Mae West--on. Me and my friend, we went up to see. The waves were so high, so black, and oh God, I thought we're never going to make it. ... Then, the second day we were on the boat, and we had all jungle warfare training when we were in Augusta, Georgia. ... We were going to the Pacific, but as we were going across the second day, they said, "Attention, attention, we are headed for Great Britain." Oh, then we jumped with joy, we were so happy we were going. [laughter] We had to change from khaki to our ODs, and we were so happy. So, it took us four days to go across. ... Instead of landing in England, we landed in Scotland, and I don't know why, the ferry boats looked like tugboats, so small, and

everything was LTD, Lloyds of London. ... The houses were small, with thatched roofs on. The people seemed short and fat. ... The trains were narrower than our trains, everything was different. They put us on trains with blackout curtains. Everything was blacked out, ... we had to get used to it. Then, the trains went to Bristol, and then they put us on trucks ... thirty miles outside of Bristol [to] a town called Wotton-under-Edge up in the mountain, which was a beautiful little town, the people are so wonderful. We were told, "Don't eat the people out of house and home, they haven't any food for themselves." ... We did that for a year, getting everything ready. They put us in Quonset huts, that's what they use, it was better than metal. ... I was in the motor pool [which] consisted of twenty to twenty-five men. ... It's almost like a platoon, and we were separate from the nurses and the officers, but we were billeted, ... we lived in separate homes. From there, after three or four months, they put us in a hotel. It was called the Swan's Inn. It was an old rinky-dink place. ... It just had rooms, and ... we lived in double bed beds made of wood and hay in the mattress. ... We got used to that though, and we would walk down the street separately, where our mess hall would be. Our mess hall was right alongside of where the fellow ... William Pitt, his little [marker] was out there on the sidewalk, it said, "Here's where William Pitt was born." [There was] a little history in everything ... in England. When I was in England, I was lucky enough to win four hundred dollars in a crap game. ... I was a rough kid growing up, but I never brought it home, my sisters and brother, and I never cursed at home. I had a very good mother, she appreciates everything, she always said, "We'll manage, we will manage, we will get by." She never ever once said, we never said, "We don't like this ma, we don't like this." Whatever it was we ate, we were good, but I never cursed. So, when I win the four hundred dollars, I sent some money home to my sisters, which they were very happy. ... My furlough come over in England again, too, which I went with Tony Bonanno. I went on furlough to London to my amazement. Meanwhile, England was getting hit with all the V-2 rockets they had from Germany, but they were so used to it. ... The girls were like our CCC fellows ... they'd chop trees down, but they loved the Americans. In fact, ... speaking to the girls ... I think I'm speaking to a school teacher. "Yes, Joseph I shan't do that," and said, "We'd love to hear you talk, because ... Yanks are born with the gift of the gab." [laughter] I learned how to be an Englishman, they learned how to be a G.I., Americans. They say, "I'll see you in a fortnight," or two weeks. ... I went to London on this ... furlough. We got on the train, and I could see people, two girls with all fur coats on, they were celebrities, and they were half drunk and ... the English fellows had flasks in their pocket, and they would say, "Down with Churchill, Stalin is my name," and Tony ... is teasing them on. I said, "Tony, keep it quiet before you get in a fight." ... We got out right in London, ... we asked where the entertainment was. "Yes, go right over there, ... here's where the Big Ben is, the big clock." ... I went to Westminster Abbey, and I was walking around in there and seeing on the floor, "Here is where John Longfellow," he was in there, and on the floor, "Here lived John Smith." He was 125 years old. I said, "Oh, my God, 125 years old, that guy is lucky." ... When I went to Tennessee one time, me and Tony Pierro, we had to get logs for the motor pool. ... In doing so, we see an old guy. I asked for a drink of water out of the well. ... That water stunk like hell. ... I had my shirt off, and I was flat-chested. ... An old, old man, he said, "You two fellows are flat-chested, you're going to live ... a long, long life, you're going to really have a long life." That was true. Now, I'm going to be 92 in July, and normally 99% will die, so that old guy was right. [laughter] Going back ... to London, now. I asked the guy, "Where is the nicest restaurant?" The guy said, "Well, you take a cab and you go over there, there's a big restaurant." ... There's a man with a horse and wagon, he was a taxi. Me and Tony, we got on a horse and

wagon, and he takes us there to a restaurant. I had two hundred bucks on me, the other two hundred I sent home. ... We ate. My God, now Tony was a corporal and I was a PFC then, and we were sitting like two generals. ... They gave us music and dance. ... We ate. We were around three hours there, I think the bill was ... thirty dollars in all. I was surprised, ... I gave them like a ... ten shilling note, that's two bucks, and they bowed ... and thanked me. ... I wanted to ask where the entertainment was. ... They said, "The (Covelyn Ballroom?) go there." The (Covelyn Ballroom?) was one of the biggest ballrooms in England, oh my God I went in there and it's so huge, it had in the center of the hall, there was a rotating platform with a band. ... A fifteen piece band was on there playing music. As they played three or four sets, it would revolve, and another band would come on, and continuous dancing and I'm jitterbugging and dancing. ... We were having a ball, and we danced with them girls jitterbugging, I love the jitterbug, then you'd double, ... I loved all that. I was a good dancer, I used to dance with my sisters. In fact, my little niece, Millie, when she was small when I come home from the service ... I taught her how to dance. [She would] step on my shoes. She became a Rockette, a Radio City Rockette. [laughter] ...

SH: Millie owes it all to you.

JM: So, things happen like that.

SH: The English treated you well while you were in England?

JM: Oh, yes, they were a wonderful people. I enjoyed myself, we were drinking ... in the pubs. We beat them at their own game of darts. They would carry their own flights of darts in their chest like you carry a deck of cards, and [say], "Ay mate, a game of darts?" They said they pitched from my ears. I said, "I don't care, I pitch from my nose." So, we played them, and they have their flights, and we beat them, and sometimes they see us come in, "Oh, the bloody yank," and they walk away. I said, "Come back here, give the house a drink." [Laughter] It's only ten cents, a big beer of Guinness stout, we love that drink. In fact, we always ran out. You know what they would have, like we have peanuts on a bar, pickled onions they would have, and I loved those pickled onions, they were really good, and fish and chips, oh my God, fish and chips, I would eat them as if there was no tomorrow.

SH: Did you eat pickled eggs?

JM: Yes, they do have them too, but I wanted the onions. Oh, they were good, pickled onions, oh I loved them. The girls would drink a Shandy, a Shandy is half beer and half lemonade. ... They had one or two, that's what they would drink. It was like a hillbilly town, seventy miles away from Bristol. Now in London, we went dancing, we had a lot of fun in London. I really, really enjoyed myself. ... We were all getting ready for the invasion. We were there about a year getting all the equipment ready, we had trucks, we had vehicles. ... When June 6th came, we were ready, everything was ready, packed up and all, and all sirens went off, whistles blowing, "the invasion, the invasion," and on the paper had headlines ... "All-out effort." I remember that clearly, it was, "All-out effort," that's June 6th. We got in our trucks and convoy and while in England I had to see a girl that I liked, Gladys. ... Her mother ran a tailor shop, and we would kid her, ... "You'd better have my uniform ready." ... They liked the way we talk, and

we roughed them up, I guess. I remember Gladys running down. ... My truck had passed by, we were going down to Southampton and she gave me a letter, she promised she would write to my sister, and she did. She was a very good girl. I couldn't afford to get serious with anybody. First of all I was a soldier, I might get killed. ... I had to take out insurance and if I get killed they would bring me home. ... We went down to Southampton, we got on the ship, and ... we were going across the English Channel.

SH: What unit were you assigned to?

JM: Oh, yes, an evacuation hospital. ... All the fellows, ... they work in pre-op, in wards, where they became corporals and sergeants. Before you get operated on, like Tony Bonanno, he would shave the person, pre-op I think he was. ... They worked with the officers and nurses. In fact, I have a list here. I wrote up here all the officers and nurses, at the address they gave us when we got discharged. Everybody in the outfit I have. ... Maybe I will give it to you later.

SH: What was the unit designation?

JM: 45th Evacuation Hospital, 45th Field Hospital, yes. So, now being in combat, ... when we hit the beach in Normandy, the English Channel was so rough you couldn't see the boat in front of you. We were supposed to be in a convoy, but we got there in Omaha Beach, I don't know if it was the tenth day, fourth day, [but] it was in the invasion. See, the invasion took us twelve days or two weeks or something. I know we were in the invasion because we hit the beach there, and put us on an invasion barge, only two ships, two trucks, a quarter ton truck behind, would fit on the invasion barge. On the invasion barge, they would have young fellows, second lieutenants they made, kids from out of college--your age--and they were driving the invasion barges. They put me on, ... not knowing that when the tailgate went down, it only had one chain because it hit a mine, and an officer was with me too, and the quarter-ton trailer had camouflage nets on my truck, and as we come down the rope ladder, you had to watch yourself. Many people got killed on the boats, swing into the ship. ... We trained for all that, ... and you get into your truck. ... They have the engineers walking into the water, telling the kids on the invasion barges how deep the water is, with their gun on the waist. ... You got in pretty close, and I didn't go in the water. ... As they camouflage the truck, and doing so I did in time when the planes come over. I had taken my field jacket off, ... put it on top of my helmet. ... One of our guys had an anti-aircraft gun, sent a barrage at them. ... Then all of a sudden there was fire from them. ... They went away. ... If you see that movie *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), the little hill going up, well I'm going up there, but it's so muddy and all that, I'm spinning with my wheels. I'm trying going on the grass and the infantry guy said, "Keep away from the hedgerows, they're mined, they're mined, keep away from the hedgerows." ... As I get on top of there, I saw a little sign big as this paper, it said, "45th." [laughter] ... I'm looking, ... went over there. ... "Don't turn left," [the sign] said, "turn left you get killed, the Krauts are there." So, I turned right, ... went in a little ways and to my amazement, I'm looking and I see my first sergeant [and] around six guys holding hands, walking one step at a time. ... The ward tent is one hundred feet long. We had a four hundred bed hospital, and there were a lot of nurses and officers ... which I didn't know too well. I was always in the motor pool going for supplies, because that was my job. ... I see them holding hands walking like that, and I was wondering [why]. ... One guy says, "Over here, pull your truck. ... Take it here, leave it here." ... The mine detectors, I guess they got

wiped out. ... We called these guys the "vacuum cleaners." We always had a name for something. [laughter] They got wiped out, so the guys had to walk the field themselves. They had to get the hospital up because you have wounded all over the place. ... They put up the hospital there. ... They put me on guard duty, I had to guard our equipment not only from the Germans, from the civilians too. People are so desperate they'd rob you, ... they'd kill you. You got to watch out, your eyes got to be open at all times. Everybody's life depends upon one another. ... I'm up there next day, I'm as hungry as could be, working guard duty and working in the fields, and I see the dandelions there. I pick them up and take the yellow flower off, get a canteen of water, I found something to eat. ... "Hey, Joe Mauro's eating grass!" "Eating grass your rear-end!" I said "Here." I had around eight guys eating grass [with me]. ... [laughter] That was really something. The third day, I think we were in (Lacombe?), Saint-Laurent, I forgot, third or fourth day, Richie ... found this bicycle that I rode not far from where we were, and Rich got so hungry, and I could see a farmhouse. There's a little guy with a big brown thing, I think he had a black beret on his head or something. I said "Rich, call the guy over, give him the bike, maybe he'll give us some bread." So, in our field jacket, they gave us invasion money and the little book how to speak French. ... Being Italian, he said I could speak pretty good French, but it wasn't so. So, I'm looking, but I got a few words, I said "*Monsieur*" and I called the guy. ... I said, "Here's a bicycle." ... He thanked me so much. ... "Do you have any bread?" ... He ran back to the house and came out with a piece of ... bread and he had a green bottle. ... He says, "Drink, drink." ... Richie got it. He's shorter than me, Richie, and he took it [and said], "Shoot the guy, shoot the guy." ... It's a real strong drink. ... I brought it back to the guys, and this guy in my outfit, he's an electrician, and ... a big rough guy from Massachusetts. "What have you got kid? ... Well, good stuff." We were using that cigarette lighter [and used it] to light the food, blue flame. [laughter] We did. That's where I had a PX lighter, fifty cents. We all smoked then, and we used that. ... The turning point of the war is when we took Saint-Lo, that was it. It was on July 27th, my birthday I remember, and I'm hiding behind sandbags under a tree in my steel helmet, because as you're shooting up artillery shots at the planes, all that "ack-ack" [anti-aircraft artillery] that goes up, that's all metal, that comes down on your head, you get killed, you got to watch out. So, we're taking cover and I had a big mattress alongside the little wall we made. ... Them planes come over, two thousand planes, American planes, come over and bomb the hell out of St. Lo, bomb and dogfight, the English fighters, and Americans, and the Germans dogfight, as if you're watching a movie. ... Then we had the map, and we see over here is Lacombe, and over here is Paris. ... We said, "We're never going make it out of ... the same beach." ... A few days went by and we had to move, we head to Saint-Laurent. ... We thought Paris was declared open city which it was, we were so happy. ... We were around forty miles before Paris, something like that. ... Going through St. Lo, it was so bombed out, it was nothing but a lake. They had make a pontoon bridge ... and I'm going through ... I see like apartment houses, beautiful brick apartments--they were pillboxes, that thick. They would come, they would make believe they were apartment houses, they were pillboxes that the Germans used. ... Everything is flooded out, it's something that you would never believe until you happen to see that. Saint-Lo was really knocked down, and we come up there, I forgot where we were, around thirty miles out of Paris. Paris was declared an open city, and as we went through Paris, I remember I'm in a convoy, ... I got my top rolled up, ... twenty guys in the truck, and I went right through the Arc de Triomphe right through there, and [they had] all the people by the thousands on the side of the roads. ... On my truck I had "Cliffside Flash." I lived in Fairview, but I put Cliffside Park on it because people didn't know where Fairview was at. [laughter] They

will remember Cliffside, because Palisades Amusement Park used to be in Cliffside. If you ever recall ... it was a big amusement park, one of the best, biggest parks in the country. You had the biggest swimming salt water swimming pool in the world. ... Cliffside Park is only two miles from the ... George Washington Bridge, and I'm right next to that. I'm only four miles from the bridge, Fairview. So, I had "Cliffside Flash" on the truck, and I ran by, "*Viva Cliffside Flash*." ... Everything is "*Viva*." So, with that, we're slowing down and I see coming over to me, girls, ... so beautiful, come over. ... They gave me a helmet full of eggs, I got eggs in my helmet, ... cognac, cognac. ... I never drank it in my life. ... A piece of pizza was fifty cents and the beer was fifty cents a pitcher and for a dollar we had a lot of fun. [laughter] Well, I learned how to drink cognac. ... As we're riding through a little guy comes up to me, an English guy, about five feet tall, ... "Listen here you bloody Yankee, take your lorry and park it under the Eiffel Tower." ... We parked it right under the Eiffel Tower. ... Now, they made a big park out of it now. I was there around twelve years ago, it's not like it was then, I parked under the Eiffel Tower. ... You take the rotor out of the distributor, put it in your pocket so nobody would ride it because Army trucks had no keys, they [would] rob it. ... I lost mine on the garrison, my truck. So, I took the rotor out put it in my pocket. ... I looked sharp. I had the Clark Gable mustache and I was a good dancer. By that time, we get to Paris, I let it grow, and we all got hundreds of haircuts. I got ... a complete bald, another guy got a "V for Victory" haircut. ... I shaved everything, the company commander even hollered at me one time. ... I had to shave everything, my mustache and all. You got a four hour pass. [laughter] I had my invasion pay, I wanted to buy perfume and stuff for my sisters, and I sent it home. ...

SH: After you landed in Normandy, how often would you have to set up the field hospital before you got to Paris?

JM: I wouldn't know. ... I have a book. ... A sergeant that became a warrant officer in our outfit, (Lesmond?) his name is, ... he wrote a whole book about the 45th Evacuation Hospital. He gave every detail, every move they made, everything they did, ... the patients that we had, everything. The book is here some place. ... I have a copy and he gave us the address of every enlisted man and officer in our outfit. ...

SH: How many times did you set up your hospital tent before you got to Paris?

JM: Oh, yes, in combat we had big war tents, you know, we had that, sure. My job was going out for supplies [for] different outfits. ... We became semi-mobile. Sometimes they would send me out during combat, "Move the 41st Field Hospital" [or] "go to headquarters, needs some vehicles," which happened. I'm going to tell you about that in a short while.

SH: After Paris, where did they send you?

JM: Oh, after Paris, ... we rode all the way to Liege [Belgium].

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Tell us about your experience in London at the movie theater.

JM: Yes, yes. I remember in England, one of my fellows and I went to go and see a movie. ... *Springtime in the Rockies* was playing in the cinema, and ... I heard about it, I haven't seen it. So, me and Tony went in there and sit down. While we're watching the movie, the lights come on, and it said, "We are now being heavily bombed, anyone who wishes to leave the cinema to go to the underground subway station ... we will give you ... fifteen minutes." So, Tony said, "Let's go out Joe." "Sit down here, sit down, you're a soldier, sit down." "What are you crazy, Joe?" ... "No." [laughter] Meanwhile, I hear, "boom, boom, boom." I was afraid myself, I wouldn't admit it. So, sure as God made green apples it was around half an hour later they all come back in again. [When] the movie was over, we went outside. ... Right alongside the buildings are down, the firemen are there, good Lord they missed us. ... It was a good thing I didn't run out, I could have been killed, but that's the scary thing. We got out to see that. I was amazed, yes. ...

SH: When they would set up the hospital, did you have a specific job? Or were you always going out and getting supplies?

JM: My job was always going out and getting supplies. It's something like what's going on in Iraq today. ... Anybody that goes out with a vehicle they pick up any equipment, you send out a detail to do so. Coming back in the same road, they would have that mined, knowing you'd come back. ... In combat, there is nothing worse than to see people starve. I've seen civilians with dirty sores on their faces, the kids [with] dogs pulling the wagons, you know, priest and nuns with ragged clothes looking for a ride or something. Anyway, it was so heart breaking. ... It was very bad, and the cold and starving. ... It was hard for me, that's why I get one hundred percent disability. I had severe frostbite, my arms, my legs, my back, ... and that's why I walk with a cane now.

SH: Did you drive any of the ambulances that brought soldiers to the hospital?

JM: No, ... when you're in combat, you have the infantry, then you have company aid men with them, as a platoon. We were trained for that, I had a lot of that too. When we hit the beach we had to have a right arm band with a Red Cross on, but we had to take that off because later it was a spot for them to shoot at. We took it off.

SH: Oh, really?

JM: Yes, we had to. ... Then, I was never with them anymore, ... as if I was separate living in our own pup tents, ... or anywhere in a hole, in a foxhole. I had the bedroll, and ... half of my tent, shelter half, I would put two blankets, and ... in the front, that was my bed. ... I lived in the truck, in the foxhole, in a bombed-out house, and you had to rough it up. I was not afraid anymore, you would almost smell your enemy, you know, when you're in fear. You became like an animal, and they were very hungry, with all the outfits you went to, you had to go to quartermaster, engineers, the place where you get your sheets. Later on, we took over buildings. As we came through Paris, we went to Liege, Belgium. Liege is like a Pittsburg area, all coal and stuff, and factories, and as we ran through, there's another little town called Verviers about ten miles outside of Liege, Verviers, and a big open field, a farmer pulled that truck so you don't get stuck in mud. [We] put the tents up there, and ... the people come out, all the civilians kiss

my feet and my arms, my hands. They thanked us. ... It was a funny feeling. ... Then, they have a big sign ... that went across the main highway. ... It said, "We hang our washing on the Siegfried Line." [laughter] I remember that. While we were in this field, Archbishop [Francis] Spellman came over, gave us our last rites. Yes, he came down, he gave us our last rites, but winter was coming on, and we had moved up to a town called Eupen, E-U-P-E-N, I think that's Alsace-Lorraine on the borderline of Germany and Belgium. ... They took over a building, a big school house. ... I want to show you something. [Editor's Note: Mr. Mauro is showing the interviewers pictures.] Here's the building, ... and the entrance. ... [We] took over a high school. We got rid of all the stuff out of the high school.

SH: That is a large beautiful brick building.

JM: Yes, it was, and we rode in the back entrance to our hospital at Eupen. Now, I'll tell you about this. ... We moved over here in Eupen, they bombed this, I had a bomb come right here and back here where our trucks were all lined up. I was on guard duty, and I'm hiding under the axel of the wheel of the truck, and they didn't bomb the hospital. They dropped a pineapple right here, yes, bombed parts of the hospital, and here were the tents alongside of the hospital, right in here, between here, ... all the shrapnel in there.

SH: You have a picture of the shrapnel from the attack.

JM: ... When they were strafing us, it was at night time. They came, they put flares, they lit up ... the sky. So, you could see so bright, ... and that bomb didn't go off, that bomb came by the cobblestone street. Then, right next to it, right where the hospital ... tent was, on the ground, hiding under the truck [I hid]. ... I didn't get hit, but a lot of guys got hit. ... We lost quite a few guys [who] were killed, and some would cash in.

SH: According to the caption, the photograph is of "The tent beside the hospital in Eupen, after the bombing and strafing the morning of December 18th, 1944. Our movie house."

JM: ... We used it as a movie house. They used it ... after they did autopsies. No matter who died in the hospital, they have an autopsy on the person. One time, I was over there in the motor pool, he said, "Hey, Joe Mauro, Joe Mauro," my friend. He had a dead German, he's making him talk, because your face becomes like a rubber mask, and many times from this here hospital, ... all the wounded come in, and they cut off the blankets on their feet, their arms and the blankets on there, and throw them across the room in the trailer. [They said], "Say Mauro, get rid of that trailer, please get rid of the stuff." ... I would ride, I found a place in Belgium in the back, and the ladies would know when I go there, and they come down and fight. They would pull each other's hair, fighting for the bloody clothes. ... They make clothes for the kids, you know. People were starving, all of Europe was starving. One time in doing so, I got stuck in the mud, my trailer. ... I take my winch out in the front of my truck, and there were three trains over there, not engines, boxcars empty, and I wanted to put myself out. ... I put the winch out-- instead of me pulling myself up the truck is turning over.

SH: Oh, no.

JM: ... The firemen, they ran over, they threw logs, branches under the wheels of the train to stop me. I thanked them so much, I even gave them my cigarettes. I said, "Thank you very much." Oh, my God. All through Europe, ... we always had chewing gum. You get your K-rations, which you use a lot all the time, and in this K-ration box you get a little package of four cigarettes and in there too is a little packet of gum. ... I would save the gum, I'd get the gum from everybody. I always was the kind of guy to give everybody gum. ... In fact, when I got to Germany--I speak better German than Italian--I became a real "sauer" kraut. [laughter] ... I played rough sometimes. I was mean, I fired a couple of rounds to scare the heck out of them, they'd run away from me. Well, you had to be boss. I'm safer in Germany than I was in ... France and Belgium, I'll tell you that. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: You were talking about how the casualties started to add up.

JM: Oh, yes. From then, after we got bombed, we had to retreat. It was winter time, we got to go back and we went overnight to ... some place in Belgium, and it was around Christmas time. My God, and I was really sad, I got really sad and cold. ... I didn't think we were going to make it, and I'd rather be home in New Year's Eve, and me and my friends. Oh, yes, Joey Bonanno, as I told you there's two Bonanno brothers, I was trapped, I'll tell you about that after. We went out, we found a little place with no lights, it was a little pub and the guy was selling, we got in, they opened the door, we got drunk, and I'll never forget that. Then, we had to go back. We had to go back to the same place, where the hassle was there, back to Eupen again, we got to go back. ... They said, "The first eight vehicles are loaded, go down and salvage anything you can in Malmedy," because they massacred everybody. [Editor's Note: On December 17, 1944, the Germans massacred American prisoners of war near Malmedy, Belgium.] ... Six miles south, they captured and they killed everybody. They put a machinegun in the truck or they had them in the field, some guys escaped from the back and we had to go there to salvage any medical supplies. So, I was one of the eight guys going, the next to the last. In doing so, a guy by the name of Morado, he was a corporal. ... I said to myself [later], maybe that's why I never got a rating because I would have been probably in charge and I would have been killed. ... Going on this detail, that Morado is in charge, eight of us had to go. ... The 41st [Evacuation Hospital] ... was in a field in Malmedy, I had been there back and forth, getting supplies. ... We came through in the back way. ... We were ordered put the lights out, never in the history of my life all through the Army, I never even knew we had lights, we never used lights, in England no matter where it was black out. In England, you're riding on the opposite side of the road, but in France you ride on the right side like we do here now. So, I was a pretty good driver, but going on this convoy, on this detail, going through the back road, "Put your lights out." People were getting run over, getting killed, young kids and all. For around a mile or two you had a light, and then, "Shut them off." Up a little more, there's a big-time battle going on, I noticed my helmet, I had shrapnel on my helmet, the side of the canvas on my truck is going like this, "Broom." My field jacket, we were riding around, ... we were in the middle of a battle, and coming down this decline, going over the hill, I'm following. ... Four of us ... went to a field where trees were there. ... The other guys, I don't know what happened to them, but they were ahead, they had about four, or five, or six men ... loading the stuff on the truck, and they were gone, so there was only four of us left. ... Barney comes running at me to the end, I'm in the field, hiding behind

the trees, and the bullets are going "plunk" into the trees, and the ravine is behind me, they're going into the water. Barney said, "Joe, Joe!" I said, "What?" He said, ... "The captain over there with a machinegun, he wants me to help with the machinegun." I said, "You can't help him, ... our orders were to go to rear and get everything salvaged out of the field hospital." [He said], What are you going to do? I was afraid myself, I was really afraid, so he was running over to me, and I said, "Look, the only thing we have are orders to go, we can't stay and help the captain." Meanwhile, I'm looking, infantry men are flat on the floor, they're flying back and forth, they were with the infantry, and they had six up here like sick and they have a mine, and if they pull away, they pull the sick away, they mine the area too. So, the Germans go in, they get mined. I'm watching them, I knew there were mines, and I'm looking. ... I said, "We got to go." I said, "Get a ten yard interval between each vehicle, don't chicken out." I said "Ten yards," I said, "You got to make a break for it." Phil first, Tony Pierro, was next; I'm third, and Barney is fourth. "Don't forget, don't chicken out, throw the front wheel drive, and hit at a forty-five degree angle." ... The street was covered up with debris and branches, and ... when I gave the signal we left. As we left, all hell broke loose, oh my God, I'm cursing, all the curses and prayers at the same time. ... I'm cursing and praying. Grandmother was the only one I knew who died, and I remembered, I said, "Grandma, wait for me." ... Machine gun bullets coming at me, every fifth bullet is a tracer bullet, every fifth, I know that, ... and the eighty-eight, "vroom, vroom." The eighty-eights are so accurate, and, "boom," goes right in front of me, the truck, it hit him. It hit him here, and he went flying, and I'm riding, and Tony ... was in front of me. Two of our tanks are hiding on the broken down bridge, bombed out bridge, and everything was off on the road. ... I know the signals and we were right between two of the tanks the same way we went through the top. Meanwhile, artillery is coming in, I didn't care about the artillery, I see houses coming down, walls are coming down, and ladies are running out with their kids, with their legs, heads dangling. I was so afraid, and then when I got out, I banged up the truck. Meanwhile, I get out of the truck, I fell out of the truck on my rear end on the cobblestone street, and my right leg went into shock. I couldn't get up, and meanwhile, "Mauro, Mauro, back here." I said "I can't." Then, I seen this infantry guy [on] ... a full-blown truck, ... the racks are broken, and so I said okay, I tried to get up. I did get up, then, ran over to the truck to see what happened, and there's all blood all over the seat. The guy said ... the truck was missing. ... I got a hold of the captain, ... I said ... the guy's are still waiting for us to come up, and I had to bring them back home. He said, ... "Meet me in the motor pool," ... let him drive the truck, and I'll back him up, load his truck with supplies, and put them in front of me, and everybody comes home, which we did. We got back to the outfit; I had to sit down four days ... when I pulled in to the yard. ...

SH: After this, you returned to Eupen?

JM: I stayed there around ten to fifteen minutes to get my breath. I was so tired and sleepy, we got somebody comes out from headquarters and said, "The company commander wants to see you." The company commander is a colonel, and I had to go to report, "First Class Mauro reporting as ordered, sir." I told him, and he said, "My God, ... take the day off tomorrow, give him a break, no detail," and I did. Then, ... several days later, from there we drove over to Germany, we were running through Aachen. We went through Aachen, we had to drive over the Siegfried Line. They had engineers [that] had bulldozed it through, all the dirt over the Siegfried Line, big dragon-teeth, big concrete thing. ... I drove over the Siegfried Line. ... I remember seeing Cologne and Frankfurt on the way down. ... Then, as we're going several days later, I

had a detail, I'm driving the field hospital over to the Remagen Bridge. Now, the bridge is intact. ... The bridge is set up, the guy doesn't believe me. ... They had a generator with a radio going on, where the motor pool guys [were]. They say, "Mauro, Mauro," they're talking, ... I hear what they're saying. ... They're speaking grammatically. [laughter] So, next day I went up, they bombed the bridge. ... We had to cross over the pontoon bridges, ... like rowboats tied together, and put planks across them, that's a platoon bridge. We drive over that, drove over the Remagen Bridge, right from Bon, B-O-N, over to (Hamath?) on the other side, and then from there we traveled all through Germany. I was at Stuttgart, I was everywhere. ... They went to Camp Buchenwald too, those truck drivers. ... I went over there, oh my God, ... what a smell. [Editor's Note: The Buchenwald concentration camp the Germans constructed near Weimar, Germany in 1937. It was liberated by the Allies in April 1945, after tens of thousands of prisoners had been killed.] I had picked up dead soldiers, Germans, had them in my truck--one guy for a couple of days we couldn't find a cemetery to bury him. ... I said before, south of the infantry you have two company aid men with every platoon, and then from there you have a company aid station, battalion aid station. Then from there the battalion aid station, we were like that, they put up like a field hospital. They made us send a mobile field hospital. We were right up there with the front, all the time, artillery is over our head, they always shoot over my head in combat, all the time I'm in the Army during the war. ...

SH: You were talking about the smell of the concentration camp.

JM: Oh, yes, the smell is so horrible. It was upsetting, so help me God. "What the heck is that smell, good God what is that smell." So, I'm riding down a ... beautiful park, it was nice, ... down to see a place, it used to be an SS camp, and they made it a concentration camp. ... My God, the smell was horrible. I looked down there, they had an officer from headquarters with us and you had civilians down, to show the people. ... They didn't know, they didn't believe it. They had us bring them to show them. All those prisoners, they had like black and white stripe pajamas it looked like. ... Four high, bunks made of wood, with hay on it. ... They said, "Mauro, don't give them those cigarettes." ... They started eating the cigarettes. ... I said, "Don't eat them, don't eat them. ... The guys are going to die, don't give them ... cigarettes, they're eating them!" With that I looked around and I see the piles of human ashes, oh what a sight. Now, I have them all at home and my daughter has them a lot too and if you see that pamphlet, you'll going to see them in the back, I put them in there too. All the officers ... and nurses from my outfit took pictures. ... They gave everybody in the outfit [pictures]. I had a bunch of them, I brought them home, but in the back of them they had "not for publication." ... I have them all here. ... He said, "Mauro, see that empty house up there? You and Tony go up there." It was empty, all the furniture was put in the garage. ... It was the SS colonel's house, we were in the damn camp. I'm up there looking, my God, this room, the soundproof doors that were made of leather. ... I looked around, trying to rob everything I can. ... He had a little statue, "Heil Hitler," paper weight they put on there. I took that, and he had a stamp collection, which I took that. I would have sent it home anyway, saved it, which I did. My grandson, he lives out in California now, one time we'd bring him home I tried to get a trade, somebody wanted to give me five hundred dollars for it, I said the heck with you. ... It is worth five thousand, if not more. ... I just sent everything home. ... They even had the colonel's uniform up there in his closet, I took all his medals home, medals made of tin. ... He had a beautiful bedroom, ... painted ceilings and all that, oh my God, they're beautiful. We're down in the

basement, they had a basement, every house in Germany has ... potatoes. ... You would have coal, they had potatoes. There were two dead Germans on the side, moved them over to get the potatoes under there. [laughter] We had a little pot belly stove, one of the guys had. ... We ate the potatoes, we fried them. [laughter] It was very interesting I tell you that, very much. ...

SH: What were you told to do when you reached the concentration camp?

JM: Well, I don't know, we went there, ... they took all that stuff out of there, the truckloads of money and jewelry, I wish they would have sent me then. A lot of guys really got rich there, they belong to the 50/50 club.

Elaine Cigolini: Had those in the concentration camp been inoculated for diseases?

JM: Oh, yes, I didn't know that my outfit moved in now at Buchenwald. My outfit came in there, they took over. They "Lysol" [disinfect] everything down for tuberculosis, they inoculated everybody. ... It wasn't my detail to bring them to another hospital ... the ones that remained. ... My friend, he's got the tattoo machine, lives in Flemington, New Jersey. The machine that they tattooed them with, he took the machine. ... I'm lucky to be here alive, I'll tell you that. I'm lucky, when I rode through Malmedy with those trucks, the good Lord was with me. When I got out of the truck, I fell, I went into shock. I couldn't get up. ... About two months later, after Malmedy, could have been a month or two there. We were deep in Germany, I had to go back for supplies. One time I came out and had to go get something, and they gave me an assistant driver. ... In doing so, I'm on a highway driving, ... a lonely highway, [with] nobody around. I had this kid with me, the assistant driver, we're talking, all of a sudden I hear, "clang, clang, clang." I looked, my gas is all going out, and I stopped, there's an angle iron in the middle of the highway. ... There's a big hole in my gas tank this big, bigger than a watermelon. What am I going to do now? We were in no man's land. ... I always had a .45 on me. ... In basic training we had the M1s, but in combat, they gave us a small carbine. ... That angle iron, you ever seen the side of your bed where your spring hangs on, and that's an angle iron. ... They had welded that on the jeeps and the weapons' carriers and all that ... because the Germans, they put barbed wire from one tree to the other on the other road, and you can't see it, ... and GIs get their heads cut off. ... On top, it had like a V cut out. ... So, evidently, it wasn't welded right. It was one of our own irons ... that came off and ... it hit my universal, went through my gas tank. Now, I'm stuck. What the heck am I going to do? ... I looked in the back of my truck, there were two blankets I had, I got one, I folded it as small as I could. I pushed it up into the tank, I remember that, and I found a piece of wood or cardboard and I stuck it underneath the blanket. ... I got my belt off, I started holding on, I had the kid--good thing I had an assistant driver. ... The five gallon cans of gas, we had flaps on the trucks. ... On the side of the truck you have a rack that holds a shovel and a pick, and you had to brace yourself on that, and [we were] pouring the gas in there and ... I went around thirty miles, I made it. I pulled through an outfit, it wasn't the outfit I had to go to, but when you meet another outfit, it's like brothers, no matter you go, it's your home, any place you go. I pulled in, I saw the first sergeant. I said, "Where's the motor sergeant. Listen, I need a [gas] tank." In ten minutes, he got a new tank, he put it on me. Mission accomplished. Then, I made it.

SH: That was a very inventive way to repair your gas tank.

JM: ... I was lucky in that sense, I was really, really lucky. So many things happened to me, even later on coming home. I was in Stuttgart, ... we loaded a winery, and ... instead of having gas in them, we had five gallon cans of wine. [laughter] One time, ... I met two of my guys on the road, there were three of us, and it's a lonely town at night, we got drunk, and one guy had a little fire. Mankowski, he was only half a nut and he burnt the house down, and it was flaming up. ... I look on top of the hill, did you ever see a movie where all the Indians are on top of the hill looking down? All the Free French were up there, ... the underground. They come down there. One guy comes down, he said, "Who is in charge?" "Nobody." "Who made this fire? Get out." ... They would kill us, that kid could have been shot. That's one thing, I didn't get drunk anymore. [laughter] ... After the war is over, we're coming home, ... we found out that Germany is going to surrender. We were to wait there, and all the civilians are running, "Joseph, *ich habe angst*, I'm afraid, I'm afraid." They spoke in German. ... I said "What?" ... They're afraid of the Russians because the Russians are going to retaliate for what they did at Stalingrad. Because when the Germans went to Stalingrad they knocked the heck out of them and all the women had to come out with picks and shovels to fight. The women really saved Stalingrad, I'm trying to tell you something that I really know. They really fought and they never forgot that, the turning point of the war for the Russians. They came back, and they want the Russians to get revenge. Well, we had to stay there and they come in and do what they have to do, and we start coming home again, getting ready to go to the Pacific when the war ended.

SH: What was the reaction when you heard the Germans had surrendered?

JM: We were so happy, we knew it was going to happen, we were so happy, we knew ... any day. When it did happen, we were so relieved. The German people were more afraid of us than anything else. I wasn't afraid of Germany. The girls, they give you chewing gum and they would wash my cloths and stuff. I was safer, we were there around two months or so getting everything ready to come home. We found out they dropped the bomb in Hiroshima there and Japan surrendered, so when we did come home then we had to "cowboy" ... to La Havre, France. ... Camp Lucky Strike I was in.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: We were just talking off the record about the reaction of the German people when they knew that Germany had surrendered.

JM: They were happy about it. They weren't mad at us. They were happy. They were afraid, they said, "*Fertig, fertig*, is finished, the war is finished." They knew they would be taken care of better. They tried to start cleaning their sidewalks with the bricks and taking the cement off, pounding on the streets, they were really getting ready to rebuild again as we were there. Ladies were doing that, ladies worked harder than men, ... strong people. I like Germany. Germany is a beautiful country and all grape vines along the Rhine River, grapes growing there. I was feeling good there in Germany, better than France. France, they treat me good on the street, they gave me champagne and stuff like that, but ... I found them trying to rob my truck several times. ... I didn't shoot them though [for] ... going for my supplies at night. I would find my way. There's no lights in Germany, no lights. When you ride from one country [on] a long stretch of

land, you always try to remember your roads, a church steeple, you turn left here, or a bombed building you turn left here, and that's what you have to do. ... Sometimes at night when it gets dark you can't see anything, and sometimes it gets creepy, and sometimes I was afraid of these shadows. [I don't know] how many times I fired my rifle. Next day you're coming back, and I shot a cow. I couldn't care less, I was afraid for myself. I was alone, I didn't always have an assistant driver. I'm going for supplies. ... My job was, go and get gas supply, food supply, rations, anything, that's what you had to do. Now, after the war was over, we rode to Camp ... Lucky Strike I remember that, and we were there around two months, got ... everything together. ... You had to come home as a unit again. ... Meanwhile, I gambled there in La Havre. I lost, ... I sold everything there. ... We got out and our mustering out pay was only three hundred dollars. Coming home we wind up in Camp Lucky Strike where we got on the boat called the *Thomas Barrier*. I'll never forget the little [boat], it must have been made in Hoboken or some place. The propeller was more out of the water than in the water. [laughter] It took us fifteen days to get home--fifteen days--everybody in the ship was seasick. ... I'm lucky, one percent didn't get seasick, everybody else [did]. Fifteen days they were fed intravenously, ... they were all dying like that. We landed at Camp Myles Standish. ... [Editor's Note: Camp Myles Standish is located in Massachusetts.] So, we landed, and we're getting off the boat and there was a Salvation Army. ... I'm carrying everything off the boat, I'm coming down and in the mess hall they're playing [music]. They thought they were all war casualties, we weren't war casualties. ... They kept us there for two weeks to build us up, we were worse than Buchenwald where I liberated. ... They had big sign in the mess hall, "The mess hall will be open twenty-four hours a day, all you can eat, all you want to eat." ... While we were there for two weeks, you had a big meeting outside in the field there, the tactical commander was telling different people, "You are going to go on the same boat, and you're going to go on this train to get back home." They told us to get back home and as he's telling everybody, I think he said what a nice unit we were. ... So many were captured, so many were killed. ... We did have casualties. ... He's looking at me a little while, and he's trying to apologize directly. ... He knew the guy he gave that rating to, his name was Dimauro; D-I-M-A-U-R-O from Hasbrouck Heights, I think it was. ... Somebody had made a mistake, but I never cried the blues. I could have gone to the chaplain and said, "That's my rating you gave to him." I wanted the money sent home, so I said, "The heck with it." I said to myself, maybe if I get a rate, I'll be in charge of detail. I'd probably get killed. ... I'm lucky it wasn't that way, I was so happy I got home. ... When I got home, after the war was over, we came [to] Fort Monmouth or some place, I don't remember where we were discharged from, Camp Kilmer or Fort Monmouth, one of the places for a short period of time. They gave us all new uniforms and clothing in the bags we had to come home with. In doing so, Joey calls up his brother. ... His brother Johnny comes down and picks us up, and he brought me home. Now, Joey and Tony are in the car, they're out to Cliff Street where I lived, ... my sisters had decorated ... outside of the building, "Welcome home Joe and Sandy." So, Tony and Joey say, "Who the hell do they think you are, Eisenhower, Joe?" So, I said, "Hey, they're my sisters, they love me." [laughter] So, my father gave us a big party at the house a couple of days later, [they were] playing the accordion. ...

SH: Who was playing the accordion?

JM: One of my cousins was playing the accordion, and we had a lot of fun. I wanted to get a haircut in the barbershop, me and my brother shortly after that, and the barber was so happy to

see me. When we come home on furlough he wouldn't take no money from any GI for a haircut. ... Even when I was on a date with Grace O' Neill, one of my friend's sisters, she used to write to me and she lived in Atlantic City. She was working out of Philadelphia, and I come home on furlough and I'd take a train from Penn Station, I went to Philadelphia to see her and it was wonderful. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: You talked about how well they treated the GIs when they came back to the United States.

JM: ... While I'm getting a haircut, me and my brother and the barber, a guy across the street Louie, he owned a fruits and vegetable store, and the grocery store. He said, "Hey Joe, I'm glad to see you're back, I've got to talk to you. Your father owes me ... three hundred dollars." I said "What?" He said, "He borrowed it, he said you boys would pay me when you come home." ... My father had given us a party, must have not paid three hundred dollars. ... Here we go, one hundred fifty each, looking for a job again shortly after, ... have my Army uniform walking the streets again looking for a job. I walked down to Alcoa Aluminum Company, [they] weren't hiring, [and] the coffee house weren't hiring down in Edgewater. I went to the Ford Motor Company, "Yes, yes, two guys, we need you right away." I was working there thirty-five years and I retired. I worked hard, ... I sent both of my kids to college, Elaine did, [and] my son Philip who died around eight years ago. He died, a misfortune that he died, he was married to a nurse too, and he had a heart attack. ...

SH: When did you meet your wife?

JM: ... After the war I did, ... around a year or so after. I got a job working, making forty dollars a week, a dollar an hour, that was a lot of money compared to the quarter an hour before. That's a lot of money then, with that I saved up money for a down payment and so forth. I met my wife Lucy through someone who was trying to put wallpaper in his house and didn't know how to do it. I knew how to do it, I learned from my father how to hang up wallpaper, ... a simple glaze, and do it that way. In doing so, there's a girl who was over here, she was babysitting the little girl next door, Lucy, yes, and she introduced me to her, and would up double-dating, and she was so wonderful. Her mother died when she was only sixteen years old, and she had two brothers and they ... worked in the florist. He owned his own business and her brother Rocky, her other brother, became a successful businessman owning a brick yard. I lived with my folks. ... When we got married, I had to live with my father-in-law, she wouldn't leave her father. I said okay, but that was ... about five years, and then we moved from Edgewater Ford Motor Company to Mahwah in 1955 and opened up a new place. I wanted to buy a house or build, do something, rent. Instead her father said, "I'll make a house for you if you stay, which I did," and that was that. My wife died in 1986, November 10th.

SH: I am sorry.

JM: Yes, she died in her sleep, she was diabetic, but she was healthy. The day before she died, she was doing everything, but that night she just died, surprised the heck out of me. I thought I was a brave guy coming back, seeing action. ... When I wake up, ... she moved her eyes, [I

said], "Don't fool around Lucy, you said we're going shopping." Elaine was married then, and Philip my son, he lived down there in his own apartment. I couldn't even have voice enough to call them up, I was so shaken. ... She, [Elaine], was my lawyer, my daughter, my doctor, she does all my pension, she does everything for me. God bless her. That's my story, I hope it's something, I don't know.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Please continue.

JM: ... One of the things I remembered [I wanted] to tell you, when you smoked a cigarette in England, no matter where, in combat, people don't smoke then. You had to put it out and you make sure you doused the ashes off and you take the tobacco out of the paper, and loosen the tobacco, roll the paper small, and throw it away because that cigarette could be detected. You could see it from above the plane, way far, giving away your position, people smoking. You had to remember that. Precautions had to be taken in combat. ... Incidentally, I forgot to tell you about when Phil Bulone got hit. My friend Phil Bulone, ... he got hit. Around a month later or two months, I'm on detail, had to go back from Germany ... to Belgium or France again. ... I remember coming through the same area, ... and I came down a certain street, and all the people were deformed, big heads, big bumps on their heads. I don't know, it was in Luxemburg or Germany, I don't remember where it was. I couldn't wait to get out of that town because my truck was so big, it was hitting the sides of the road, were hitting the roofs, and I got out. Not far from there I'm driving, coming home on the highway, alone. I see somebody hitch-hiking, pull to the side, Phil Bulone. I almost died, I said, "Phil, Phil," I didn't believe it, I said "Phil, Phil," as if I had seen the dead come back. [I said], "Phil Bulone, what happened?" He said, "Joe," he said "when I got hit" shrapnel hit his leg, it cut him so bad that his underwear stuck to his leg and that's what saved his life. When the guy in the infantry got him, ... he said, "You want to go to the "repo depot," replacement pool?" We called it repo depot. He said, "No." He said, "Well, if you want, your outfit is around one hundred miles up in front of you. Think you can find them?" He started hitch-hiking, alone on the road, so help me God, I'm telling you the truth. Nobody around, a lonely highway, it was him, and I picked him up. ... [laughter]

SH: Did you take him to his unit?

JM: Yes, we sent him home to his own outfit and he was ... driving the truck again. Now, there's the reunions after the war, we had reunions over here, my friend Joey Bonanno. ... We had all the guys from ... Somerville, Hackettstown, South Jersey, all the guys and their families and their wives always had to pay for around twenty-two years. ... Then, we start dying away, ... fading away. Like MacArthur said, "Good soldiers don't die, they fade away." There's something else Elaine told me to say, I don't remember.

EC: At some point you were guarding two Italians and two German prisoners.

JM: Yes, yes, when we came from Paris, ... we got this big building here in the house. ... The detachment commander told me, "Here are four prisoners, Italian prisoners, you speak the language, go in and get coordinates for this. It takes four days to heat up the building, we're

going to have wounded coming in four days." ... I was speaking to them in Italian. So, I had the guard put him up. ... I'm driving the truck, I can't guard them. ... They went on strike on me. ... He said, "I'm a tailor, I'll ruin my hands." I said, "You're a prisoner, you S.O.B. I'll kill you. I'll kill you right now." ... So, he went on strike. ... One guy was a tall guy, as tall as you, God bless you. ... I gave him a pack of cigarettes. ... I said, ... "I wanted to call in a truck, my orders are to get up there, you know that. It's not that hard to kill them and you." So, he looked at me, he got a hold of the shovel, he hit the guy in the butt, "boom." "What are you crazy, you're one of us." He put the coal on the truck, I got back, I couldn't wait. ... The detachment came in, I had to report. I said they gave me a hard time. ... [They said], "Bring them back to the stockade and get four Germans." I went to the stockade and I wish I knew I had been at that stockade. ... I went to the stockade, ... he didn't tell me where to go, and who do I meet, Edward G. Robinson and Fred Astaire, they're looking for souvenirs. ... These were prisoners that I had to return and get Germans. With that, they gave me four Germans, two of them guys became my friends. They were nice guys, they were very good friends of mine. ... They were my age, and in fact one time my cigarette lighter didn't work on me, he said, "Don't worry about it. I'll make it work." He got a piece of ... one of the K ration cans in there, eggs, and he cut a piece of metal on there. ... He made the little spring for my cigarette lighter that lasted for me until I got another lighter. One of the guys, his father owned a Ford franchise dealership in Germany, and later on, I worked for Ford Motor in Edgewater. [laughter] ... So, nevertheless he was good. I'm sorry, I have no pictures of him, but everything happened so fast. I had no camera, I was so busy going on detail. ... I didn't expect to come home alive, I didn't expect to make it, so help me God. Everything happened so fast. Even when Roosevelt died, it was so sad. ... Everybody was so discouraged. It was really a bad day for us to head out. It was something, yes.

SH: Did the Germans obey your orders? Did they speak English?

JM: Oh, yes, they did, yes. ... I didn't even have to guard them. ... They were so good to me. I was in the motor pool. I was in charge of so many things, ... but they were good, they were good workers, very good, conscientious, very good men, very good friends. ... The thing I enjoyed, ... my wife died on me, ... I was seventy-eight years old, I'm ninety-one now, I was seventy-eight at the time. One day I got a phone call on a Sunday morning, Joey called me up and said, "Hey Joe, what do you say we go back to Belgium?" [I said], "What the hell are you crazy?" ... He said, "The two loves of my life, my wife Anne died. ... Remember Betty?" "I don't remember Betty." ... Then it dawned on me. ... We were ready to leave Belgium and go into Germany ... and he was missing. I thought he got captured, he got killed, [but] he was shacking up with this young girl Betty, and she's a beautiful girl. ... He didn't know the outfit moved, but he come back with some kind of a tall story, then he got by. He always liked her, but he said, "I really did like her, maybe she's alive." I said, "Look Joey," I said "you're old," I said, "you're worse than me, you live vicariously, you're balding, you've got white hair. You look as if 'Kilroy was here.'" [laughter] He said, "I'll pay for everything." I said, "Okay, you pay for everything, I'll go." ... Elaine said, "Go ahead dad, you could go." With that, I boarded the plane, we flew ... to Brussels. [Editor's Note: "Kilroy was here" was a sketch that was popular during World War II, depicting a bald-headed man with a large nose.] ... I could speak, and get by with French and German and a little Dutch and a little bit of Polish. I grew up with all the Polish kids. When I went to school, ... I ran home because I didn't know what the teacher was talking about. My sister had to bring me back. ... All I knew was Polish and Italian. ...

SH: Did you have a good reunion when you went back to Belgium?

JM: Oh, yes, we went to Belgium. I'm in a hotel, right away he says, "Joe, let's go." I said, "Wait a minute, we just got here." ... We got out of the airport ... and he's ready to go. ... He said, "Let's rent a car in the hotel." We rented a car, a brand new one, it was good. ... We wanted to go to Belgium, then Paris, ... which I hated so much. ... We followed that road and they're going very fast. ... I said, "Oh good God." So, we come up to Belgium at a certain point and we see, "Coca Cola, five dollars a can." Oh, good God. Ice cream cone, nine dollars, you can shove it, I want to get the heck out of this here place. We get in front of the place near Eupen, right near Eupen, that's where that girl lived, Betty. He said, "It's got to be around here." I said, "It's changed, it's fifty eight years ago." He said, "It changed Joe." I see the guy walking with a cow, ... a boy walking there, I said, "Please, I want to speak with you." [The boy said], "What does he want?" ... [laughter] I said, "My comrade is a little nuts and so am I, here's a picture of Betty." ... I had a picture of him standing there in an archway, and Betty, and the little kid next to him. So, he recognized the little kid, and so he said, "Oh yes, go on top of the hill there's a guy over there, he could tell you." I went up and there's a big German guy and he was a tall guy, and he had auto racing cars, international racer. ... He said, "What does he want to know?" ... A girl by the name of Betty lived here, and this is her nephew right there. So with that he got a second guy to come out, and said, "Oh yes, yes, we know." ... Before you know it, the French come down, take pictures of me, two GIs returning after fifty-eight years, sixty years. They gave me a big celebration. ... I was in the newspapers and all. So, I went to his house in Belgium, ... the son has it now, he's a man now, what a beautiful home they had. ... We ate there, and he got Betty on the phone and said, "Hello, do you know who this is?" "Yes, it's Joe Bonanno," she said. She remembered his voice. ... She prospered herself. She owned a big store like Sears and Roebuck, big. She said, "I can't come on now, but come to my house tomorrow, be back and we'll have some dinner." "Joe," I said "when we go back there to meet them, what do you want me to shoot the husband? What do you want me to do, kill this guy?" [laughter] This guy was so nice, his name was Jack. ... We went home, back to the hotel. ... We found the house, it was a beautiful home, what a place, what a home, fruit trees all over the place, my God. She said, "Come on this Saturday. What kind of vintage do you want?" Went down the cellar, he had a roomful of wine, ... the guy's a multimillionaire. Holy god God, they're so nice, they're so kind. He brought us over to show ... the Hurtgen Forest where the guys of the 106th Division got wiped out. They come up to relieve us during the breakthrough, during the Battle of the Bulge. They were new, they were green, they only had about four months training in the States, they sent them there and they got wiped out. The guys got killed. I remember when I come home [after World War II], on my street alone, six guys were killed in Fairview. They were all in the 106th Division. They came in after me, they give them three years in the Army after me and they sent us over there. Now they had a big monument made up of all the G.I.'s that died and I've seen it and I was trying to look for names of the people who I know. I couldn't find, anyway. He was so good though, and they gave us a wonderful, wonderful meal. I said, "Thank you ever so much." I have pictures of the home too, and the letters that she wrote. That was quite an experience. [Editor's Note: The Battle of Hurtgen Forest took place from September 1944 to February 1945, with the American Army suffering over 30,000 casualties.]

SH: It had to have been. Did we cover everything?

JM: I think I did. ... We used to have reunions and we don't have any more reunions, the last one was around twenty years [ago]. ...

SH: Do you keep up your friendship with the Germans that were prisoners of war?

JM: No, I don't remember their names. ... That's about it. ... They're all dead but him, Tony Pierro. Tony Pierro and I, we served together. ... I was best man for Tony and Joan. Phil died too.

EC: Did you tell them about when you were in the D-Day invasion?

JM: Oh, when we come down the rope ladder, some of them, you had to kick their hands, ... but they would get crushed anyway. ... They had a rope ladder, you kick him, kick him in the hand and face. ... They let go, they fall on their back, hit their butt. Of course, they would get crushed, they get killed. ... She wrote that story about me when we landed in ... Omaha Beach. There were no bodies in the water. ... The kids they were looking for bodies, that's all their job was, ... young kids and the amphibian DUKWs. ... They're looking for any salvage. The ocean was washing up everything, maybe another body or something, that's what they were doing. ...

SH: Did you ever have go to the field hospital for your own treatment?

JM: No, no, I didn't. In the Army, all we used was a knife, that was about the only thing we used, cutting anything, burning anything like that. [laughter] I thought I was getting the shivers when we hit the beach in Normandy. ... Two days, I got all hives along my hands, I don't know where they're from, they never told me. My fingers, my hands were all itchy, I had my garrison belt on. That's when they gave me two prisoners to take care of the shrapnel. The guys ... got flat tires, "ack-ack" coming down on the roads, two flats on one truck. They said, "Mauro, take care of the German prisoners." One kid, a young kid, he was taking the shrapnel out of the tires, changing the flat tires. ... He said, "You think you win the war? My father told me, he's an officer, we had secret weapon, secret weapon." [Editor's Note: Mr. Mauro is speaking with a German accent.] ... We didn't know about these here buzz bombs because they came after, you know. We knew about the V2 rockets in England, then the buzz bombs I passed on the field, there were all empty containers up there, where they shoot the rocket. Oh, my God. The artillery shells, the mounds are that high with all artillery, brass and all. The people, the civilians that lived in that area got rich with all that junk, that's what they did. It was a sad thing for me when we "cowboyed" back to cigarette camp Lucky Strike. We all had to drive the vehicles over in the yard, all by the thousands, you see trucks, half trucks and tanks. It felt sad leaving the "Cliffside Flash." ... That was my home. ...

EC: When the war was over, you mentioned that you met a German woman who spit on her son's picture.

JM: Yes, a German, Mrs. Meyer. She was doing my laundry, and she spit at her son's picture. She found out he was an SS. ... In Italy, the Italian soldier that we had, they claim that they

fought for the king of Italy, ... not Mussolini, ... and same thing with Germany. You had to fight for Hitler or they'll kill you. The poor Jews they were tortured alive, it was really a sad thing. All through the war combat, what I seen in Belgium and France and Germany, people starving, and I would never want people to see that again, how they covered the streets, looking into the tin cans. I got my rations, I was giving my coffee away. ... I didn't have nothing, I just turned my back and walk away.

SH: Did you have any interaction with any Allied soldiers in Europe?

JM: ... Oh, yes, I met the Canadians, we fought alongside of them. I saw a lot of them wounded, we had them in our outfits. ... The guy, he wrote the whole book about the 45th, very interesting stories about how many patients you had, how many people wounded, all about that. ... They all have their own part to do. ... I was in motor pool, I was separate from them.

EC: You never encountered British soldier in Europe?

JM: Oh, sure, all through England you see British soldiers.

EC: Did you talk to them?

JM: Of course, sure, yes, especially the air force. ... They were very good fighters, English airmen, the P-51s [fighter airplanes] were great. I see dogfights as if you see in the movies, you see in combat. One time I had to go for gas supply, I had to go pick up gas, two hundred cans of gas in the truck. In doing so, ... they give you the trip ticket, go and find a place. ... They hid it in the woods, in the wooded area, and they had so many stockpiles of gas cans, around five hundred, a thousand here, in different piles. In the event they get bombed, they would get blown up. ... So when I was there, there was a lot of action going on, I pulled up, and it was a rainy day. I said, "What the heck is going on?" I see this here little black guy run up to his truck, I'm in the truck, he had a turret gun, and a plane was coming to strafe him. He goes, "I got him, I got him!" ... He got the plane.

SH: He was an African-American?

JM: Oh, yes. ... See, they didn't put much in the infantry. ... Gas supplies, rations, you know, quartermaster, and stuff like that, that's where they do this work. ... When we were in Eupen, now Eupen is outside Alsace-Lorraine right near Germany. ... We went up that big street, we went to Aachen, the MP directed traffic, some of the GIs coming in, ... all of a sudden I see this truck coming down. ... They stopped them, it was a black guy. He said, "I'm not going up there, it's red hot up there." ... He had to ... get the guy out of the truck and put another military officer to go up there and give the ammunition. ...

AP: You said the German people were very afraid of the Russians. Did you ever meet up with any of the Russians?

JM: Oh, yes, yes. When we came right back from Stuttgart in that area, I was in Breton, Germany around two months, before we went to camp [in France]. ... The war was over then, in

fact, two trucks come over to me, I was in charge of the motor pool at that time, everybody was splitting over who took the detail, who drove. Some of the guys drove the nurses and doctors to Hitler's hideout, Berchtesgaden. I didn't want to go, I'd seen enough of that garbage, they went there to check it out, you know. Two trucks come out, they're Russian, they had teeth, fangs, my God and he was wearing a cape. The officer said, "Better get me benzene." They call gasoline benzene in Europe. ... I said, "I don't have anything. ... Don't have enough for myself." I wouldn't give him any gas. ... I said, "Get out of here, or I'll shoot you two." I was rough. ...

EC: The Russians were not very friendly.

JM: Oh, they were mad, they cursed me up and down, I didn't give them any gas. ... They needed gas, I won't give them any gas, I wouldn't give them any. [laughter]

EC: They just went on their way?

JM: Yes, I'll tell you something, it was good and bad, you know. At least, I went to the Army, I had good food, my God, my eyeballs come out of my head, just like in CCCs. I never saw pancakes and oh my God, they had hard-boiled eggs, all you want to eat, seconds or thirds, whatever. In garrison, in Georgia, they have what's called a (chow hung table?). If a guy is so hungry, you sit at that table, they put everything one dish, salads, whatever it is, you're like a pig. [laughter] Heavy guys, rough guys, you know, we all became friends. You'd be surprised what buddies we all became. One guy became Camp Gordon champ. He was a boxer, little Joey Bonanno, little skinny guinea over there, he became a fighter too. [laughter]

EC: You suffered from frostbite on your hands and feet from being in the foxhole.

JM: Oh, yes, I had frostbite. ...

SH: Did you go for treatment?

JM: No, no everybody had frostbite or something. We would use our sleeping bags and cut holes on them and wear them. I sleep in my truck, you know, nobody cared, guys who got frostbite got their feet and toes amputated, yes, they did. ...

EC: The frostbite must have been severe for soldiers to seek treatment. If not they dealt with it.

JM: Yes, but when I come out of the Army, that's why I went back, I come in, my hands still hurt me. Kevin, ... he gives me the handgrips and that helps me out a lot. My back and everything hurt me, and I went down, and they gave me seventy percent disability for frostbite on my toes and that stuff.

EC: You have post-traumatic stress as well.

JM: Oh, yes, I went with you, she came down, my lawyer. Every time I have the air conditioner on at home, when I put it on, at night, I'd be sleeping, I think I'm in a foxhole, "It's freezing, freezing," I can't sleep, my back hurts me. So, I told them that, and then when I saw World

Trade Center go down [it came back]. When I'm sleeping up in the guest room upstairs, one time she heard me fall out of bed. [laughter] She told them the last time. They felt sorry for me, they gave me one hundred percent disability. Now, it's just like going to commissary.

EC: He earned it.

JM: I earned it. [laughter] I live alone now, my wife's dead, my son died on me, and I come up here a lot. I have three grandchildren, Kevin, Erica and Ciaren. I survived.

SH: Thank you for talking to us. You have seen so much. The Depression greatly affected your family.

JM: It did, very much so.

SH: Was your family involved politically? You talked about how sad you were when President Roosevelt died.

JM: Oh, yes, we all were, my God, he was everything. See, he's the one that come up with Civilian Conservation Corps, CCC, which I was in twice.

SH: That was part of the New Deal.

JM: New Deal, Works Progress Administration, WPA, National Youth Administration, which I belonged to that too, because you got three dollars a day, three days, every two weeks. Nine bucks, that was a lot of money. Everything was so cheap, a quart of milk was five cents then, it was so cheap. ... When I quit school, I was in ninth grade, I used to work as a painter, he'd gave me twenty-five cents, that was good pay. ... Then, I was a longshoreman, I worked ... with the hook and shovel. ... I was standing behind on a rock with my father's hat and coat on. ... They give me the hook, forty-four cents an hour, that was a lot of money then. You race right through, go out there in the morning, come up the next day, work for twenty-four hours straight without eating, with a handkerchief. ... The ship is so small, the skinny ladder coming down at the bottom of the big boat, they were all Japanese boats. ... I couldn't care less, come up so hungry, my God, come up the hill, me and my friend, come up the hill, so hungry. I sat in the store. In those days the grocery store had milk delivered to them outside. ... I would snatch a roll, and take a sip on milk, and go home. ...

SH: Was your family political?

JM: No, no we were not. ... I had five uncles of each of the brothers living, one of the brothers Tony, he died, there was six altogether. The first five sons' names is Joe, and the first daughter is named Josephine. Sister Josie died recently now, she was ninety-three, she died in October, ... and Joan. ...

SH: Did your mother and father speak English?

JM: My mother grew up as an orphan.

EC: She spoke English.

JM: Yes, she spoke English fluently. ...

SH: Did your mother and father talk about their immigration story and what it was like for them to come to the United States?

JM: Well, they all came over here because jobs were hard to get and the food. This is a ... rich land. ... They all came here, they prospered in their own way. My uncle had a saloon, a store, and then he had a dry goods store and so forth, yes. ... My father worked in Corn Products, he was a supervisor. ... He was a smart man, my father, could speak several languages, he was really an intelligent man. The Depression days were so bad, that one time he was caught smoking, and which you're not supposed to on top of the roof, and ... they fired him. ... They wanted to give him a job back, and it was too late, he didn't want to take it, he was insulted. So, he thought he'd go back in business painting again, which he did for a while, and in 1929, when they built the Ford plant in Edgewater, he worked there for a year and after that, kaput. Nobody had anything. You got to buy a house, banks were selling houses, buy a house cheap, no money down, you couldn't get anything, but we had enough money to eat, everything was very poor.

EC: When your mother came to the United States, did she have brothers who came here before her?

JM: Yes.

EC: She was sixteen when she came.

JM: Sixteen, yes.

EC: That is how she got here, she was sponsored by her brother. She had to live with her brother and one sister-in-law who was not nice to her.

JM: ... Her sister-in-law was very mean to her. ... She grew up, she was like Cinderella, chopped the wood and stuff like that, and one of her cousins was getting married with my father's last brother Louie, and that's where he met my mother. In a short period of time [they were married]. She was eighteen and I think my father was ten to twelve years older than my mother. ... My mother died when she was seventy-six, I think. ...

EC: The woman who was mean to her when she was a youngster, they died only a few days apart. My grandmother passed away, this woman came to visit her in the funeral home, and she tripped and fell on the marble floor, she died. The next day, she was one room away from her. Everybody was like, "Whoa."

SH: What about your father's family, Mr. Mauro?

JM: Well, my father was the last one to come over. They were all here before him. In the old world they had jobs. They shoveled coal in the furnace--today, you call them engineers.
[laughter]

SH: You never got to meet any of your grandparents?

JM: ... The only one [was the] grandmother who lived with us. See what happened, the other brothers would all chip in. We were so poor, they'd give so much money, they had more money than we did, and that's how we get along. I'm telling you, we were very, very poor.

EC: Your father's mother did live with you? ... My mother's father was supposed to come over when I was born in 1919, but he developed spinal meningitis. That's a disease that was going on all over, and he died and he couldn't make it here.

EC: There were others in your father's family, too. One was a gardener.

JM: ... He was a gardener in San Felipe, a big park place in Italy, and he fell off the wall. He broke his back and he died.

EC: He was ready to come over. He had his pass and everything.

SH: It has been wonderful to talk with you today.

JM: I expect some day for Kevin to make a movie. ... Growing up as a kid is very interesting too, all of the things that happened to me. I would have made Huckleberry Finn look sick, the things that I did. How to go fishing, how to go skinny dipping in the Hudson River, they made a raft, my brother in law, ... I was only sixteen years old, I didn't know how to swim, ... and made a raft, around ten guys in the channel, and push it, ... going out in the middle of Hudson River, and you had to get back. I couldn't swim, so he signals, swim, me and Jimmy Pinzone, and I kicked my feet on the side. ... I beat them, ... I climbed up the ladder. "Jump off, jump over," pretty high, around twenty feet high, I had to jump, I did. [laughter]

EC: Sometimes when you see a cellphone, you comment on how useful it would have been to have during the war.

JM: During the war, certainly. If we had the phone, my God, there's no way to communicate with anybody, oh sure, but the good thing, the enemy would have it too, they could squeal on us too. ... [laughter]

EC: My father has is loyal to the Ford brand. His car now has everything that you would want on it. He thinks it is amazing that you could put in reverse and the reverse lights go on. He also likes the GPS system.

JM: ... I said give me everything in it. So, he looked up on the internet, he looked and saw the [Ford] Taurus had all of the options. ... I said, "That's for me." Now, I sit in that car and I get my back rubbed too. [laughter] ... I have a wonderful car, I feel like an astronaut in that car. I

live here, I put the heater on. ... The gas price is \$3.33 a gallon, I couldn't care less. I get my money compensated from the government, my pension. Who's living better than me? For being so poor, I feel rich. ... Mission accomplished.

SH: The American dream.

JM: Yes, it is, it is. Thank God for that, keep the faith, I always say. You have an objective, go for it, I told my grandchildren that. ... If you have an objective, go for it no matter what, don't let nobody stop you. If you have a fight, hit him in the eye, ... go for it. I learned that in the Army. They say two ways of doing things, the right way and the Army way, you want the Army way. You've got to remember that. [laughter]

EC: He has been a hero not only for his World War II service, but even on the home front. There was a gas leak across the street from our house. I was eighteen years old on a Sunday morning, it blew us out of bed.

JM: New home, Cape Cod home.

EC: The house was just in flames. My father was the only one to throw his pants on and get across the icy street on a January morning in the middle of the winter. He rescued the elderly people and brought them over to our house. My mother started helping them because they were bleeding.

JM: She was shocked. ... I was trying to help.

EC: Right after that the house blew up. He also hurt his back trying to save someone's life on the assembly line at Ford Motor Company.

JM: He was working on the repair a part of the truck, a cab on the skids, and I was a line operator. He said, "Joe let the line run." I was working overtime, and I shut it off. Another minute, a door opened up, and it got caught in the bracket. ... He went to straighten it up, his two arms got caught, and he screamed, I ran over, and I lifted with all my might. After I did it, I knocked the cable off the line, I couldn't straighten it up, I hurt my back.

EC: He lifted up a car.

JM: ... Both arms amputated, he would have died. So, I had a case and a hearing, halfway through it was postponed in Hackensack. It was lunch time, they said, "Come next week." Here you first come in to the Ford Motor Company, I was naïve and stupid, I was so happy I had the job. So, they wouldn't change my job for me. I had to work in pain, and when we had the informal hearing, informal hearing they said come next week, my lawyer, said you don't have to come, it's in the bag. They sent me a letter, we lost the case. He sold me out. The doctor had said, "Later on in life, you're going to feel it Mr. Mauro. You have two degenerative disks." Now, the last five or six years, my back is still [hurting]. If it were not for my back, I'd be okay. I'm ninety-one years old. I'd be okay, but my back, I can't do anything, I can't walk. ... Thank

God I have that car. I said I feel like an astronaut in that car, and I go, I walk with a cane. Things happen, you've got to take it with a grain of salt.

SH: That is good to hear. Again, thank you for having us.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: We have one more story.

JM: One day while we were in Belgium, the sergeant said, "Mauro, get cleaned up, dressed, drive the staff car, you have to take some nurses and colonels over." ... Our last company commander, Colonel Johnson, he was really good, a young guy, they made him general of the Second Armored Division. ... I had to take him up there. ... It was a pretty far move we had to make. In doing so, I remember riding up in that area and there's a big hay wagon, horses pulling hay, and I feel that the Germans [are] around me, and I really flew past them on the side, scared the horse and all. I got to the area because there was all gunfire going up there. There was a battle up in front of the Second Armored Division and Colonel Johnson was there. I'd see him get out of the staff car and everyone walked away. And he said, "Who brought you up here?" So, he said, "Sergeant Mauro." All the while he thought I was a sergeant. [laughter] ... "Come up here," and he had known me real good because he's the one that told me shave the mustache because you're not fighting a Civil War, my sideburns. [laughter]

SH: You had a handlebar mustache?

JM: Yes. ... Another thing happened to me, I forgot to tell you. When we were in England, I was going on a detail, and pretty far out, over one hundred miles, and they sent me to the wrong town. ... There was like two Fairviews where I come from, but I don't remember the two towns, the same name. They were one hundred miles distance from each other and I went to the wrong one and I go back, and going back to the other one, I'm driving so hard I come around the roundabout, the circle, there were around ten men riding bicycles and a dog behind them. I blew my horn, I came in around the circle. ... A lady who was walking the baby carriage is facing me, points to me like that. I look in the mirror, I see somebody flat on the road. Well, it was a man ran into me with a bicycle, and he hit the back flap of my truck, and laid down with the dog and he was dead. ... What happened, an MP came by, and he looked at me, he said, "Jesus," he said, "Look, here's a wheel mark." ... The guy was drunk, he had beer smelling on his breath, the guy with the dog. ... I'm coming by the roundabout slow because he rode into my back and hit my back flap that holds the gas can on there. ... I was nervous and mad, when I get back home I told my detachment commander what happened. So, nevertheless, they had to have a case. I had to go to court and report. They had a case, they also got the wigs on their head, white wigs on their head, the same thing. So, over there I told them what happened, so he said, "Don't worry," he said "Mauro, don't worry, he'll be compensated for it, it was his fault, the government will take care of his family." So, Colonel Johnson that became a general later on, he said look, "Lad, where you're going you'll going to see a lot of this stuff, don't let it get you. That fellow will be taken care of." He remembered me. He thought I was a sergeant. [He said], "Sergeant come over here." He waited ten minutes talking to me, which I felt honored, I was

impressed. Here's the guy, he's coming to talk to me on the side. My God, what a man, I felt good. ... [laughter]

SH: Thank you.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Had you considered staying in the military?

JM: No, it didn't pay for me to stay in. I was only a private first class. My friends who had come home before me while I was there, they had a high rate in the service--tech sergeant, master sergeant, first sergeant, second lieutenant. They went back in because they were paid good money and they had a good job and some of them had to go in because they got married, and they made a career out of it. I couldn't afford it, I didn't have two nickels to rub together to be honest with you.

SH: Did they tell you about the GI Bill?

JM: Oh, yes, they did, they tried to explain it to me. ... It's a thing to talk about it and not to have anything. I had to go for a job with my Army clothes. I had no suits, no clothes to wear. I was destitute. I had nothing, I was really, really broke. When they offered me a dollar an hour to get a job, I thought, "My God."

SH: Did you use the unemployment benefits provided by the G.I. Bill?

JM: Well, people were starting to get that. I tried to get it. There was only around twenty dollars, I only received one check. By the time I got that check I got a job with Ford Motor Company. ... I was happy to get that kind of money, forty bucks a week. We pay fifty cents union dues a month, that's all they started with. ... I started going to the meetings up in Mahwah, Darlington. The plant closed, and I had to take early retirement, January the 1st, 1980. The president of our local, his name is Frank Golan, he lived next door to me and we grew up together, we worked in the National Battery in North Bergen together. We worked on the ships together, we're good friends, he was in ... Ford Motor Company. He became committee manager, he became president of our local, he's been our president for over forty years, and he's still our president. We have our meetings up in Darlington, I go there once a month from around four to five hundred guys that come from Harrison, New York, Monroe, Ocean, and around here in Jersey too. I still meet them, but they're all fading away and they're all passing away. I'm up in age and Frank Golan is my age too, ninety-one. We were at Camp Gordon together too.

SH: Really?

JM: I was with them, the 29th Division, when I hit the beach.

EC: He was also in the car with you when you had your accident when you were a teenager.

JM: Frank Golan was one of the fellows when I turned over in the car, he sat behind me, he held on to the coat rack in the back. He's the one that never cursed. But he did say "You son of a gun." [laughter]

SH: Well again thank you for sharing your stories with us.

JM: It was a pleasure.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Jonathan Conlin 2/1/12

Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 3/21/12

Reviewed by Joseph Mauro 4/27/12