

Anthony Calcasola
Narrator

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New York State Military Museum
Interviewer

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Anthony Calcasola AC
Wayne Clarke WC

WC: Would you please state your full name and date and place of birth?

AC: Anthony Calcasola. I was born in Thompsonville, Connecticut or they called it Enfield, I think that's right. It's Enfield, Connecticut. The year that I was born was 1920.

WC: Did you attend school there?

AC: Oh yes, not in Connecticut. I attended school in New York City.

WC: Did you attend high school in New York City?

AC: I was in the beginning of high school and I had to leave to go to work.

WC: Do you remember where you were when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

AC: Oh yes, I remember it very clearly. We were playing cards in my room when it came over the radio at that time. Well, that's where we were when it came over that Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. I remember it very well.

WC: When did you go into the service?

AC: I went into the service April 14, 1946.

WC: Did you go in before the war?

AC: No, it was after.

WC: Oh, you went in after the war.

AC: No, it was during the war.

WC: Oh, during the war.

AC: During the war.

WC: Okay, because the war ended in 1945.

AC: Right, I went there... well, I was in the army for three... in the middle of three years.

WC: Okay, during the war.

AC: During the war.

WC: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

AC: No, I was drafted.

WC: You were drafted into the army?

AC: Yes.

WC: Where did you go for your basic training?

AC: It was Fort Lee, Virginia.

WC: Was that your first time away from home?

AC: Yes.

WC: What was basic training like?

AC: Oh, It was just a routine... marches, doing all kinds of crazy things. It came in handy when I was putting Infantry.

WC: Once you finished your basic training, did you go on to an Infantry school? Any other schools?

AC: No, it was an Infantry school all the way. That's what it was. I went from there and they moved me to...I went to Europe.

WC: How did you get over to Europe? Did you go by ship or by plane?

AC: I got there by ship. I went over on the Queen Mary and I came home on the Queen Elizabeth. But the war wasn't over then. When I came home on the Queen Elizabeth, it was for me to go on a furlough for thirty days and then go to Japan. The war in Japan was still going on. We were the first group. We came over on the Queen Mary.

WC: What was that like?

AC: The whole division was on the Queen Mary.

WC: So you didn't have your own room?

AC: Oh, no. We were like sardines, quite about a thousand people.

WC: Did you get sick at all?

AC: I got sick going to because when the war ended, we were in up Austria, right on the Italian boarder. The war ended the day we hit the Italian border in the Alps and well, thank God the war ended there. We stood there for about a couple of weeks, something like that. Before you know it they decided that my division was going to be the first to go into combat as the whole division. As a matter of fact, the boat was filled with all of our troops, about 15,000 troops and we came home. Believe me, it was a pleasure to be home. We were home for eighteen days...we were home for a month. From there we were going to Japan. What happened while we were home was that the war in Japan ended.

WC: That must've been a relief.

AC: Oh, was it!

WC: Was there a lot of celebration?

AC: Oh, gosh you know. Thank god we all got home safe. From there of course, we had to stay in Texas for quite a while, maybe about six to seven months. After that they decided to send me home, so it worked out pretty good for me.

WC: Now going back to when you first went to Europe, you went across on the Queen Mary?

AC: Yeah, that's it!

WC: Whereabouts did you land?

AC: We landed in England. Oh, it was before England. What is it?

WC: Oh, Scotland?

AC: Yeah, Scotland because the ship couldn't go anywhere else. From there we landed in Scotland and we took a train all through England and we went over the river. We had to go on a boat to get over the river. The first place we landed was... well we went through France.

WC: Did you get over there after D-Day or before D-Day?

AC: Well, it was after... you got me confused now. Well the war was still going on and we just came after the war was started. The war was well started. Of course the first place we battled with my division... we were in France. Let me see... we went to England and then we crossed the channel into France and from there we were catching hell. From there we went to war, most of it was in France.

WC: So you were with the 44th Division?

AC: I was with the 44th Division, right!

WC: Do you remember the first time you were in combat?

AC: Sure!

WC: What was that like?

AC: [Laughter] It wasn't good. First of all, we were so tired when we crossed the English Channel. We had to cross the English Channel because that was the only place we could get there. There were so many ships sunk at sea, that they just put us on smaller boat. Oh my God, I remember we were sick as dogs. The ship just was going like this. When we did get off, we were in France. From France, well, from there we started getting... we went to Germany...wait, let me get myself straightened out here. It was tough all the way down. We went to all the way down France... well of course we went through England then we went to France... My mind is a little foggy.

WC: Oh, no! That's fine. Take your time.

AC: This is what we got because... well, we didn't get to that part yet... but anyway, go ahead.

WC: Did you spend any time in Belgium or Holland?

AC: We were right near Belgium and Holland, but then we made a right into... the next spot we went into...well, let me see.

WC: Tell me about the Battle of the Bulge.

AC: The Battle of the Bulge, we won! Well, as a matter of fact we got a special... I think it was this here. [Points to photograph] First of all, we were not up there. Let me tell you what they did. I was in the 44th Infantry division and we were going down into... well the next country was... anyway let me tell you what happened. They got stuck. We were losing the war up where they had the Battle of the Bulge. We were the first...they took us off my division. They took my company that was the 114th regiment. They took us out of there and sent us right up there in the battle. We called it the battle. [Shows photograph] This is it right over here. I brought the picture, and what we did was... lets put it this way, we broke the line. My company, the ones who were there, we got an award for being the division who broke the ice. We got a picture of it! And you know, my grandson, I told you my grandson works at the pentagon. [Shows calendar with photographs] He made this book up for me; this is where we went. All I know is that we never thought we would get out of there alive. But we really fooled them! It just so happened that we broke their line. They ran out of ammunition, and they couldn't go any further. My division was the one who got one of the biggest awards in combat. The only way I can tell it to you was that it was the happiest day of our lives. [Points to photograph] This is what my grandson had showed us. This was years after what had happened. He said, "You know we have a record of that right here [At the pentagon]." [Points to photograph] Well, you have to start from here. This was my division, the 44th. This is one that the Germans... you know what they were doing... this here. What had happened was we were in foxholes, and this was on that line that we were talking about. What happened was it was, it New Years Eve and the Germans... do you know what happened here?

WC: No

AC: [Shows photograph] These Germans, they start... we were in foxholes on the line and what happened was, they started jumping off the planes with parachutes. They were so drunk they kept hollering, "Yankee Bastards, we'll fix you!" We were just shooting them out of the air; we were killing them as they were coming down. As I said, they were all drunk and they thought they had us beat, and believe me we were the ones who got the big award from the president for stopping whole thing. After that, the war... from there on the war had started. We were going down back to where we belong. They were getting a new division and from then on, the Germans started running out of ammunition and everything. Good lord it was... well, lets put it this way, it was the craziest things I have seen in my life. After that they were using, well they were desperate, they didn't have lead for the bullets, so they were using wood.

WC: Really?

AC: A lot of people don't know that! I wanted to take some home. It was a regular pellet, but do you know what was in that bullet? It was hard wood soaked in poison. I will never forget the first time that we had this. We had to go to the black forest in Germany before we went to Austria. I'm a little confused on that.

WC: That's alright!

AC: It was very difficult to go through the whole thing. We had to go to a place called the black forest, which was down of course. What happened was... that was an experience in itself. I've never seen anything like it. I used to see the cows and the horses, things like that. They were going crazy! What had happened was, they told us these bullets were in machine guns and when they shot it, instead of lead it was wood, poisoned wood. It was a purplish color. You have to realize we were in a forest, the black forest, I remember it distinctly. When it used to hit the tree, usually, we knew the sounds and where the bullets were going go, but since we were in the forest, it was terrible.

WC: Were you in the Hürtgen forest too?

AC: No, they called it the black forest.

WC: Just the black forest? Okay.

AC: The bullets used to hit the trees, and not only that, the wood splintered. The bullet didn't kill you. The pieces of wood that would come off the tree would hit you in the back. We couldn't judge anymore because we couldn't tell where the bullets were going to land. It was an experience. Anyway, to make a long story short, they ran out of ammunition and those were the bullets they were firing at us. It was a regular German bullet, but the only thing is that they were purple and they were poisoned. It was very bad for us because they didn't know. What you could do? We lost a lot of people. We lost a lot of [unclear] there.

WC: Now where were you when the war ended?

AC: When the war ended, well... from there we went... into Germany. We were still in Germany.

WC: You were in Vienna, Right?

AC: Yeah, let me tell you where we were. [Shows book] I have this because I met a woman in my church, who had came from Germany. What happened was, she... we took this city called the first [unclear]. This was on the borderline of Germany and Austria. This was a beautiful village. We had seen a catholic church there and we had not seen any catholic churches in all of Germany. But we had seen a catholic church so we went down there and well, I'm sorry we went. They instructed us not to go in there, but we were a group of 5-10 Catholics and we said let's go to mass. When we went in I really felt terribly sorry because of what had happened. They were having a mass and people were all quiet. I saw that they had a wall like we have in my church, with pictures of the German soldiers who died. The mothers and fathers were there and then they saw us walking in with our guns and rifles, we were very sorry that we went in. But whom do I meet in the Nights of Columbus...not the Nights of Columbus, over here in my church. You see, I take care of my church, my God knows that. I don't remember her name, but it's the woman whose husband is a very handy guy who does a lot of work for us.

Unknown Speaker: You told me she went to the same church in Germany that you had gone to.

AC: She was born there and lived there. Today she's my best friend because it was the most embarrassing thing that we had ever did. [Shows book] That was a real experience and right after that... well, this is why my book is this way because when I did find her she said, "Oh my goodness Tony, I did not know that." So, I said I got the book. This is why it's so beat up; she's been reshoving this book to everybody because it's got a million pictures. Most of it is from where they came from. But anyway, we got up to... as far as... we went into Austria. You can see the war was coming to an end, and we weren't getting any more bullets or anything like that. As we were going through Austria, we hit the Italian border. The day we hit the Italian border the war ended, and of course I was very happy. [Laughter]

WC: Was there a lot of celebrations?

AC: There weren't many celebrations. There wasn't a heck of a lot of us there. Believe me, it was no celebration. We couldn't believe what was going on. Lo and behold that was it, my friend. I cried and that's it.

WC: There were photographs of you inside that book, correct?

AC: Oh yes! [Holds up photographs]

WC: Is this you here?

AC: Yes! Let me see, I think I have another one in here. [Points to photograph] General Jean, he was a good guy.

WC: Now is this you here?

AC: Yeah! That's me! [Laughter]

WC: Do you remember where that was taken?

AC: Oh yes, that was taken in...this was before I had just gotten into the army, around 1946.

WC: Now this other photograph, this is you here too, right? I can see you're wearing the combat infantry badge in that picture.

AC: [Points to photograph] Oh yes that was when we always carried them.

WC: Very nice! So the war ended in Europe?

AC: The war ended in Europe, and we were the first division that was going to Japan.

WC: So you came back home on the Queen Elizabeth?

AC: Yes, we stood there about a month and then from there they told us our division was picked to go to Japan. What they were going to do was bring us home first and stay there thirty days and then we pick up the ship to go to Japan. Naturally, I was glad to be home but the thought going back [Shakes head]. I'll never forget we went to Lindenhurst to see my brother and stay the night. While we were out there, the war ended. Oh God, I'm going to cry, it was just something. But anyway, we were alive and we just thank God.

WC: Once you got out of the service, did you make use of the GI Bill? Did you go back to school or did you go to work right away?

AC: Well, I took a year off. I couldn't, I was in really bad shape. They wanted me to go to the hospital because my feet were froze a little bit, but I said, "Look, I don't want to stay here."

WC: Were you wounded at all?

AC: No, the only thing I had was frozen feet. Like I said, they wanted me to go to the hospital and I said, "Forget about it, I'm going home!" I got... I forget what they called it now, but I got a special band because we won the war. They took my thing out and put us up there. But anyway, it was the line that was broken, what can I tell you. They gave us this special award with a blue ribbon.

WC: Oh, it was a presidential citation!

AC: I got it right here! I have a picture of it, the presidential citation. It was only our company, our reason that went there. It was the only one that you put on this side, it's a blue gold ribbon, and they call it a presidential citation. We all got that, my whole company because we took over that day. [Shows document] Believe me this is one of the things...you know this is president Harry Truman. He gave each one of us one of these who went there.

WC: The war ended and you became a civilian again. Who did you go to work for?

AC: I stood away for a whole year. I was a wreck, just a wreck. I couldn't sleep. My wife said I was screaming looking for my rifle. It was a hard life being in the Infantry. It was a hard life. It's nothing you could explain and I hope no one goes there, my friend.

WC: Whom did you work for?

AC: I worked for Cerro Wire and Cable Company. They're no longer here. They moved to one of those places out in...I don't know where it was. They wanted me to go there.

WC: How many years did you work for them?

AC: I worked for them a quite a number of years.

WC: Did you retire there?

AC: No, I didn't retire there. I was still in the electrical union, where I could get a good pension.

WC: How do you think the time in the service changed or affected your life?

AC: Well, I will never see anything like it. Being in the war is not easy, but anyway, I'm 90 years old, I'm not going to complain.

WC: Now, do you belong to the American Legion?

AC: I belong to the American Legion. I've belonged for 22 years, but I belonged to the American Legion in Brooklyn before I came here. So, believe me its got to be over 50 years if you combine the two. I belong to the Knights of Columbus also, that is a Catholic Organization.

WC: Did you stay in contact with any of the people you were in the service with?

AC: Oh sure! We're almost all gone, but there's still one or two who are still with me. One of them just lost his wife, but he's up in the eighties like I am too. But it was a tough life.

WC: Thank you so much for your interview.

AC: Thank you, it brought back a lot of memories!