

Valentino Arcuri
WWII Army Air Corps Veteran

Michele Starkey
Interviewer

Valentino Arcuri was just 20 years old when he enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1942. He had been working with his father as a mechanic in Fishkill. He told us that he was shipped to Fort Dix in New Jersey for basic training and later to Louisiana and Atlantic City as a part of his training before being shipped overseas to England in 1942.

Arcuri boarded the Queen Mary to sail from New York's harbor to Scotland. Since the Queen Mary was too large to dock near shore, the soldiers were brought to shore on tenders and Arcuri told us the fog was so thick that people on shore held lanterns to guide the tenders safely through the fog to the shore.

The soldiers boarded trains that would take them to England. Arcuri shared that the English women lined the tracks with tea and light snacks. "We gave them chocolate candy in exchange for their offerings. Chocolate candy was rationed along with everything else and they appreciated the chocolate."

Where did you stay when you got to England?

"We lived in Quonset huts that were about 30 feet long. There were about fifty of us living in the hut with a pot-bellied stove for heat. We used coal to heat the water to take showers. We basically exercised, ate and slept while we prepared for our assignments. My mechanic background was why I was assigned to the 407th Hq and Base Service Squadron."

What were some of your duties?

"Well, I did a many different things. One day I might be driving on a fire truck or an ambulance and the next day I was hauling gasoline out on the runway to fuel up the fighter jets. Many of our guys flew on what were called, "Milk runs" and maybe 25 planes would go out and just 17 or 18 of them would return safely to the airfield. As a motor pool driver, I would make runs to the depot tanker to fill up with fuel and then drive 25 miles or so back to fuel up the planes, the B24's or B17's, with gasoline. All the while the Germans were strafing the runways or attacking us with bombs or machine-gun fire from low-flying aircraft. We didn't have any radar in those days and never saw the incoming German aircraft until they arrived and fired at us."

Did you ever meet anyone famous on your tour of duty?

"Yes, as a matter of fact, one day Jimmy Stewart flew in to our airfield and I had to pick him up and give him a ride back to the base. He was a very nice fellow."

What was one of your most vivid memories of the War?

"There was a time when a pilot of a fighter plane landed on the airfield. His plane was on fire and we raced out to the runway to pull him out from the plane. He just looked up at us and said, "Where did you guys come from?" I was just happy that he survived the attack."

Did you meet your wife overseas?

"Doris was just 18 years old when I met her at a dance in England. In those days because of the curfew, lights went out early. I was at the dance with another soldier and we each asked one of the English girls to dance. Eventually Doris and I were dating and then I asked her to marry me. Doris was one of the roughly 85,000 English War Brides. We have been married for 67 years and had four sons together. We have had a very good life together."

What medals did you receive from your service?

"I received the American Campaign Medal, the European Campaign Medal, two Bronx Stars and two Silver Stars, the WWII Victory Medal and the Good Conduct Medal. I also received four overseas bars for the time I spent in Europe. We had supported the Ploesti Air Raid when our bombers took out the oil fields of Nazi-controlled Ploesti, Romania."

When did you come home from the War?

"I came home in 1945 but I couldn't bring Doris with me and she had to follow on a ship with our firstborn child. It was a long journey by boat and after many days, I borrowed the

car from my mother and drove down to NYC in an ice storm to finally pick her and the baby up "

What did you do after the War?

"Well for 28 years I worked in the floor covering business working with carpet and tile. Then I began wood working and making cabinets and such for the Mahopac School District."

Arcuri now serves as the VFW Post 1161 Chaplain and has been a member for many years. He and Doris still reside in the Hudson Valley.

The VFW Post 1161 meets every third Friday of every month in the City of Newburgh Post 973 Bldg. The meetings begin at 1:00 pm. They are recruiting for new members and offer many benefits, call for details.