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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANK RUFFO

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Stephanie Ruffo: This begins our interview with Mr. Frank Ruffo in Nutley, New Jersey on October 7th, 2005.

SR: Thank you for taking the time to be with us today. My name is Stephanie Ruffo and I would like to start by asking you where and when were you born?

FR: I was born November 27, 1925 in Glen Ridge, New Jersey, Mountainside Hospital.

SR: Where were you raised?

FR: In Nutley.

SR: What can you tell us about your father's background and his parents?

FR: Well, my father came from Italy. … He did work for the town, … trimming trees and stuff… Then [he] worked for a contractor. Then he ended up working in a factory, as a weaver, making materials during the war for Navy and Army uniforms.

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Whereabouts in Italy was he from?

FR: He was from Cozensa. The town is Acri in the Province of Cozenza in Southern Italy. …Then he came here.

SH: About what year? Do you remember? Can you talk about it?

FR: Well, he came here, I don't know the exact year but it was after World War II because he served in the Italian Army.

SH: Did he?

FR: Yes. He served in the Italian Army and he came here after the war to try to bring his family over, you know, because they were in poverty.

SH: Could this have been after World War I?

FR: Oh yes, World War I is when he was, he would be, I was in World War II.

SH: That's why it was easy to figure it out. Did he talk about leaving family back there, did he come by himself?

FR: Yes, he came by himself. His grandfather was here and he came by himself. His grandfather sent for him and he left his family there, figuring he would get a job and try to bring them over. … Later on in life, he brought his sister … and her husband … over first. We got him over here and got him a job, then he was able to get his wife over here and they lived in … Rutherford first, and then moved to Lyndhurst.

SH: Now the grandfather that was already in this country, had he come before World War I?

FR: Oh, yes, yes, he was very old. I don't even know, we used to ask him how old he was and he never gave an exact date. He'd say, "a little older than my teeth, as old as my tongue." So figure that one out. [laughter] But, outside of that, that's the only other grandparent I knew … on my father's side.

SR: What can you tell us about your mother and her background?

FR: My mother was good. That's where you got that. [Editor's Note: Mr. Ruffo is pointing to Stephanie Ruffo] Anyway, she was born in Italy and I don't know exactly where, but she came over here as a little child. … She was the oldest in her family and then, later on, my father met her and they got married. … They had eight children, one died as a baby. … We lived in a small house down on the same place where I was raised for years. In fact, the house is still there and I built a house next door that she lives in now. [Editor's note: Mr. Ruffo is referring to the current home of Stephanie Ruffo] That's about it. She wasn't that healthy a woman, but she had so many children and the doctor said to her, "my goodness, how did you have so many children." She had some kind of a problem, I forget what it was, [a] heart problem, and he [was] amazed that she had that many children. But, thank God, she did all right.

SR: What were your parents' names?

FR: My father's name was Peter … and my mother's name was Rose.

SH: Did they ever talk about how they met?

FR: They never did, no. I never remember them talking about it. But they did all right. All right being together, they had seven kids, and we did all right. We weren't rich, but we never went hungry either. He was a very hard worker and she did a lot [of] canning and stuff. We always had stuff in the house. She'd make a meal, when you blink an eye she'd make a meal.

SH: Did they speak Italian in the home to each other?

FR: Yes. They spoke Italian and English. My father insisted that we speak to him in English and he spoke to us in Italian, but we had to answer him in English.

SH: Really?

FR: That's how we learned the language. In fact, a little later on, when we were kids, they sent us to an Italian school to learn to read and write Italian. In Nutley, the church, I think, the name of the church, they had a Catholic church on Brookline Avenue, Holy Family, they had a community house and that's where the school was, third floor. I could still see the ceiling. But it was worth it, because we weren't left out, and we knew … [when] our parents gave us orders, they were in Italian. Very disciplinarian, my father was very, very, a disciplinarian.

SH: Was he?

FR: Yes.

SH: Now was there a large Italian community here? Is that why they were able to teach Italian?

FR: Well, there were different sections of Nutley. In fact, there's one section in Nutley that's still very Italian, they call [it] Avondale, but where we were, this was another section of town. Well, my mother's parents moved there and her uncle, they built a house together, so they were in the same neighborhood. … But it was a community then, unlike today. Today, you don't know who lives across the street from you. But then, we all knew each other and they all helped each other, you know. Our mother took care of people who were sick. If their parents were afraid to take care of [them] because they had tuberculosis and they were afraid they would get it, … my mother took care of them all. She died [at] about sixty-five years old, something like that.

SR: Did any of your siblings serve in the military?

FR: None of my kids.

SR: Your brothers and sisters?

FR: My brother did. He was in Germany, served in Germany. Yes, that's all, just Sal did. … It was after the war, though. It was in the occupation. I was over there during the war.

SH: So you were the oldest?

FR: Yes. [Well], no, my sister, Rose, was the oldest. I was the oldest boy. I got drafted out of high school. I was eighteen years old when I registered for the draft and February the 23rd I was drafted. … My nineteenth birthday I was on the English Channel, crossing the English Channel, that's how I remember my birthday.

SR: Where did you attend school?

FR: Nutley High School. [I went to school] all in Nutley; Lincoln [Elementary] School and [Franklin] Junior High School, … then Nutley High School.

SH: Did you have jobs after school and …

FR: Yes, oh, yes. That was a must. But, then when I went out for football I wasn't going to work, but I worked in an A&P stocking shelves and stuff. [I] worked there for quite a while during school because my sister left school to go to work because my dad got hurt. … We did it to help out … you know. But, I did work after school.

SH: As a younger boy, did you have paper routes, or anything like that?

FR: No, none of that. There wasn't enough money in that. I wanted to get paid by the hour. [laughter]

SR: Was your family very religious?

FR: Yes, very. My father was very strict and we were religious. In fact, we were Evangelicals and we went to church and Sunday school. We all had to do that. …During the week, we even had bible readings at the table and on Sundays, after we got done eating dinner, we couldn't go out of the house until we went and prayed as a family. … That went on for years. That was before I went in the army.

SH: What church were you?

FR: Assembly of God. In fact, I ended up being elected the president of the board in the church. [I] served for something like twenty-five years. We built that building. I don't know which way you came. [Editor's Note: Mr. Ruffo is referring to the route Ms. Holyoak took to get to the interview] If you came from East Passaic Avenue, … the building at the bottom of the hill of Milton Avenue, where I lived, we built that. I was in charge of [the] building committee when we built that church and we went all over. We went to Massachusetts to look at the type of church we wanted to build. It was very good, [a] good experience.

SR: How did the Depression affect your family?

FR: Well, you know, like Truman said, "if you're out of work it's a depression. If your neighbor is out of work it's a recession." But, thank God, I could say my father worked and we had a nice piece of property and he had a lot of vegetables. …We ate mostly vegetables. We had some steak, when somebody got sick, to give them some nourishment, but, otherwise, we had chickens. … My father had bought a hog and they had butchered it themselves and made the stuff for the winter. In fact, even the, they call it spry now, but they used to make their own lard from the bacon … and sausage. We had something to eat all the time. Thank God for that. What's next?

SR: When did you meet your wife and how?

FR: You better ask her. [laughter] No, we were raised on the same block. In fact, she lived across the street from me and we were teenagers. … I was going with her in high school. When I went in the army, I used to write to her [and] she used to write to me. That was a good match, too. Look what it produced [Editor's note: Mr. Ruffo is pointing to Stephanie Ruffo]

SR: So did you get married after you returned from the war?

FR: Yes.

SH: Did you teach your children Italian?

FR: No. They were too busy.

SH: Was your wife also from an Italian family?

FR: Yes. Her father was a minister and he pastored a church in Newark on 7th Avenue and her mother was a Sunday school teacher. [She was] very good, too, … highly respected. We're from [a] pretty religious background … all the way down the line.

SH: Talk a little bit, if you would, about the activities that you were involved in, in high school?

FR: Well, mostly in high school it was football. … I did participate in regular activities that the high school had, but I didn't go for a lot of the others. In fact, they didn't have that many. It was football, baseball, and basketball, what they had. … They didn't have soccer. They didn't have Lacrosse. So other than that, that's all we had. But we used to do our own thing after school. We made our own, I used to like the parallel bars and …, what do they call it, not the gym itself, but the sport … the exercise things. I loved it and we built our own in the woods. We made our own parallel bars.

SH: Really?

FR: Yes, we cut down some trees and made them. We used to go after school and do that. We were into it, the kids that I hung around with, too.

SH: So you made the football team?

FR: Oh, yes, I made the team, but I had a hard time because my father didn't [want] me to play. In fact, you know how wise kids are; you try to threaten your parents. … I wanted to play football so bad. In fact, the coach wanted to come to my house to talk to my father. I said, "don't do that, I'll never get over it." Well, anyway, finally I got a chance to play in my junior year, because my senior year I went into the army, but I got a chance to play.

SR: Were there any teachers that are in high school that you remember, or any experiences you remember?

FR: Oh, yes. I'll tell you an experience I had in high school. Well, first in grammar school. There was a teacher that they had. They used to have clubs after [school], you had to join a club. You had to have one of the clubs when you're in grammar school and I didn't want crafts, and arts and crafts, and all that stuff, so I hesitated and hesitated and I said … "I don't want to, there isn't any club here I like." So she said, "Well then, you're gonna have to take the dancing club." I didn't want to dance. In fact, I didn't believe in dancing, my religion, you know, it wasn't right, this and that, but things change. But this teacher insisted that we have a dance and she had to teach me. She had to and I didn't like that. But, anyway, we got through it. But then in high school, I went out for football and I had a teacher that was an accounting teacher and she was from England. Her name was, [if] you want to put her name in there, I don't know, Miss Sprague. I remember it because she got me really ripped off. Anyway, we were in class one day and … she was talking about the war and I wasn't in the army yet, I hadn't joined up, or anything, but she started talking, and of all the classes I was in, this was the only class I was the

only boy in the class. They were all girls. It was accounting, and she went on a rampage. She used to do this, everyday you'd go in for class, I had the last class of the day and she would talk about the war in England and how they bombed us and all that, and one day I said, "look," I said, "Why do you wait for five minutes before the period is over and give us this homework.? I don't want to do this homework at home, let's do it here." I said, "I don't want to know about this here war, I'm not in the war." Well she got hot and she said, "if it wasn't for your kind of people," which was the Italians, she said, "we wouldn't be in this war." Well, she set off a firebug. I said, "If you say that once more, I'll come up and slap you right across the face." I said, "don't you blame my people for [the war]. I'm an American. I'm not Italian because my father was Italian. But I'm an American citizen and you're degrading me, and so don't do it again, or I'll slap you across the face." She said the girls [in the class] got scared, so she said, "well I'm gonna tell you something," she said, "you could come to class but," she says, "I'm not gonna pass you. I'm not gonna give you a grade. I don't care what you do." So I said, "By the way you're telling these stories and giving us homework, you won't be teaching me. I'll have to teach myself at home, because of the homework you're giving me." Well, anyway, so I found that they were having football practice, so instead of going to the accounting class, the last period of the day, I went out for football practice, which was fine for two or three days. All of a sudden, the principal comes out there, he says, his name was (Mr. Harshman ?), "what are you doing out here?" I said, "What do you mean, what am I doing out here. I'm practicing football." He said, "You're supposed to be in accounting class." I said, "Yes I am, but I didn't go because she told me she's gonna fail me anyway, no matter what I do." So he said, "Well, you got to go back to accounting class." If my father would have found out about this he would have broke my neck. Anyway, I said to him, "Mr.(Harshman?), would you come to work everyday if the Board of Education told you, you weren't gonna get paid?" He said, "What are you bringing that up for?" I said, "Well, that's what she did. She told me I'm not gonna get paid, why should I go waste my time in her class?" So I said, "And she owes me an apology besides, and I won't go back in her class until she gives me a public apology in front of the class." So he says, "All right, you go back to class, I'll be in there." He came to the class and … when he got by the door in the hall and I explained [it] to her. … She said, "I did tell him that." So he said, "Well, you should apologize to him." So she apologized, but she wouldn't do it in front of the class. So I wasn't gonna press the issue. But then it ended up I passed the class, but I didn't enjoy it. In fact, I had an accounting teacher, a bookkeeping teacher, it was a fellow, I met him in the hall a couple of times, "How are you making out?" I used to get As and Bs in accounting, I couldn't pass in this class. She wouldn't give me better than a C no matter what I did. So that's what happened. Now you can put me in jail. [laughter]

SH: I find that very interesting because many times we ask what people knew of what was going on in Europe and your experience is very unique and I thank you for sharing that.

FR: Yes. Well, when you're brought up, and you find out what the world was like, especially with a Christian background, you know that the world is not the best, but you make the best of it and that's how it goes.

SH: Did your family ever talked about Mussolini and what was going on in Italy?

FR: Oh, yes. I think he started out as a good man, Mussolini, but then he got into politics. He sided with Hitler. Now, he had nothing else but to do what he was told. But, he did a lot of good for Italy. Italy recognizes that, too, until he got involved with Hitler and took sides with them, but he did a lot of good for reforming Italy. A lot of stuff was going on. My dad used to tell me, "I used to be able to walk the streets and not worry in Italy when he was in charge. Because if somebody stole something, they would actually cut their hand off if they found him guilty, but that's all in past history."

SR: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

FR: Yes, I was in church. We were in … Nutley Assembly, the old building, and we were having choir practice and, I think, it was about two o'clock in the afternoon, or something like that, and somebody had a radio and said, "Hey, we're at war. They just bombed Pearl Harbor and the president declared war." That's when I found out. I guess, the same Sunday that it happened because I was in church where we had choir practice. We had about seventeen or eighteen people.

SH: What was the reaction of the people when they heard that?

FR: They were shocked. I mean, they were shocked. Everybody was, and it started, the Japs you know, everybody started saying, "The sneaky Japanese," and all that stuff. But I tell you, what we lived through, these people in the United States should appreciate what this country went through and how they got through it; because of prayers, and because of people that were dedicated to stand up for our country. It's [not] … like that now. People are complaining about everything.

SH: When you went back to school on Monday, what was the reaction? What was the talk in the halls and in the classrooms?

FR: Well, they knew we were at war and, sooner or later, we were gonna get involved, even the kids in the school. I wasn't the first one who went from Nutley High School, but I didn't go until '44. …A lot of them went, [they] were drafted. I remember when they started the selection board, where they registered to vote and everything, people had to register and then they were called, too. A lot of people from Nutley.

SR: You said that you were drafted in 1944, did you ever complete high school?

FR: No, I had enough points so when I got out, I got a diploma. I had, I actually [had] one … my latter part of my junior year, my class graduated in … 1944. But they graduated, see, they had twice a year graduation then. I went in the army in February, my class graduated in June, so I got [my diploma in February]. It was actually half the senior year that I lost. … I had talked to the principal about getting a delay, you know, … so I could finish high school. He said, "I have nothing to do with that," so that was [that].

SR: Where did you complete your training?

FR: Military training?

SH: Yes.

FR: It was at Camp Grant, Illinois. [I] had seventeen weeks of medical training. I was a medic and they gave us seventeen weeks of training. … Then from there they shipped us out. I went to Camp Shanks in New York, from there we shipped overseas.

SH: Where did you first report when you were drafted?

FR: Fort Dix. … Then they sent us to, I was sent to Camp Grant, Illinois.

SH: Do you have any idea why you wound up being in the medics?

FR: No, I don't. But I prayed, even when I was drafted, they went in line and the board where they were stamping and they were putting down there, "Navy, Navy, Navy" and I couldn't swim. I didn't know how to swim and didn't want … any part of the Navy, although it was cleaner. But I said, "Lord, don't let me go in there." So the guy is ready to stamp, [and] the [other] guy grabbed his hand and he said, "Wait a minute. You got enough guys now, give us a few," and he says, "Army," and that's it. My prayer was answered in line. [laughter] So I went in the army, and then they sent [me] from Fort Dix to Camp Grant, Illinois. That was a nice place.

SH: Was that the first time you traveled out of New Jersey?

FR: Yes. Well, in fact, the army was the first [time] I went out of the state, but then when I came home, we went … with my father to visit some relatives in Rhode Island. It's a big deal. I was in the army when I went up there with him, and met our cousins and that's how that went.

SH: You went by train to Missouri.

FR: By train we went to Camp Grant, Illinois, yes.

SH: Or Illinois, I'm sorry. Tell us about the training, what you remember, what was the most shocking to a young man from New Jersey?

FR: To tell you the truth, there was nothing shocking to me. I was gonna come out on top. I was gonna do everything. … I could do it. "Don't dare me to do something because I would do it. But, I had a good time there. Had some officers and non-coms that were pretty decent and some were really wicked. They were real disciplinarians, too.

SH: Where were most of the guys from? Were they from all over the country, or mostly from the East Coast?

FR: In Camp Grant you mean? Yes, a lot of them were from New Jersey and New York, and a lot of them were Jewish; Weinstein, (Lipshetz.?) I remember some of the names even. Another

guy was Rosenberg. He was a riot this kid. He was real small. That was a riot. He was a joke because he couldn't do … [anything] because everything was too big for him.

SH: When did you first learn not to volunteer for anything?

FR: Well, I learned that in basic training, because they said, to anybody, "We want some volunteers," to do something, or want to do something else, so they give you a wheelbarrow and you start going. But then one day when the sergeant was in charge, he's from Massachusetts, this guy, he was a bug for muscle builder and he used to call me "Dago." He says, "Hey Guinea" or "Dago, come on, come with me, we're gonna go out to the field." You had to go prepare for bivouac. We had to build a latrine.

SH: This is in Illinois?

FR: In Camp Grant, yes. But, anyway, we did that and then I came back. We came back from that and talk about being up there, you know, doing the army as I said, we had the sergeant, where [we] come back and they're out on bivouac and two guys got in a fight in the chow line. So this one kid from Brooklyn, that's funny how you remember the names, his name was (Bertuglia,?) … he beat these guys up. I was watching them fight. He beat these poor guys up something fierce. He said, "I'll fight anybody in the company." So my sergeant was there, [and] I said to him, real quiet, I said to him, "He's got a lot of nerve; I like to take a shot at him even if I get beat just so he keeps his mouth shut.' So the Sergeant says, 'hey Captain, there's somebody over here who'll fight him." So I said, "What are you doing now?" So he says, "Well you said that." So anyway the captain said, "How much do you weigh?" I said, "143 pounds." He says, "You can't fight him. He's 185 pounds, he'll kill you." So I got mad at the captain. I said, "If you want me to fight I'll fight him. He wants to fight somebody. I'll fight him, don't worry about it." So … I ended up in the hospital, but not because he beat me up. But because they made us take our shoes off and in stocking feet you had to box on this canvas.

SH: Oh, you were boxing.

FR: Yes, and then when … [I] turned … [my] foot, my callous under my big toe split wide open and I couldn't, it was burning like fire. So I said to the Sergeant, I said, "I can't, I have to hop around." "Why are you hopping?" I said, "Look at, take my socks off and look at my foot." They sent me to the hospital. They had to cut the callous off. I spent five days in the hospital. But I watched the fight, that's why I … [knew that] … he used to go like this, every time he was gonna throw a punch, he'd bring it back so when he brought his punch back, I fired at him and hit him before he was able to throw his. [Editor's note: Mr. Ruffo was demonstrating the strategy of his opponent.] It's a riot now, but it was some of the foolish things I did, and I'm still here.

SH: Was there a team, a boxing team?

FR: No, no, just [if someone] wanted to fight we'd go back to the camp and get the gloves and they set up an entertainment. But then I went to the hospital. They had a party after, you know, the guy, the sergeant, brings me a big thing of shortcake. He says, "Here, take all these, enjoy it, if you could."

SH: Now how did the man treat you after that, the guy that you beat?

FR: Oh, we became good friends. … He said, "Where did you learn that?" I lied. I said, "I came in second in the Golden Gloves." He said, "I was wondering where you learned that." … When we were kids we used to fight. There was a fellow across the street from us that had the gloves. We used to go in the fields, put the gloves on the kids and let the kids fight, you know. …

SH: What were some of the other experiences that you remember from your training there and the interaction with the men as you all worked towards …

FR: Well, I got mixed up in a lot of stuff I shouldn't have gotten mixed up in because of not minding my own business. … I couldn't stand to see a guy being mistreated. … There was a fellow in the barracks, he used to drink a lot, and this PFC [Private First Class] who was in charge, … he gets this one fellow, the guy couldn't even stand up. … He started to fight with him, and he's punching and punching and got him up against the wall, and he's punching him. I said, "Why don't you leave the guy alone?" I said, "You can see he can't even stand up. … If you're a man, tomorrow go up there … when he's sober and see if you want to fight him." He got so hot with me he said, "Why, you want some, too?" I said, "I don't think you could give it to me like you gave it to him because I'll break your neck." … Well, anyway, they put me up on charges because I [was] threatening, [but] I said, "I didn't threaten him I just told him to stop." I ended up getting … a detail of picking up cigarette butts, details to break your back. So I ended up doing it. I used to do it. To me it was a joke because I wasn't going to the movies. I wasn't doing nothing, laying on the bunk, so I go pick up butts. So I'm picking up these butts, and the officers around the command post there are sitting there talking, and this PFC, who they made a corporal after, he takes his cigarette and he throws it behind me. He says, "Hey, soldier," he said, "you missed one." I said, "No, I didn't. … I picked up everything in front of me. That's behind me and you put it there. You go get it," and the lieutenant looks at me, so he says, "You better go pick it up." I said, "I'm not picking it up." I said, "I didn't come here to serve you in this army I came to serve my country, and you ain't gonna make a fool out of me." You know the captain made the guy go pick that cigarette butt up. I said, "Hey, why should I be somebody's fool? If I have to be clean you better be clean, too." So that's how it went.

SR: When did you complete your training?

FR: When we finished basic training, seventeen weeks after I went in, so that was in the fall some time. … Then they shipped us right out, the fall of '44.

SR: Where did you go after training? Where did they ship you?

FR: Camp Shanks, New York. It was a deportation point. You went there to get ready to go overseas. … Then they shipped me to New York. … We took the train from Camp Shanks to New York, and we got on a nice ship. They transported us in style, on the *Queen Elizabeth*, the original *Queen Elizabeth*. But I didn't know this, we had to go unescorted with the *Queen Elizabeth* because it was fast. … I'm going, during the day, I see them, this way and this way … every six minutes, they're changing course. So I said, "What are they doing that for?" He said,

"Well, because it takes a submarine six minutes to tag on to your direction to fire." But we got across all right. We ended up in Scotland. We landed. … Then by train they took us down to Bourne- Moth which was the deportation point to go to France.

SH: Did you get a leave before you boarded the *Queen Elizabeth*? Did you get to come home?

FR: Well, we used to take off on weekends, you know, but you weren't supposed to leave because you could ship [out] any minute. So we came home on weekends and we're going back to Camp Shanks, and I see guards walking around our barracks, the area there. So [I said,] "What's going on?" He said, "They're shipping out." I said, "Shipping out? I'm in that outfit. I got to get in there." So the guy went around the corner, I ran into the barracks and the guys there got their bags packed and all. I used to have all my stuff ready to move anyway, except what I had on and I took my time packing, making believe I'm packing. The guy comes, "You guys ready to go?" "Yes, we're ready to go." I got away with it. It was lucky.

SH: Well, on the trip over, how long did it take you?

FR: Six days, six and a half days with the ship.

SH: What did you do for entertainment in those six and a half days? What did you talk about? Were there rumors?

FR: Well, I used to lie on the deck up on top, because we took three days down below and three days we had to go topside, because there were so many people on the ship. There were 1600 of us … medics in … part of the B deck. … You [can] get lost on that ship. I got lost. They give us tags, and the guy says, "What are you doing in this section." I said, "I don't know I'm lost." I went down this hallway, came back, and then, they had two corridors on that ship like hallways. … One here and one there, and in the middle was bunks, you know, the rooms, staterooms. But it was big, it was a big ship.

SH: Did they assign you any kind of duty?

FR: Oh, yes, but I got out of that. They had us in the kitchen slicing bread. I had the job slicing bread with the hand thing. … While the guys are eating you got to keep moving. So I find out from this one guy when we were up on top, he said, "I got out of KP [because] I told them I got upset, I was getting seasick. They don't want you in the kitchen when you're sick." So I said, "yeah." So I brought the bread to the kitchen and I said, "I don't feel right. I'm upset," I said, "I feel like I'm gonna throw up. I think I'm getting seasick." The guys said, "Get out of here, get out of here." So I got out.

SH: Did they have anything to keep you busy other than things like that?

FR: Well, they used to have, like movies at night, or something. … It wasn't too bad.

SH: Did you know where you would be assigned when you got to Europe?

FR: No, we were put in a replacement depot. … They assigned you to a place. …When I got overseas they assigned us to the 35th Medical Depot. … We were responsible for supplies and stuff, and went to different places. When they captured stuff, we went over there and inventoried it, and then they'd send people in to pick up some stuff. You pack it for them and they take it.

SH: Were you put in the 35th in Bournemouth or was it when you got to Europe?

FR: I don't remember exactly when, but I started out, I don't remember exactly if it was basic when they did it. They shipped us as a unit, but then they put us in a replacement depot, and then there came a time when they broke through the Battle of the Bulge and they pulled, they were looking for volunteers from different outfits. They were taking young guys from different outfits and putting them in the infantry because they needed them. But I didn't get picked for that.

SH: Now, when you came across the Channel, what do you remember seeing? Where did you land?

FR: Going across the Channel is when I got the biggest scare of my life. … We were on a smaller ship going across and it was a storm, and now you're always gonna get out of the face of it. … So we all went to the other side of the ship so that we wouldn't get hit with the rain and wind. … When we did, all our luggage, our duffle bags, were thrown down in the bottom and they all shifted and the boat, like the ferry in New York, it leaned and you can almost put your foot in the water on the side. [Editor's Note: Mr. Ruffo is referring to the New York Ferry accident on October 15, 2003] So they said, "Get back on the other side." But the baggage had shifted so much you couldn't go down there and move all that. We pulled into La Havre, and they put us up against another ship, tied us up, 'til they unloaded it. … That's how we got off, we had to climb down the netting, onto the barges, to go to the beach.

SH: Do you remember the name of the ship?

FR: The one that I went across the Channel? No, I don't remember that. But, I know coming home there was a ship, they had to take us home. They had all the ocean liners from different companies, from different countries. In fact, I went [on] one ship and they took us off it, … then we got on to this other ship, an Italian, to the USS *Cristobel,* that they used for troopship bringing guys home. It's funny, some of the things you remember how comical it is. They used to have comedians on TV. [They] used to make jokes about … you guarding a pile of coal and all that stuff. But it was different. We had the guys that were not used to being, in like, in a rough place. … They were not physically big and strong. … I can understand the way they were. In fact, one guy I offered to help him carry his bag up the beach because he threw it down. He said, "I can't carry this thing." He said, "I'm not." So I said, "You got to have it when you get over there. What are you gonna do?" "I don't care, I don't care." So another guy and myself, we help to bring the stuff up, and this guy was from New York, we used to call him JJ, he was forty-one years old. … I couldn't understand it, at that age you know. He had gotten all his teeth taken out in the army. They gave him false teeth. So, we go for our physical when we landed in France, and the guy said, "Where's your teeth?" He said, "They took them all out," he says, "I got false teeth."

"Didn't they give you [teeth]." "Yes." He said, "Where are they?" "They're in my pocket," and we laughed. … He said, "Well, how come you're not wearing them?" He said, with a New York accent, "they hoit me. They hoit me." So we used to always tease him, "they hoit me."

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE----------

SR: Side two tape one

SH: Please continue.

FR: So, we get up on the beach and then we go in. They bring us to a like a tent city to stay in, in France. We had to go by train from La Havre to outside of Paris some place. … We were there for a while then they shipped into Germany.

SH: Now when you were outside of Paris, were you part of a big hospital complex?

FR: No, we never were assigned to a hospital. We were in a repo depot, like I said, 'til they shipped us out. … Then they assigned us to this one area, where we had the supplies like I said, once we got there, we stayed in that mode, to research supplies, and we get them ready for shipment.

SH: Outside of Paris, tell us what a typical day was like for you?

FR: I don't remember too much about that until we moved into Germany. … Then we used take trips to different places, you know.

SH: How long do you think you were in France? Did you move slowly across France?

FR: No, we went from La Havre to that place near Paris, and from there right into Germany. We went through Aachen and that was devastated, that place. They really bombed that place out. … We went to another place called Viersen, Germany, and from there we went to different places in Belgium. We went to, like on leave, we would go to Brussels. Yes, and they had something over there. We went in there, but, I didn't do too much. I didn't like to go traveling.

SH: What would be the reason that you got to travel? Did you have liberty?

FR: Well, we had time before the next move, you know, so we took advantage of that whenever you could get a chance, if you could get a weekend pass. But you had to get approved by the company to go, and like it was a weekend. You couldn't get a week off. It was like a weekend pass or an overnight pass.

SH: When the D-Day invasion took place in Europe, you were still in Illinois. How was that reported to the troops at that point? What did they tell you?

FR: I'm trying to think now. Well, what we got, they never reported to us, we always got it from the newspapers. They didn't put out … any bulletins saying the invasion took place, you know.

SH: Were there any chaplains assigned to the units that you were with or were they more up front?

FR: No, the chaplains were not assigned to a unit. They were with an army, like they had their duties with two or three companies. … But we didn't have one specifically assigned to our company. … They used to have services, you know, but not in the churches because they didn't have the churches. They'd have a service in the field. Then we moved into this place in Viersen. I have some pictures of it. I'll show them to you. The supplies there were in a warehouse. I got some pictures I took on the roof sunbathing, and took of this factory. … They used to have the milk wagons come by the front of the place, the old horse and buggy. It was really something.

SH: You talked about asking for volunteers and things during the Bulge and then immediately after, so that would be into January of '45. You were still in Paris at that point?

FR: I didn't go to Paris at all, outside of Paris.

SH: Well, in France, I should say.

FR: In France, yes, but the volunteering I learned early. I wasn't gonna volunteer because you don't know what you're gonna get into. But when they assigned you, you had an assignment, then you had no choice, … and I was in the medics. … One time they wanted us to pull guard, this was after the Bulge breakthrough, we had to pull out. We went back to Holland to (Herlin?), Holland, and we stayed there in a school for a couple of weeks. … They used to have this, we used to call them Gerry, the Gerries came over with a plane at night, scouting, I guess, and they had Dutch soldiers there that were guarding the camp. The camp where we were walking around and all of a sudden, they said, "You got to pull guard duty." So I wasn't gonna take a gun. I said, "I don't want a gun." "Take it, just to fire watch, you know." So they gave us a club and on one day, I'm on duty one night, and the guy comes around the bend. They see this guy coming and he says, "*Kamerad*." I was so scared. I said, "*Kamerad*." He must be a kraut, you know, so I said, "I'll get something to whack him over the head with." But, he was a Dutch soldier, and this jerk, one night a plane came over and he dropped a parachute with a flare, and this guy shot the flare to put it out. He knocked it down. Well, then I knew we were nailed. So the second day after that, we had to ship out of there, and it's a good thing we did, because they went and hit it, because they figured there's somebody there for them to do that. So then we shipped out of there.

SH: Who were the men that were working with you? Were they still made up with people from New York and New Jersey?

FR: Yes, a lot of them, yes. A lot of us stayed together quite a while.

SH: Who was your commanding officer? Where was he from?

FR: We ended up with one guy, who was a major; he was a regular army man. When he became our boss, it was a bust, because he was a regular army and he had connections, and that's how we got out of Europe. That's how I got home. … We were supposed to be shipped to the Pacific because the medical outfit that was there before us, they wanted to give them a break. … They were gonna send them home and send us to the Pacific. So this major, he pulled strings, somehow, and he said, "We'll go but give us a delay en route, back to the States, and then we'll go from there.' …That was good because when that happened the war ended. We were still in the States, so there was no need for us to be shipped over. But, we had some good officers though, some pretty good officers.

SH: How did they treat the men for the most part?

FR: Well, over there it wasn't so much like basic training where they were pushing you and pounding you. They treated you right, you know. When they could do something for you, they could do it, but otherwise they wouldn't do it. But it wasn't bad. … I was in Wiedenbruck, that's the name of the place, and a fellow from our neighborhood, from here in the States, that I knew from church, he was a first lieutenant and he had come over to our depot to get supplies, and because … the church had given everybody a copy of where the soldiers were, what outfit, and he had a copy of our address, that I was with the 35th, so he was asking for me, and it happened that I wasn't there. I had to go out on a detail. When I came back they said, "There was a guy here named Frank Cernero, who's looking for you, a lieutenant." He said, "He came for supplies but he couldn't stay, he had to leave." So I missed him, too. But … you were not supposed to fraternize and all that stuff. But the kids, I always had a feeling for the kids that were innocent. They didn't know. But some of them were indoctrinated and they were wise guys. … We had this one kid, I grabbed him by the ear and I said, "Go over to your house, go into your house. Where do you live over there?" I brought him over and I said to his mother, "You better keep him inside because he's getting nasty and he's gonna get hurt." So then after a while, after a couple of days, he came out of the house that I brought him over to. … We had horseshoes and stuff and the kids wanted to play. We gave them the stuff, said, "Here take it." I said to this kid, "You're in charge. You take care of the stuff; you got to make sure that it gets put back here when it's done." He was thrilled. Oh, he was a big shot. But that's how we got along.

SH: Now this was in France or in Germany?

FR: In Germany, and we were not supposed to fraternize. That's the only way to get along. Then we moved to this other place, another town called Ahle. … We had a depot there and across the street there was a bar and a hall, dance hall, they had, but it was all full of supplies, German supplies, medical supplies, and tent in the back. They had stuff in there, too, and then across the street, we had this other building, like a little barrack that was filled with supplies. … There was a little room in the front where there were three little beds that we used as our sleeping place. … We stayed there and the lady across the street, as I say, if you treat people like they're human beings, she had, they had chickens and eggs, and we used to get eggs every morning. "Have eggs, you want eggs for breakfast?" So, anyway, they treated us good. So one day I went over there and they had a nice radio so I said, "Can I borrow that radio?" They were a little scared, you know, and the daughter, young kid, she didn't want to do it. I said, "I'll bring

it back." I said, "I guarantee it you'll get it back." It was shortwave and everything, you know. So I took it over to the barracks and the sergeant says to me, "Where did you get the radio?" I said, "I borrowed it from the people across the street." He says, "What do you mean you borrowed it? You took it." I said, "No, I didn't, I borrowed it, and it's going back to them." So it ended up we stayed there for quite a while. We had a lot of fun there, though [I] almost got killed there, too, trying to ride a motorcycle that somebody had abandoned. You know, these people, … we advanced so fast they let Italian prisoners …go, and they were trying to get home. … They were walking by, one who had rags on his feet, tied around his feet because his feet were bleeding, and they'd take a bicycle, or a motorcycle will run out of gas. They leave it. They left it where it ran out of gas. So I tried to take it and go for a ride. They had a wire and, I didn't realize, when you turn, you're pulling the throttle; I hit the side of the bridge turning around. But, anyway, when we're ready to leave that place, I had an argument with the sergeant. I said, "I'm gonna give this radio back, you're not taking it." He said, "Well." I said, "If you go take it, I'll report you. I'm telling you I promised the people, and I want to leave a good impression with them, that they were gonna get their radio back. They're gonna get the radio back." So he was gonna go over, but then he wouldn't go. He said, "You're something else." I said, "Well, you had a safe stay here, didn't you? You got breakfast." … She invited us over for dinner, the lady. Yes, so we're sitting at the table, served roast beef dinner.

SH: Where did she get roast beef?

FR: I don't know. But whatever she had, it was very good. So we're sitting down eating. She puts it there, up on the table. So I cut a piece of my meat, put it on a fork, and I gave it to her daughter, and the daughter looked, "What's the matter?" I said, "I came here alive, I'm want to go home." I said, "I don't know, not that I don't trust you but I want to make sure I'm not taking something that's gonna kill me." They laughed, but they gave me more meat, you know. You say, "What did you do that for?" you know, but, hey, you want to survive you got to, don't leave an opportunity open.

SH: Were they thankful to get the radio back?

FR: Oh, yes, oh, yes. Well, they were very thankful. In fact, she wanted to give us stuff to take with us, like, you know, if you want some eggs to take with. You couldn't take the eggs. They'll break, but I enjoyed it. What's next? Talking too much.

SR: You had mentioned earlier that you had written letters back and forth to your future wife, was she able to write back to you? Was she able to be in contact with you?

FR: Oh, yes. Yes, she wrote some nice letters. I used to write a lot of letters home, but they were censored, too, you know. …

SH: You talked about your church keeping tract of where everybody was and letting everybody else know. Were there other people in that community who were writing to the servicemen?

FR: Yes, well, the people from the church were writing, some of them would write, but you were more interested in the ones you were close to, to get mail. But they just have these, I forget what they used to call them, they used to make photocopies.

SH: V-mail?

FR: V-mail, yes. See I forgot that. But they were censored, too. You couldn't put down where you were, all that stuff.

SH: What do you remember about holidays and being overseas?

FR: Well, you miss the holidays, you always do. But the idea was when you were in the right place, where the company was altogether. See when I was with this 35th they sent us out on details. We were out to this place, where I told you about the hall, there were only three of us. The company was down, back at the bigger place, and they would send out somebody to bring us supplies and stuff. But when they all were together, they used to have a good dinner, like, you know, they had a Thanksgiving dinner, or something. They would have something that wasn't just all rations, unless you're in the field like we were, but then we got the eggs from the people. When you had a little electric stove you cooked what you wanted.

SH: It must have been a gas stove, right?

FR: Electric.

SH: Really, what fired the electricity?

FR: Where, in Germany? They had electric in those places; the halls had power and everything. Some of them places they flew through, I mean, like Aachen, they bombed it because it's a big city. But these are rural areas where you went out, and it was in a rural area, they had a lot of stuff. Then they had pot-bellied stoves, too, that we heated the place, where you could use that, too.

SH: Now all these supplies that were just left by the Germans, you weren't worried about them being sabotaged?

FR: No. They just pulled out. They had to go so fast. You know, when they broke through from Paris; they went almost to the Rhine River. I mean, there was no waiting, you know, but it's a big deal. When you had to run, you had to run. We had to leave behind what we had, if you didn't have your stuff ready. You got to go, that's it.

SH: Were you traveling mostly by jeep or did you use a truck?

FR: Trucks, jeeps, too. It depends on how many people. Now, we had, when we moved in a convoy, we were in two and a half ton trucks. … I have pictures on the road in a convoy with the trucks, and the picture I can't find that I thought, it would be nice, was a pontoon bridge and we were going across in two and a half ton trucks. I mean, bumper to bumper going like, not

touching, but a distance apart. We crossed the river like that and the blown out bridges next to us. But I can't find that picture.

SH: Which river, do you remember?

FR: I think it was the Rhine, and somebody took it from the back of us. I was in the second truck on the pontoon bridge, and I got a picture in there that's when they were coming off the bridge. Only you could see the front of the truck coming off, but it's not much. Okay.

SH: At any point in all of this, did you ever see Patton?

FR: No, I never saw the big shots. I heard plenty about them, though. In fact, we were with the 1st Army, with the 9th Army, and then the 1st Army, but General Bradley was our commanding officer. … Then Montgomery took over; it was a lousy part of a military stay when we were under his command. I didn't like it.

SH: What was different than when you've been under Bradley?

FR: Just wasn't the same, and then you didn't like the idea that a foreign general was commanding us, you know.

SH: Did anything change, that you remember, other than you just knew that it had happened?

FR: Well, it seemed like it wasn't the same. … I just can't explain it.

SH: Did you ever see any of the British troops?

SH: Oh, yes, we ran into them when we used to go to town and stuff. They used to have fights and everything.

SH: Really?

FR: Oh, they used to have fights. When guys got drunk, you always had trouble. But that's why I didn't like to go. The guys want to go on leave, sometimes, they'd go out. In Holland we went out. They wanted to go out just for a little while, or Belgium it was, and I didn't drink and I didn't like it, you know, because they start drinking; you don't know what they're gonna do. … You put yourself in jeopardy. But one time we're in a school and they went out from Holland. We went some place and we had a fellow in our outfit, we used to call him Tiny. He was about three-hundred fifty, four-hundred pounds. In fact, he broke an army cot trying to sleep on it. It collapsed. Anyway, they went out and, of course, he said, "Come on, you're gonna come with us." So we went to this place. We figure we're gonna go out for something to eat, and they were drinking and they were drinking, one beer after another, and this guy, Tiny, was sitting next to me. … He wouldn't let me go because he knew I didn't like to stay there, and he would put glasses in front of me every time they ordered. He ordered and put the ones in front of me, it was over five or six glasses. He says, "Go ahead, drink." I said, "No I ain't drinking." He says, "You're gonna drink," he says. So then I said, "I got to go to the bathroom." He says, "Who are

you kidding? I'm going with you." Then what happened, he got good and sauced. So every time he finished the thing, I'd put one of mine in front of him, and when he got good and sauced, I went out again and I went out to leave. Well, I went out, and I went out by myself, and I had to go back to where we were on my own, and I didn't like that either you know. So I went back and I … fell asleep in the bed. They come in, making noise, oh, my God, and nobody could sleep with them doing that. So this guy says, "Where are you, you Guinea?" and he turns around, he sees my cot. I'm sleeping, he picks up my cot and he flips it. I thought a bomb hit the place because I went over and I jumped up and I said, "What happened?" He says, "I'll tell you what happened" and he was mad because I left them. So after that they could go any place they wanted; they couldn't convince me to go no more. I was concerned about getting home, you know. These guys were having fun, while they could. They called it fun, not me. I was more concerned about putting myself in jeopardy. So that's part of the fun. Now you know a lot about your grandfather you didn't know before.

SH: You had talked about refusing to take a rifle to stand guard and things like that. Was there a part of you that was almost like a conscientious objector?

FR: No. No. You see, the law was that if you were a medic and you had a weapon they could kill you on the spot with no questions asked so I didn't want to have a weapon, you know, because they pulled me for duty one time. … In Scotland, when we first landed and they took the medics and they had us out in formation, they wanted to give us a gun. I said, "I don't want a gun." He says, "You're gonna pull duty." I said, "No, I'm not. The Geneva Conventions says I wear this thing, I don't carry a gun." [Editor's Note: Mr. Ruffo is referring to the red cross medic band wore on the arm of the uniform] You know they made such a stink and all the guys started complaining, "Why should we pull guard duty?" They broke up the formation, they got us off watch. Then they used to give us all the dirty details, "Because you wouldn't carry a gun, go do the KP," go do this, go do that. I didn't care. But, I wasn't gonna carry a gun unless I had to. If they assign me, if they took me out and sent me to the infantry, you'd have to carry a gun.

SH: During break we looked at the photograph album that Mr. Ruffo has and one of the questions that comes out of that is the progress that you made as you secured these different warehouses of German supplies and now US supplies. How far into Germany did you go?

FR: I don't remember exactly. But we never went to the Elbe River. If you're talking about going, whether it went to Germany and then they come back. I never went that far. We went over the Rhine River, I know that, but other than that, I don't remember the exact location. The last place, I'm not sure if it was Wiedenbruck that we were in, that was our main depot that we worked out of. … When I was at Ahle, we worked from Wiedenbruck, they sent us up there to do that, but that's as far as I know.

SH: Okay, so you had gone to Wiedenbruck, and then you went kind of north?

FR: Well, they sent us south to, the three of us like I said, to go check that place out.

SH: Who could requisition materials from your depot?

FR: I don't know, I wasn't involved in the paper work. I wasn't involved with any of that. But I know there was, we had one captain there that took a microscope that he used for research. He had taken one of them, you know, that they had in there. They had good ones. But other than that, I don't remember, because the paper work was not my [responsibility].

SH: Did you find it difficult to keep, obviously you had a very nice box camera, you said that your sister had sent to you?

FR: Yes, she gave it to me when I went in.

SH: Was that hard, to keep personal items secure like that?

FR: Well, it depends on where you were. When you shipped them, you didn't ship them in a duffle bag where they throw the stuff. … I lost that camera when I came home. I went to, when we're going to the cemetery for something, and I put it, I took pictures, and I put it on the bumper of the car. In fact, I took pictures in front of my house. I put it on the bumper of the car and I drove down the hill and I went around. When I got to the corner by the cemetery, Joralemon Street, and the thing fell off and somebody beeped and went like that, you know. I didn't know, I figured, "What he's saying?" Something's wrong. I never stopped. The guy must have stopped and picked it up. I had pictures in it, too, not the war pictures, but what are you gonna do? I felt so bad because I carried it all through Europe and nothing ever happened to it; I go home and lose this thing.

SH: Can you tell us about where you were and what you remember about the word that the war was over?

FR: We had a party. When we found out the war was over, that Germany has surrendered, boy, it was big news. Then we came home and we found out Japan had surrendered, that was even bigger, because we were home then.

SH: What kind of a party did you have? You were in Marburg then, or where you still in Ahle?

FR: I was still in Germany when it was over there but … when it was over in Japan, I was home. I'm trying to think, well, 1946, I got out of the army, I think, in June. I can't remember exactly. It was the end of June, or something like that.

SH: In June of '46 then?

FR: Something like that, yes, because I had twenty-six months in service.

SH: You have a photograph that you said was people that were being liberated from one of the work camps?

FR: Some place in there. I don't know, I think we were even riding by when I took that picture, I'm not sure. It's sixty years ago.

SH: Understandable.

SR: After you were discharged from the army, where did you live?

FR: I was back home with my mother and father and then, well, I was going out with … [my future wife] at that time, and it wasn't too long after that I got married.

SH: I'd like to back up a little bit and ask about when you were sent back from Europe. You were sent to where? I mean, you had a liberty I'm assuming to come here to Nutley, but then where did to go to be discharged?

FR: Well, we came home. When we came home on a ship we were supposed to come in, into New York and we're up on deck looking for the skyline. One day out, they said, "We're not gonna go to New York, we're gonna go to Hampton Rhodes, Virginia, we're gonna come in." I was disappointed, and we went in Hampton Rhodes, Virginia when we came back, but then I got leave to come home, you know …

SH: What kind of a welcome was there when you come back?

FR: Well, the bands were playing, you know, at the pier and all that. Well, the guys coming home they played music there and, of course, people met you. But they didn't know where we were gonna land. My parents would have never come down anyway. They couldn't afford it, anyway. But once we hit land, when we were coming in, we actually saw … land, and we knew it was the States, a yell went up on that ship. You got chills all over you. That's how, it's so I could actually feel it now, the thrill of knowing you're coming back to your country. It was something.

SH: You talked about then coming home and then where did you report to?

FR: Well, then we had to go, I had to go to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and from there, they gave us our separation papers to go to Fort Dix, I think it was, and they discharged us from there.

SH: While you were in Fort Bragg, were you being trained to go to the Pacific before the war was officially over?

FR: No, we didn't do any training there. We just were killing time. …

SH: When did you come back from Europe, in June?

FR: I believe it was something like that. I'd have to look in my discharge papers. I forget.

SH: I was just wondering how much time between when you came home from Europe and when the Japanese surrendered. Were you here in Nutley on leave when the Japanese surrendered?

FR: Yes.

SH: Did you go to New York, or where was the celebration that you saw on VJ Day?

FR: No. … We were just happy that the war was over. The guys didn't have to go out. … The guys in the barracks themselves were hollering. …

SH: So you were back in camp, in Fort Bragg then?

FR: Yes, I believe so.

SH: Okay. One of the things we like to know is where people were, what they thought they were facing before ending the war?

FR: Right. That's what you could remember. But I'm not, it was just so good to be home.

SH: What's the first thing you did when you got home to Nutley? What did you do? Was it something that you wanted to eat or …

FR: Oh, forget it, don't talk about food. I came home on leave from Fort Bragg, North Carolina on a weekend pass. We hitch-hiked, and on the way home, I got home at two o'clock in the morning, something like that, two-thirty in the morning and I was hungry. … My mother says, "You want something to eat?" "Yes, I'll have something to eat." Well, they had sausage and the Italians used to dry peppers, the red peppers on a string. They dry them, they'd be crispy like, and you cook them in oil. With the oil and stuff, you smoke up the whole house and my mother starts, she says, "You want some?" I said, "Yes, give me a half a dozen eggs." I had a half a dozen eggs and I don't know how much sausage and then peppers and a whole thing of bread. So much that my sister said, "What are you cooking?" "Why are you cooking, Ma, it's choking in here." "Your brother's eating."

SH: When you came back to the house, at two-thirty in the morning, was it only your brother that had gone in the military that wasn't here?

FR: No, he was here. It wasn't 'til after [the war] he went in. He went in after.

SH: So the whole family woke up.

FR: Yes, at two-thirty in the morning, yes. …Then hitch-hiking home, it cost me a nickel to get home because the bus, I couldn't get a bus, but I had to get from the subway in Belleville over there. … Now it's more. But it was a nickel for a bus to go from the subway to the corner, down below there, by the cemetery. … Then I walked home from there. It's unbelievable that time has changed so much, the prices and stuff, unbelievable. You tell somebody, "Oh, yeah, I used to get a nickel for a thing of bread like that," now it's a dollar- ten, and we used to take them and cut them in half and fill them with potatoes and hot dogs. Go to Louie Dinaglings in Newark on Bloomfield Avenue, fifty cents a sandwich. But don't talk too much about food, because that's my weakness.

SR: How long were you home after the war before you got married?

FR: Let's see. I got home. Well, I got married in '47, so I got home in '46, not too long. She did it quick.

SH: What did you know about the GI Bill and did you ever think of possibly using it for education?

FR: Well, I didn't because, like I said, a year after I was home, I got married and I went to work. I got a job in the post office here. I used to work in the post office in the summer time like for summer subs they used to call it, and when I got out of the army, they needed summer help so I went there and I got the job as summer help. … When they were supposed to let everybody go, they wanted to keep me because they liked the way I worked. So then I went and took the test and I put in for the job and I got the job, temporary, like a regular sub. I became when I was civil service but a regular, I didn't have my own route, I was just a substitute. Then after a while I got my own route, and I stayed there for a while and then I quit and I went into business for myself with my uncle. My uncle talked me into going in business with my brother- in- law. He was just getting out of the navy, too, and we started a paving business doing driveways and parking lots, and stuff like that, sidewalks, and then I left there and I went to work in a factory and I got a job there. [I] worked there for quite a few years. Then I went to another place when they moved back to Ohio. And I went to work in another place and I didn't stay there too long. Then I got a job in a hospital as a maintenance man and I became maintenance foreman in the hospital. I was there for a few years, twenty years, something like that, but I gave up the foreman's job because of the boss I had was rotten. I just couldn't put up with him no more. So I didn't want the responsibility because they used to steal stuff. … I didn't go for that stuff and I didn't want to be involved, so I went back to being a regular. The manager, the hospital administrator got mad. He says, "Why did you do that? Why didn't you come to me first?" I said, "I don't want that responsibility" I said, "I'm answerable to somebody higher than you and higher than my boss," I said, "The guy upstairs." I said, "And I don't want to mess my life up and do something that's gonna be a detriment to my testimony. I never had to steal to make a living before and I don't want to start now." So that's what happened. Then I retired from there. I'm retired about fourteen years.

SH: How many children do you have?

FR: I don't know, four.

SR: Children, not grandchildren.

FR: Two

SR: What are their names?

FR: Barbara and Peter.

SR: How old are they?

FR: Ask your grandmother. [laughter] My daughter is around fifty-four and your father is forty-seven, which is not bad. [Editor's Note: Mr. Ruffo is speaking about the father of Stephanie Ruffo] Not bad. Two good kids.

SH: Were you involved in Boy Scouts, or Cub Scouts, or anything with the kids growing up?

FR: No. I was involved more with my church than anything because when I got out of the service, I ran for the board of trustees and I was on the board of trustees. I was on the board of trustees, I was nineteen years old, and when I come out, they asked me if I would run, so I did, and I became president of the board and I was there for about twenty-five years, or better. When they built the church, I was the chairman of the building committee, and worked with the contractor and had a good time doing that. But I had to struggle, too, with people that you can't agree with. They don't want to agree with you and "You never do it right, you should have done it this way." So that's what happened, and here I am, your grandpa, what a pain, ha. Oh, yeah, then I built one, well, building is, I was in maintenance but I was always into some kind of line. First of all, we built my brother's house, the one who was in service after the war, the service of occupation. We built his house and then I built my house.

SH: Do most of your brothers and sisters live around Nutley?

FR: We live within a block from each other. We owned half of the block. I have two brothers, one died, but he died at birth. … I had three brothers and one died, and two brothers are alive. [I also had] four sisters. One of them died, too. *Se la vie*, it was always a gang. That's how you learn to share everything you know. You had to share. We were very close, very close.

SR: What do you do now in your spare time?

FR: I don't know. I can't do much in my spare time because my granddaughter doesn't play ball any more. I do what I can because I'm not up to it, physically up to it anymore. I just ain't got it. Eighty years old, I can't complain. My father died at sixty-eight, so I can't complain. So that's my spare time. Just taking it one day at a time and getting all of that.

SH: Well, Mr. Ruffo, I thank you very much for taking time to talk with us today and especially for sharing your story with Stephanie and, again, it's my pleasure to have been part of this, thank you.

FR: Well, I'm glad you could do it, that we could do it. You could remember some of this stuff now. [I am] just thankful for the fact that I'm here today. A lot of guys never came back and I credit it to people who prayed for me, because our church used to take one evening, like on a prayer night, they would pray for everybody that was in the service, and everyone that was in service, in our church, came back home. There wasn't one that was lost, and I'm thankful for that because I know that God has something to do with it, and people don't think so, but it's true. He does have something to do with it. When people pray, God will answer, and I'm thankful for that, so she's got a grandpa. Thank God.

SH: Thank you very much

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

Reviewed by: Stephanie Ruffo 11/7/05
Reviewed by: Sandra Stewart Holyoak: 11/28/05
Reviewed by: Frank Ruffo 1/14/06