

Luigi Buttino
Veteran

LB: My name is Luigi Buttino, I was born in Gloversville in the house I live in now, I graduated out of high school in '42, I went to enlist in the Coast Guard in September, and they called me in November to get sworn in. On January 7, 1943, I went to basic training in Manhattan Beach, I was there for six weeks, and then I went to Port Security for another six weeks which was [unclear] of the port, it was based in Brooklyn, New York at the foot of Columbia Street. And out of there I operated at Pier 33, we had to go through a regular check-up on all the fire equipment, all the [unclear]—and we could tell what the [unclear] were—because they were wooden boxes with a blue stripe around [unclear]. You had to check your fire equipment on the pier because in case of sabotage. They were taking the nozzles off and putting golf balls in there, and then putting the nozzles back on the holes and you had to check them for razor blade cuts because all the holes on the standpipes systems were all accordion. You had to check and make sure that they all what they call “a dry system” and the pressure was on the air and then when you do go to a fire, you do not turn the nozzle to the fire, but away from the fire so wouldn't blow that cold air that was in on the lines until you got water. So this one day there was a Norwegian ship in '33 and they were getting ready to pull out, and I went aboard and the fellas were taking their cigarettes and throwing them out of the porthole; so I said, “Jeez fellas, don't do that.” So anyway the ship pulled out, and about a couple hours later I noticed there was a fire burning on the string-piece. So we were taught not to fight the fire, but go and turn on the alarm and then fight the fire because if you start to fight the fire and it gets out of hand and then you go to turn on the alarm So I did that, I came back and I was fighting the fire on the string-piece until the fire department came down, and then they kept the fire from getting underneath the pier, but the whole string-piece was on fire. So I had it knocked down pretty good, and then the Captain of the fire department came over and took my name, serial number and [unclear]. He says, “You'll hear from me.” So about two weeks later, we were standing inspection before we went on our duty, and the chief [unclear] calls my name, serial number, “Front and center!” I said, “Now what the hell did I do?” That's when he presented me with [unclear]. So then they sent me on to Brooklyn Navy Yard fire school, and they had a replica of a ship on the dock. They'd put oil and gasoline onto it and let it burn, and we were trained to go in and fight that with aerofoam and a high velocity fog. Then I got transferred aboard the CG55024F that was a fireboat which was fire damage salvage rescue. From there I was temporary transferred to the 1162F. In the meantime, they had a fire call to a ship burning off the Jersey Coast, so I went out with that ship and I got a citation from that for going down below all dressed up in our fall weather gear and our

gas masks that we had to breathe through and we got the fire out with high velocity fog and foam. Then another time aboard the 55024F, that's the one I can't find a citation for, but there was the ship burning getting ready to shape up on a convoy out by [unclear]. There was a fire and we pulled alongside of it, and they thought, "Gee it's a funny thing, the crew has abandoned the ship!" So this fella from Cohoes and I went aboard, they used to call him the joker because [unclear] and that's what they called him. He and I were teamed up. So the [unclear] says, "Get dressed up and go down there to fight that fire!" So him and I go down there and come to find out it was cargo netting that was smoking away! Well this Navy Commander came alongside us with a speedboat and says, "[unclear]?" "Oh yes." He says, "You know what it was [unclear]?" "Yes, cargo netting." He said, "It's a good thing you saw that it was cargo netting because the next compartment was full of dynamite!" I said, "It was?" If you had seen a little [unclear] running across the water I would have made it right across the Jersey [unclear]. Then they got the crew back together aboard the ship, but otherwise we had several little incidents [unclear].

Q: Now they were mostly [unclear]?

LB: You see fire aboard a ship, it's a funny thing, if you pump five gallons of water in, you have to pump five gallons out because that's what happened to the Normandy. We laid aside the Normandy for about two months because they had about forty to fifty of these electric welding machines aboard these barges. Underwater welding was a Navy school at Pier 88 in New York [unclear] and Pier 92 was a Navy base, and they welded all of those portholes shut underwater. The New York City Fire Department kept pumping water in when it was sabotaged, and they never thought about pumping it out. Any ship fire that we went to, if we couldn't put a [unclear] up over then we'd have to cut a hole to the side. Then we'd run our suction sleeves in, but you [unclear] only pick up 23 feet [unclear] the vacuum. We'd suck out all the water that we pumped in. What happened to the Normandy is they pumped enough water in it and it just rolled over on its side and laid right there. The Navy had a good school for welding under water, but [unclear]. I guess they scrapped it. Then I had a brother who was two years older than me, he went through the African campaign, the [unclear] campaign, and the [unclear] campaign, and never got a scratch on him! He comes home, wasn't even home for a year, and had a heart condition and the [unclear] blood clots. Today, they would've kept him alive, but back then he died. He was 34 years old.

Q: So what do you think your most memorable time was in the Coast Guard?

LB: You'd get a lot of them in the winter time because each one of these Piers had what they call, "night guards" and they were all old men. They wanted to be nice and neat, they'd have paper on the table. They'd have their hot plate there and they'd make coffee [unclear] they'd fall asleep, and [unclear]. Otherwise you were constantly on [unclear]

you never got a nice sleep.

Q: So I noticed you have some pictures with you would you like to share those with us?

LB: Yes

Q: What's that picture of?

LB: This is the fire salvage and damage boat that I was on.

Q: How long were you on that ship?

LB: About three years.

Q: How about your other picture? What's that one?

LB: This is a picture of me in 1943! I had hair in those days too! [unclear] see this one. This is a picture of the crew that I was on with the 55024F.

Q: Those big nozzles behind you are those the big spray nozzles that you put the fires out with?

LB: We called those the deck monitors, but you had to be tied up to use them otherwise they would spin the boat right around because there's a lot of pressure on them. These are the photographs from when we were practicing with the aerofoam and the high velocity fog. You see we never used solid straight streams of water because we tried to keep the water from going into the ship as we possibly could. We had six [unclear] pumps of water, we had two Chrysler engines for welding and cutting. A lot of times you'd have to come up alongside the ship, and you'd have to cut a hole in the side to put your suction sleeve in to suck your water out [unclear]. Then when you got through, you had to take that hole and we had pieces of plaque to put over it and weld that hole back up again.

Q: What do you think your most enjoyable time was?

LB: The most enjoyable time was when I stuck my neck out! We got transferred down to a place called Leonardo, New Jersey. There's a pier going three and a half miles out in the ocean, and all the ships would come into the harbor and unload their munitions there before they go into the harbor and when they come back out [unclear]. I said, "Boy this is going to be nice. It's the middle of the year coming up, I'm a little ways from Atlantic City, and I'm going to have a ball!" So volunteered for three more months in service. Figured I'd work within Atlantic City, but nothing ever happened. When May 7th came around they said, "You have to get yourself out of here." So I figured I was going to have it made because I couldn't afford to spend time in Atlantic City back then. One of the greatest things that we could never complain about is one time we get dispatched by radio and I said, "God that's an awfully rough sea!" They said, "That's

alright boys, you have to go out, but you don't have to come back." And we had nothing, but wooden [unclear] ships.