

Bianca Giangregorio Anthon
First Lieutenant, Army Nurse Corps.
Narrator

Ricky Picarro, Interviewer
Hudson Falls H.S. Hudson Falls, NY

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Mr. Lance Bull's Residence

RT: What is your full name?

BGA: Bianca Anthon ... I did not serve under that name.

RT: No?

BGA: No.

RT: What was the name that you serve under?

BGA: My maiden name. I hate to tell you this, but it's Giangregorio. [Laughs and spells out name.]

RT: Where and when were you born?

BGA: I was born in Italy on Dec 18, 1921

RT: What was your education before service?

BGA: I graduated from Watertown High School, and then three years of nursing school.

RT: Did you always want to be a nurse?

BGA: No. I wanted to be a doctor, but in those days they did not take many women.

RT: Did you have any pre-war occupation?

BGA: Yes. I worked at Mercy Hospital doing general duty and then someone offered me a job for seventy-five dollars per month.

RT: Wow! That was a lot of money back then.

BGA: Yes. That was a lot of money then. It was a TB sanitarium and I stayed there a whole year until I enlisted.

RT: Is there any particular reason for enlisting?

BGA: Everybody else was going. I had two brothers that were serving and I thought if they get hurt, I want someone to take care of them.

RT: Do you recall the event of Pearl Harbor? Do you remember where you were?

BGA: I sure do. I was a student nurse and I was sitting doing my homework and it came over the radio—the girls had the radio on—and we just looked at each other and said, “Where is Pearl Harbor?” We didn't even know it was part of Hawaii. It was a shock to all of us.

RT: And where were you?

BGA: Right in my room at Mercy Hospital—studying for an anatomy test.

RT: Was it on that day when you heard it?

BGA: The next morning.

RT: So it was not widely televised? [Broadcast]

BGA: Oh, yes! There were no televisions then, but it was on the radio constantly.

RT: What was your reaction? Were you angry?

BGA: Shocked.

RT: Surprised that anyone could attack the US? A lot of people thought it could not happen back then, right?

BGA: We didn't know what to make of it, really. I don't think we realized the immensity of it.

RT: Right. When did you enter the service?

BGA: In June of 1944. I got through training in 1943, worked for a year, and then I enlisted.

RT: So you enlisted and were not part of the draft?

BGA: No.

RT: Okay.

BGA: Nurses were not drafted—you had to volunteer. You had to be a member of the Red Cross before you could enlist.

RT: And you chose the nurse corps because you wanted to help people like your brothers and the Army—right?

BGA: Yes. If they got hurt, I'd want someone to take care of them.

RT: Where did you receive basic training?

BGA: Atlantic City, NJ

RT: Do you have any feelings or experiences [to share] about how basic training was?

BGA: It was hard [laughs] but it certainly prepared us for what we were going to go through. The one thing I remember was they had us climb up this ladder on a cement block and they had a rowboat below us with a rope ladder. That's what sticks in my mind. We were so lucky that they had us do that because it's kind of tricky on a rope ladder to descend into a boat on water. It was a good thing they did [train us] because that's what we had to do.

RT: So did you enjoy basic training or was it really rough?

BGA: It was rough. I'm only five feet tall and I had to scale a six-foot wall. [Laughs]

RT: Wow.

BGA: Yes. They put us through quite a rigorous...

RT: Even the nurses and all of the women—they trained you the same as the men?

BGA: Just about. We had to crawl to go under barbed wire. I know my brothers had to go crawling with machine gun fire going over their heads.

RT: Do you have any friends that you met while in basic training?

BGA: Several of the girls from Mercy [hospital] were there, believe it or not. In fact, my roommate and I enlisted together and we stayed together the whole time.

RT: Did any of you meet up while you were over in Europe?

BGA: Well, she [roommate] was with me; during basic we saw each other every day. I met my brother on a street of Paris. I had two days leave to go to Paris from Reims and we're walking along the Chans de Lise and this GI grabs me and I thought, what is wrong with him? He had a helmet on and I couldn't see his face—it was my brother!

RT: And you didn't even know it?

BGA: No. He was trying to find out where I was stationed—and I didn't know where he was either. [Laughter]

RT: And your dates of service were from June 1944 to March 1946. Did you enjoy the time you spent in the Army?

BGA: It was an experience, let's put it that way. I can't say it was all enjoyment—we worked very hard. We worked from seven in the morning until seven at night, or from seven at night until seven in the morning, in twelve-hour shifts.

RT: Non-stop?

BGA: Non-stop. [Nods]

RT: And your specific training was just nursing, right?

BGA: Yes.

RT: What was your unit?

BGA: The 178th General Hospital.

RT: Were you assigned to any certain ship before you went over?

BGA: No.

RT: And you were in the European Theatre?

BGA: The European Theatre [Nodding]. We left right from N.Y. I was stationed at Fort Jay Governors Island. It was October when we went over. We were put in trucks and taken to a dock, and the ship was there waiting for us.

RT: Now you say that you were just in the European Theatre, so does that mean when the war ended [in Europe] you weren't sent to the Pacific Theatre to help?

BGA: We volunteered for the CBI —The China-Burma-India Theatre— but they dropped the bomb in June that year and did not send us there. I ended up in Austria for occupation with the Third Army—Patton's Army.

RT: Do you have any experiences with that you can recall?

BGA: No. It was peacetime then; it was after the war was over.

RT: How were the citizens? Were they grateful that you were there?

BGA: Yes.

RT: There were no negative reactions?

BGA: No.

RT: Were you in any major battles?

BGA: I have one battle scar from the Ardennes Forest...

RT: The Battle of the Bulge?

BGA: Yes. The Battle of the Bulge—right.

RT: Can you describe what that was like?

BGA: We were a thousand-bed hospital and we had one hundred nurses, so that meant you had one hundred patients to each nurse—with two corpsmen. [Lesser number of nurses working each shift with rotating time/days off, perhaps.]

RT: Wow.

BGA: We would have to do triage every morning because the trains would come in with maybe a thousand men wounded. A thousand would have to go out and a thousand came in. Sometimes we didn't even have enough beds—we 'd have to put them on litters on the floor.

RT: Because it was so crowded?

BGA: Yes. We were getting them right from the battlefield—some of them were still in their uniforms.

RT: Kind of chaotic and grotesque, huh?

BGA: Shrapnel wounds. [Nodding]

RT: Mostly from artillery fire?

BGA: Mostly the German eighty-eights. *What were you wounded with? The German eighty-eights.* [Typical triage question & answer.]

RT: That was the common...

BGA: Yes.

RT: Was there ever a time when people were coming in that you felt overwhelmed or like you could not keep going on?

BGA: No. We were young and foolish, and we had a lot of energy. [Chuckling] And, boy! They had prepared us! We spent two months in England before we went and we had to march every day—five mile hikes—so we were in pretty healthy shape when we got to France. We couldn't land in France, you know?

RT: No?

BGA: We were supposed to have gone to Cherbourg—which is another city—and the ships were sunken. So many ships were sunk and they couldn't get near the dock.

RT: After crossing the channel?

BGA: Yes. After crossing the channel from England. First of all, we could not get near the dock because of the sunken ships, so we went near La Harve—which is another seaport. Even there they could not get near the dock, so we had to go over the side of the ship into a landing barge and they took us to the beach—you know—our infantry. It was a little place called Étretat on the coast of France. I think what they were afraid of was planes coming over...

RT: And bombing?

BGA: Yes. They did it at midnight—in the dark.

RT: Was this the German Luftwaffe?

BGA: Yes—coming over. Yes.

RT: So that was the final port where you landed and got off your ships?

BGA: Yes. The landing barge landed with such force on the beach that one of the doctors fell and broke his arm, so that was our first casualty. [Laughter]

RT: So right when you got off the boat you had to tend to someone, huh? [More laughter.] What was it like crossing and then getting off the ship—finally hitting land?

BGA: Kind of scary.

BT: Were you nervous or excited?

BGA: Hay! We were tired! You had to have your full pack—your helmet, which is very heavy over the liner, and your pistol belt with a canteen. You know, we were not very big. I was like a hundred twenty pounds and you had all this equipment—your blanket,

everything—on you. We stood in line for about two hours before we had the signal to go, and each one of us had to go over the side of the ship.

BT: They equipped everyone—even the nurses—with pistols?

BGA: No pistols, but we had a pistol *belt* to carry first aid and the canteen.

BT: Okay. I see. Now you said that your brothers were also in the service. Do you know where they were stationed at any times?

BGA: Yes. My brother was in the same outfit as my husband; they were in field artillery. They crossed all the way from D-Day beach to Czechoslovakia—my husband ended up with my brother.

BT: Did you meet your husband in the service?

BGA: I met him before the service.

BT: So were you married before you both enlisted?

BGA: I had met him *only*, then dated him for awhile. He left at the same time my brother did—for service—which was over a year before. Then I saw my boyfriend—*at the time, my boyfriend*—once in Europe after the war was over. [Chuckle] They had a place called Marmalong. It was like a repo depot—they called it—where all the troops would be sent to go home when they were ready. My brother was there—and my *to be* husband came—and another friend of mine from New York. They all came to the hospital because we were only ten miles from Marmalong where they were stationed, so they said goodbye to me and took off.

BT: Do you recall any other times during the war where you met up with your boyfriend or your other brothers?

BGA: No.

BT: Those were the only times?

BGA: Yes.

BT: What did your husband do?

BGA: Field artillery. He was—let me think—ammunition.

BT: And he was in the Battle of the Bulge also?

BGA: Yes. He received five battle stars through Europe.

BT: Now, during the Battle of the Bulge you said you were attending at hospitals. Were you ever in a front line hospital?

BGA: Well, we were getting them with their uniforms on and artillery was going over our head—that's how far back the Germans had broken through.

BT: Did you ever have to pick up your hospital or just move it?

BGA: No.

BT: You were always stationed...

BGA: Yes. This was a general hospital. It was supposed to be way back from the front lines, but they didn't expect the Germans to break through.

BT: Right. When the Germans were firing artillery, were there any that landed close to the hospital, or was it always just going overhead?

BGA: No. They never got us with any direct hit or anything. We just heard our own artillery going over.

BT: The howitzers?

BGA: [Nods affirmative]

BT: Did you have any certain feelings about combat?

BGA: You know, when the planes came we had to take care of the patients. Anybody that could walk had to go down to the basement; they would be taken down by one of the nurses. Then one of us would have to stay with the rest. We'd have to put them—even if they could not walk or anything—we'd have to pick them up and put them under the bed with the mattress on top of them in case the bomb would hit. Thankfully, it never did.

BT: So, being that there were a lot of men at the hospital you were at, it was kind of chaotic?

BGA: No. It was well planned and carried out.

BT: Now you said that you received a battle star. Do you have any other medals or citations?

BGA: I guess the state gave us a citation—I don't know. I don't pay much attention to those things. [Laughter]

BT: And why did you receive these?

BGA: The state, I believe, gave us a citation for service—and discharge, I guess.

BT: You received battle stars for being in battles?

BGA: Because we were in the *area* where there was a battle.

BT: Were you able to keep in touch with your family at home, or with any of your friends?

BGA: Yes. We wrote “V-Mail,” they called it. Little letters that I guess they photographed and sent. In fact, we had to censor some of the enlisted men's letters every day.

BT: How often would you write home?

BGA: Probably once a week.

BT: Was it heavily censored at the time because of the war?

BGA: Yes. That was part of our duty. We had to censor the patient's letters before they could mail them out.

BT: Were the nurses' letters censored too?

BGA: No. Not ours—but the enlisted personnel. They gave it as part of your duties during the week—after you got off work. [Laughter]

BT: Can you recall what the food was like? C-rations?

BGA: It was basic. It was pretty bad—K-rations and C-rations—but at Atlantic City we were stationed at a hotel, and it was okay there. The ship was pretty bad; we had meals only six in the morning and six at night. The one thing I can still remember was the breakfast—stewed kidney for breakfast. It was horrible. [Laughter]

BT: Do you remember the supplies that came in?

BGA: Supplies?

BT: For the soldiers? For you guys at the hospital? Ammunition? Food supplies?

BGA: Yes. Everything was always coming in and out, but I didn't do any work for that.

BT: Right. Were there always trucks on the move?

BGA: Yes.

BT: So there were always people moving. Was there ever a time of day or night when everything was stopped?

BGA: No—not really. Even after the war we had a lot of displaced people coming through that were ill or migrated from the concentration camps. Some of those patients came through after the war.

BT: They came through your hospitals?

BGA: [Nods affirmative]

BT: What was that like—seeing these people?

BGA: Well—for one thing—you had to delouse them.

BT: What's that?

BGA: They had to put stuff on to get rid of lice. And they had nothing. People just walking around with the clothes on their backs—displaced from homes that were bombed out.

BT: So was it kind of ghastly to see these people? Were they like walking figurines of ghosts?

BGA: Yes, it was. You felt a lot of empathy for them. I couldn't sympathize with them because I didn't do that.

BT: Were you ever wounded or hurt in any way during your time of service?

BGA: I had a tooth pulled, but that's about it—my wisdom tooth. And I went to work the next day too. [Laughing]

BT: They never gave you a day off?

BGA: Well, she was surprised I was on duty. The chief nurse checked and said, “Are you okay?” And I said, “Yeah, I'm okay.”

BT: Was there anything going through your mind...at the hospital? Did anything keep running through your mind over and over? [Someone in background coughed loudly during the first part of this question making it hard to hear.]

BGA: Some of the patients were real—ya know—bad cases. You remember a lot of them. I don't remember their names, but I remember them.

BT: Did a lot of the patients have battlefield fatigue? [Best guess. Someone coughed loudly in background again making it hard to hear the question.]

BGA: Oh, yea. I've seen shrapnel in every part of a man's body, just about. And we had sulfa that we had to give out to prevent infection—and penicillin later on when penicillin was first starting to be used.

BT: Right. Can you recall any people who cracked on the front line and came back and kind of went crazy and lost their mind and they couldn't send them back?

BGA: Nope. I don't remember because most of the GIs—if they weren't badly wounded or if it meant just a few days—we would take care of them and send them right back to duty. If it was over days, then you had to ship them out.

BT: Right.

BGA: Triage went on almost every day.

BT: Do you recall any cases of self-inflicted wounds that you had to deal with?

BGA: After the war.

BT: After the war?

BGA: A lot of them didn't want to go to the Pacific and, yeah—we had toes shot off...
[Nodding]

BT: They'd do anything to get out of the war...

BGA: Yes, so they wouldn't have to go—and I don't blame them.

BT: Do you have any most memorable experiences in the war?

BGA: Ah, what can I tell you? Patients. Patients. I worked in almost every part of the hospital; they sent you wherever you were needed. I was in the shock ward—and the ear, nose and throat. I've seen paratroopers that came down and branches of trees went through them when they landed; eye injuries and everywhere. Unbelievable! Even after the war we had accidents and stuff happening, so we still had patients galore.

BT: So after the combat was over, you guys were still pretty busy?

BGA: Yes, we still were.

BT: When you were away from the patients and everything, did you get a chance to sit down and talk with your buddies and friends?

BGA: I went to one reunion—the 178th had a reunion. That's about all. No, we've never gotten together.

BT: Did your families know your whereabouts and what you were doing...back at home?

BGA: No. We weren't allowed to tell them anything—where you were, especially.

BT: How were they about the war being that you were absent and they knew you were there?

BGA: My mother had three of us in.

BT: So she was kind of nerve-wracked.

BGA: I saved my oldest brother from going in, really. He was married and had two children, and still they would have drafted him if I hadn't gone in. Because he would be the only son left, they didn't draft him.

BT: Did you see any of our commanders? Our high...

BGA: Eisenhower.

BT: Really?

BGA: Yes. I marched in the V-E Day parade—May 6, 1945. That was held in Reims. I worked all night and then had to march in that parade all day. [Laughs]

BT: So you actually took part in the V-E Day parade.

BGA: Yes, I did!

BT: So instead of hearing about it, you were part of it.

BGA: [Nods affirmative]

BT: So what were your feelings about V-E Day?

BGA: I guess we were all glad.

BT: Did you see any other commanders or high ranked officers in the field besides Eisenhower?

BGA: After the war they wanted nurses to go to this big dinner party that General Mark Clark was giving at his headquarters. This was in Austria—it was like a castle that we went into. There were several high-ranking people there, but I couldn't tell you all their names now.

BT: Right. Did you have any motivation throughout the war to keep you going?

BGA: Nope. I just wanted to go home. [Laughing]

BT: And were there any times you just felt like giving up because...

BGA: No.

BT: So you always kept going—looking forward?

BGA: Yes.

BT: Although it was a time of war, do you recall any time of being happy or have happy recollections?

BGA: Yeah. I was happy most of the time. I don't think it worried us that much. We just did our work, and that was it.

BT: Were there any special events that you got to do?

BGA: They sent us for a week—this was after the war was over in Europe, anyway—we got to go to the Riviera.

BT: The French Riviera?

BGA: Yes. The French Riviera—in a city called Juan-les-Pins. It's between Nice and...I can't think of the other city now. It was beautiful there. There was a place called Eden Roc and I believe the Duke and Duchess of Windsor used to go there—and they had it for us to go swim there. Overlooking from Eden Roc—which was way up high—you could look down and see Monaco.

BT: Do you recall any other experiences while in the French Riviera for the week?

BGA: We had a good time—a real good time. [Laughs] We had real waiters and dining rooms. You could go to any hotel on the Riviera and eat wherever you wanted to—it was almost like restaurants.

BT: Being that you were in the Battle of the Bulge and the Germans infiltrated the American lines and they came eighty miles into our front, how close did you actually come to the enemy?

BGA: I had prisoners of war.

BT: Really?

BGA: Yes. I worked on one of the wards where we had a whole ward full of them that had to be taken care of.

BT: So you guys took care of the prisoners?

BGA: Yes.

BT: Did you ever get the chance to talk to any of them?

BGA: No, because most of them only spoke German. I learned a few words...

BT: Right. What were their reactions toward you?

BGA: You didn't get much reaction. [Shrugs] This is interesting—a Russian pilot came in our hospital. He had bailed out on fire and was badly burned. His hands—fingers—were all clunked together. He had no eyelids, and came to us to have plastic surgery. His eyesight would have gone if we didn't make a lid for him—and so that's what the doctors were doing.

BT: So you guys had to take care of him?

BGA: [Nod] He was very young and he couldn't speak any English—scared. He used to tear his bandages off—I don't know why, but he did sometimes.

BT: Was he screaming in the process or...

BGA: I guess he thought we were torturing him or something. I don't know because no one spoke Russian and we couldn't make him understand anything.

BT: How do you feel about the enemy today? Like the Germans or Japanese—do you have any regards to them?

BGA: Not really. I'm sure they did what they did when they had to do it—and we did the same thing.

BT: Did you feel any different when you were in the war?

BGA: Sort of—you were wary of any place you went or anything you did. Your contact with the civilians wasn't that great because we lived right there at the hospital. You just had to go across a walkway and you were at your rooms. I did go into Reims—I saw the Reims Cathedral.

BT: Was that beautiful?

BGA: Oh, yes. Notre Dame...

BT: Notre Dame?

BGA: Yes. It's even more beautiful! The Notre Dame Cathedral is sort of [squatty ?] gothic but the other one is all spirals.

BT: I actually got to see that last year.

BGA: Did you?

BT: I went to France with my school last year.

BGA: So you've been in Reims?

BT: Yes. Reims—Paris. It's really beautiful.

BGA: We were way up at the top of the Reims Cathedral and we could actually see a flyer in a P-38 go by and wave to us. That's how close he was.

BT: That's neat. You could actually see the pilot in the plane?

BGA: Yes. [Laughing]

BT: That's cool. How do you feel about your military experiences?

BGA: How do I feel? [Shrugs—Pause] Sometimes I think how sad it was. [Holding back tears.] Here I am...cheer me up. It was sad to see so many young men... I don't think anybody wins in a war. Certainly not the enemy—and not the people who are doing it or anything. I just feel bad that there has to be any kind of a war.

BT: It's a terrible thing. There's always going to be a tremendous loss of life, so how did you deal with it and not let it affect you?

BGA: You got hardened to it—you had to help them. I don't think that today I could do what I did when I was young.

BT: It took a lot of guts, huh?

BGA: It did. It really did. [Nods as she wipes away tears]

BT: Do you find it hard to watch documentaries on the war today? Does it bring back a lot of upsetting memories?

BGA: Yes. It does. I mean, I was only a nurse—my sympathy was with the GI in the field. In fact, that's how my husband got to be a sergeant. The sergeant in charge of ammunition was machine-gunned down and he took his place.

BT: Did your husband have a lot of exciting moments or experiences?

BGA: Oh, yes. I wish he were here to tell you. They even had to be careful... In the Ardennes, our own planes bombed them. Would you believe that?

BT: Yeah, friendly fire.

BGA: Yes. They didn't do it on purpose, of course. He always told the story ... They were sitting there having their meal—K-rations—and you sit on your helmet, usually, but I guess he must have been sitting on a tree or a log or something. All of a sudden the planes came over and were dropping bombs—which they didn't expect at all. He got up in such a hurry that he put his mess kit—with beans on it—on his head, and ran. Then, he sees the helmet on the ground and he's thinking, *what fool didn't take his helmet?* And it was his own helmet that he hadn't picked up! [Laughter]

BT: So he put his food all over his head? [Laughing]

BGA: Yes. And it was a while before he realized it—the beans were coming down his face. [More laughter]

BT: I guess in times when things are going on you don't think—you just do. Right?

BGA: Yes. Like you say, we were very naïve. Even on the ship... I used to think we were dumping garbage pails over the side. These big green—they looked like garbage pails to me—and we'd stand there at the rail of the ship watching them dumping. And I was telling my husband about it and he said, "What are you talking about? They don't dump garbage over the side of the ship." I said, "Well they were big green pails." He said, "Those are depth charges for the submarines." I didn't even realize it. We didn't even think about it—young and foolish.

BT: Were your husband or brothers ever wounded in war?

BGA: No. We were very lucky. My other brother was in the Air Corps: China-Burma-India. I'm not too familiar, but he was part of the crew.

BT: A B-29er?

BGA: I think so.

BT: Okay. I didn't know if he was a fighter pilot or something?

BGA: Oh, no. He was part of the crew. He was a sergeant.

BT: How long did your husband serve in the military?

BGA: He stayed in—he re-enlisted. When he got home from the European war, his job had been taken. Someone had the job and he didn't feel like demanding it back and he

didn't know what to do, so the next thing—he re-enlisted. He didn't want to go into the Army again because he was tired of digging foxholes, so he enlisted in the Air Corps.

BT: Was he wounded in the Korean War?

BGA: No. The only time was in Europe when a tracer bullet hit his thigh, but he never put in for it, so he never got a Purple Heart or anything.

BT: It probably didn't really mean that much to him.

BGA: No. It was just a flesh wound.

BT: Do you remember where you were when the war ended?

BGA: Yes—on duty at the 178th.

BT: So you were at the hospital?

BGA: Yes.

BT: Can you describe how you felt?

BGA: I think I was on night duty—yes! I was on night duty because I had to go to the parade the next day. You know, officers get this liquor ration every month—a bottle of gin. I didn't drink it—I hated the stuff—so I brought it to the ward I was on and they got these little glasses and gave each GI a shot...to celebrate. [Laughter]

BT: Were you aware of the concentration camps and everything the Germans were doing at the time during the war?

BGA: Not to the extent that I know about them now, but I had a prisoner of war that came through—a young boy. I was on night duty and he'd be up at 4:00AM walking the halls and I said, "Why can't you sleep?" He said, "Because I'm afraid the dogs may come." And I said, "What dogs? We don't have dogs." And that's when he told me the story about how they used to wake them up when they were in the camps—and if they didn't get up, the dogs would bite them.

BT: And these were German Shepherds, or mean dogs?

BGA: That's what he told me. [Nods]

BT: What was your reaction to hear these stories and to find out about the concentration camps?

BGA: I couldn't believe it—it was too horrible. It's hard to accept a man's inhumanity to another man. I still can't accept it.

BT: Right. I mean, how can one person do this to other people?

BGA: Right.

BT: Could the people that came in from other concentration camps speak English?

BGA: Not all of them, but quite a few of our own men came through that needed help—and some civilians too.

BT: Were you ever able to get stories from concentration camp survivors aside from that young boy?

BGA: No—not really. Most people didn't talk too much.

BT: Did you get anymore stories out of the young boy that told you about the dogs?

BGA: No, because he shipped out. We didn't keep them too long because we were still getting a lot of patients.

BT: Did you have any specific feeling about Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb?

BGA: I didn't know enough about it at the time to even have any feelings about it. I don't believe we should have ever used it—now knowing the consequences of it. I don't think any of us realized what it was at the time it was used.

BT: Right. Would you have rather we invaded Japan instead of dropping the atomic bombs?

BGA: I think they were ready to surrender. If they had listened to General MacArthur it would not have happened. They could have starved all those men on those islands—those Japanese that were entrenched—by not letting any supplies go in. But, no. They had to go and lose all those men by taking one island after the other—which was foolish, I think.

BT: The losses were catastrophic.

BGA: [Nods affirmative]

BT: Did you learn about V-J Day?

BGA: Yes—when they dropped the bombs and we learned they did not need us for the CBI.

BT: So you were called off and sent back?

BGA: [Nods] Called off and sent to Austria for the occupation. See, if you didn't have thirty-five points—and you earned those *per month* you were overseas—you couldn't go home right away. Of course, they couldn't ship out all... Do you realize how many troops they had in Europe?

BT: Right.

BGA: So you had to wait your turn. We volunteered—my friend and I—because you earn more when you're in a battle area than when you're not. So we decided to see another part of the world. [Laughs] When they dropped the bomb in June, that meant everything stopped—and that's how I got to Austria for occupation.

BT: So when V-J Day occurred, do you recall where you were?

BGA: I was still at the 178th.

BT: Okay. Was this in the Ardennes?

BGA: No. The Ardennes was way before that.

BT: Okay.

BT: So on V-J Day you were still at the hospital?

BGA: I was still there—waiting to go to CBI.

BT: And once V-J Day happened...

BGA: They cancelled everything.

BT: Did you have any specific feelings about this? Were you happy?

BGA: Yes—I didn't want to go [to CBI]. I'd taken care of some of the pacific guys—I was stationed at Fort Jay Governors Island before going overseas. We used to get shipload after shipload of patients from both theatres. A lot of them had skin diseases and malaria, and a few other things they came back with. I was glad I didn't have to go. I hate insects. [Laughs] You know, things that crawl. Boy, there's a lot of that over there!

BT: Do you recall your feelings when you heard about FDR's death?

BGA: I wasn't surprised.

BT: Were you aware that he had polio?

BGA: Yeah, but do you know that now they don't think it was polio?

BT: Really?

BGA: Some think it was Lou Gehrig's Disease. I don't know. I've hear this and read about it, but I don't know that much about it.

BT: So you weren't really shocked or surprise, but were you upset?

BGA: Not really. When he died we were doing pretty good.

BT: Now, you grew up during the depression—correct?

BTA: Yes.

BT: Do you remember what that was like?

BGA: Yes.

BT: Really bad?

BGA: We had enough to eat, but we didn't have what the kids have today—and we knew better than to even ask for it. That was the difference; you knew that your mother and father were doing the best they could.

BT: So everything was really limited?

BGA: [Nods affirmative.]

BT: Did you guys ration everything at the time?

BGA: Did we ration? During the war the people at home had to.

BT: Right. But during the depression—in order to get food and everything—did you have to have stamps?

BGA: I think you're thinking about rationing during the war. Yes—they had to have stamps for sugar and butter and stuff that was limited.

BT: During the depression were people's spirits really down?

BGA: I think the men of the family felt it more than anybody because they couldn't get jobs and it was very hard on them, I think.

BT: Being that 25% of America was unemployed during the depression...

BGA: Yes. Think about graduation from high school. Most of the men—or boys, at that time—would be going to work when you finish high school. The rich went to college, but the middle class didn't way back then.

BT: Were you excited when FDR took over during the depression? Did you think he could help to get us out of it?

BGA: Yes. It was something good that he did at the time. Not everybody liked FDR.

BT: Yeah, I know. There's a lot of critics about The New Deal—right?

BGA: I've heard men say, "If he gets in again, I'm going to Canada." [Laughter.]

BT: Even during the war people criticized him? Or no?

BGA: No—not during the war.

BT: Just during the depression?

BGA: Yes.

BT: Did the criticism eventually die out?

BGA: Oh, yeah.

BT: Do you view FDR as one of our greatest presidents?

BGA: I think he had good ideas. We have him to thank for Social Security, which I think is one of the best things they could have done.

BT: On the issue of Social Security, do you have any feelings about George Bush?

BGA: He better keep his hands off of it or he'll have a revolution; that's all I can say.

BT: Right. Isn't he trying to do away with it?

BGA: Well, he's trying to privatize it. That's what he's trying to do. That puts you at the mercy of Wall Street. If the market is up, you make money—if the market is down, you lose a lot. That's not what Social Security is for.

BT: It's to help the elderly—right?

BGA: Yes. And the money that's being taken from you and your employer is put in a safe place—not in a Wall Street market.

BT: Right.

BGA: Social Security will be fine if they just keep their hands off of it. Do you know how many other things borrow money from Social Security?

BT: I have no idea.

BGA: Well, you look it up and find how many IOUs there are there—and that have never been paid back.

BT: Is that why they say it's hurting and running out of money?

BGA: I think so. If they'd leave it alone they wouldn't be running out of money, but they can't stand seeing all of that money accumulate.

BT: Right. Do you recall what you did when you arrived home after the war—the post war period?

BGA: Oh, boy. I was restless. I started working... Well—first of all—I had a GI Bill, so I went to college.

BT: Where did you attend college?

BGA: St. John's University—I got my B.S. in nursing education there. I was very restless; I had no patients with civilians complaining in hospitals. When I was going to school, I also worked. I did private duty and I quite that. Then I finally joined the Visiting Nurse Association in NYC; that's where I worked while I was going to college.

BT: Did you appreciate the GI Bill?

BGA: It was the only way I could go to college.

BT: They paid for everything?

BGA: They paid for my tuition. Yes.

BT: Did you have any other occupations after getting out of college?

BGA: Nursing.

BT: Just nursing?

BGA: Yes. I stayed with the Visiting Nurses in Brooklyn until I got married and had my first child.

BT: After the war did you find it hard to get back to normal life?

BGA: Yes. It took awhile to acclimate. I think you start appreciating all you have more after you see what other people have been through. And seeing the devastation... I traveled on a train from Reims all the way to Austria and I could see what they had done to Germany. You were there, but you didn't see all the buildings leveled.

BT: No, I didn't.

BGA: It was heartbreaking and I don't think anyone here could really get an appreciation unless they saw what other people had to go through during that war.

BT: Are there any really memorable experiences or dates that stood out about some of your husband's actions during or after the war?

BGA: Well, he was in Panama—he has beautiful slides of Panama Canal. He took pictures of all the airplanes in the Korean War, and some have been published in a book.

BT: *The Nose Art?*

BGA: Yeah—*The Nose Art*. Lance would know cause he's seen them all. [Pointing, presumably, at Lance.] He had beautiful slides of all of them. And do you know that he kept going to all of their reunions?

BT: Throughout the years?

BGA: All through... The Air Corps reunions—the Nineteen Bomb Group, that's what he was in.

BT: The military was a big part of his life and what he did?

BGA: Yeah.

BT: He enjoyed it a lot?

BGA: He did. He really did. He was eighty-nine when he died.

BT: Really? What year did he die?

BGA: 2001

BT: Do you think if he hadn't been in WWII that he would have been in the military?

BGA: Well, he might have because of the depression. He was in the National Guard. His uncle was in WWI and he got a silver medal for wiping out a machine gun nest and saving a lot of other men. I think he admired him so much. And he was not drafted—he was in the National Guard, so he was taken right away [for WWII]. In fact, he gave my brother basic training.

BT: He did?

BGA: Yeah—but then he got into the outfit he was training and went overseas with them.

BT: When did he join the National Guard?

BGA: He was in before the war started—he must have been, because he was an instructor.

BT: Do you remember how long he served in the military?

BGA: Thirty-two or thirty-three years, I believe—with National Guard duty too.

BT: Did you or your husband belong to any VFW organizations?

BGA: American Legion. And he belonged to the Battle of the Bulge group ... I can't remember the name or title, but there is one.

BT: Are you active in any of these.

BGA: No. I'm ashamed to say that, but I'm not.

BT: Have you attended any reunions since—or just that one?

BGA: Just that one is all we've ever had, that I know about.

BT: When was that again?

BGA: Way back. The 61st Field ... See, I was in a field hospital when I went to Austria; I was not in a big general hospital. They had a reunion too, and I did go to that when I lived in New York.

BT: Do you remember where or when they were?

BGA: They were in the 50s—I think early 50s. After that, we sort of lost touch with everyone.

BT: In the United States?

BGA: Yeah. It was here in the United States.

BT: Do you remember where?

BGA: New York City ... It was one of the hotels in New York City we went to.

BT: How did military experience change or influence your life?

BGA: I think it gave me a broader perspective of life in general—and what other people have to go through and how other people live. I think it broadens you once you see that.

BT: Looking back on WWII, do you see it as a big change or a defining moment in your life?

BGA: Yeah. It sure was. Two years only... it was unbelievable. It seemed like a lifetime; the days didn't go by very fast.

BT: Did it change your life in any specific ways?

BGA: Not really.

BT: It made you stronger?

BGA: Stronger—and able to cope.

BT: Can you describe for people younger than me—or for people who may not have an extensive knowledge of WWII—why they should not regard it as just an era of old history or something not to worry about?

BGA: It could happen again. It could happen again if we don't stop fanatics like Hitler. I mean, it's unbelievable how one man could have caused so much devastation everywhere—not just for the young American lives that were lost. Do you realize how many crosses there are over there? Did you ever visit any of those cemeteries?

BT: I never actually got to go to Normandy, but my girlfriend did.

BGA: It's unbelievable what we left there in human life, and I think it would be terrible if we ever see that again. I really do. And I think this war we're involved in right now—we should have never set foot over there. That's my personal feeling—I'm not saying I'm right or wrong.

BT: Do you think we all need to learn about this time so long ago?

BGA: You should study it and really be aware of what goes on ... I can't understand how any of those people [in Europe] could accept what was going on and not do something about it—unbelievable to me. I feel the same way about us being in Iraq. Why aren't those people doing something for themselves? I don't think we should be the watchdog of the world.

BT: We should let people fight for themselves?

BGA: Yes. I think they should have to deserve freedom; freedom doesn't come free. And I think if every person felt that way, we wouldn't have to help someone else have freedom every time we turn around.

BT: Do you think we shouldn't be in Iraq at all—like it's a big mistake and a waste of time?

BGA: Yes—I do. I really and truly do. You're not just trying to liberate a certain section of the country because there are other sections that don't want you there, and you're sort of interfering with a civil war. And I think they should straighten out their own business and I don't think we should interfere.

BT: So in an overall perspective, are you glad you went through ...

BGA: I never regretted it; I really didn't. Like I said, it made a better person of me. It taught me a lot and was an experience I wouldn't have had anywhere else.

BT: Well, Mrs. Anthon, I really appreciate you doing this for me.

BGA: It was nice of you to ask me.

BT: I would really like to thank you for completing this form, and for helping us to preserve the past for our nation's future.

BGA: You know—if he ever publishes the book—I have pictures I can let him have. [Teacher? Friend? Relative?]

BT: I can bring some copies in for him; he'd appreciate that. He really appreciates you doing this for me and for him. He knows what you guys did—and appreciates what you did, and he wants ...

BGA: You know, Tom Brokaw really opened the floodgates of emotions in WWII veterans because when we came home everybody was so sick of it and nobody even wanted to talk about it. You ask my four children—they know nothing about what we went through, my husband and I. We never talked about it; we didn't have to.

BT: And he's what really brought it out? [Tom Brokaw]

BGA: Yeah. Now everyone is interested in hearing our stories.

BT: Well, it's living history. I mean, you guys are only here for so much longer.

BGA: The only thing I have against Tom Brokaw is I don't think he gave the nurses enough credit. But—like I said—we just took care of those poor guys.

BT: Well, I really appreciate this, Mrs. Anthon.

BGA: I was glad to do it.

BT: Thank you.