

**Frank Costello
Veteran**

**Interviewed at the
American Legion Post #72
Saugerties, Ulster County, New York
December 18, 2005**

INT: Hey! Good morning. Here we are at the Veterans History Project in the American Legion Post #72 (AL), Lamouree-Hackett Post, 30 John St. Saugerties, New York and it's Sunday December 18, 2005 at 11 A.M. and today we have Mr. Frank Costello (FC). Thank you for joining us Frank. And he's going to share his military experiences with us. Thanks Frank.

FC: My pleasure.

AL: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

FC: No, I finally got drafted. I tried to enlist and it didn't work out.

INT: You had wanted to join the Air Force?

FC: I wanted to be a pilot, but my math held me back [laughs].

INT: Where were you living at the time?

FC: Glasco.

INT: You didn't pick the service you joined, you were put into the Army?

FC: Yes. Joe Flagard, if you knew him, he passed with me too.

INT: Yes, I knew him well.

FC: He and I both applied for the Air Force, and he was taking the extra classes in math through Ms. Hogan in his high school. But I couldn't take extra classes because I didn't take math, you know. I mean I took simple math, but not the actual math. Joe went on and he became a pilot.

INT: He was, and he was with the Flying Tiger Unit

FC: Yes and he used to fly out of Africa and all over. Great guy Jim.

INT: Yes, he was. Do you recall your first days in service? You mentioned that you were put in charge of the bus that went down to...

FC: Yes.

INT: Tell us about that.

FC: Again, we had a busload of people, and they were all nice guys. They respected me, I respected them. There we no problems, except this one guy

[laughs], but he didn't give me any problems on the way down, he was rather quiet.

INT: Can you tell us what happened when you got there?

FC: When he got there

INT: You mentioned he was one of the toughest guys in Glasco?

FC: He was one of the toughest, he used to fight everybody in the street that wanted a fight and then when it came time for him to, to go do K.P. he cried like a baby, he had tears in his eyes. I tried to convince him to stay, but he just wouldn't stay, and the next day he was let go, he was... unfair or something to army men.

INT: At that time you were at Camp Upton in Long Island?

FC: Yes

INT: So what was that like? How do you feel about that?

FC: Camp Upton? It was alright, there wasn't nothing too crazy about it. But then from there I went down to school down in—where the heck was that, Carolina?—to learn radar.

INT: At some point you went to camp Crowder, Missouri?

FC: Well again, Crowder, Missouri was one of my first stops while just first getting into the Army.

INT: You had boot camp type instruction there?

FC: Yes.

INT: What was that like?

FC: It was enjoyable. I enjoyed it. Learned to smoke [both laugh]. And I finally gave it up recently, three, four, five years ago.

INT: So you got through boot camp ok?

FC: Yes

INT: Do you remember what your instructors were like?

FC: They were good. Nice guys.

INT: And then you got sent for radar school?

FC: Yes. I did very well in radar. And not only radar but you had to learn the alphabet. The da da didda didda. All that stuff.

INT: The Morse code

FC: Morse code, yes.

INT: When you finished that, you were in the army single corp then?

FC: Yes.

INT: So then what was your next duty station, where'd you go after that?

FC: That's when we went to, we didn't waste any time in the States. We went directly into combat right down there. We went to [Nofer?] Island, and then right into toping school.

INT: You crossed the ocean on a ship I take it? What was that like?

FC: It was ok, except I had to fight with the guy that was running the ship. And what he tried to get me to do, and I didn't want to deal with it. And I threw my [unclear]. I did tell him that. And after that he was alright. We got along good.

INT: I guess you were concerned about Japanese submarines? Was that a possibility?

FC: Well we had to watch because—and they were, they were coming right up to our ship at times and we had to fight them off. I had forgotten that in the time.

INT: Do you know some details about that, what happened with the...?

FC: Well we all had to stand over the railing with our rifles. If we'd see anything we'd have to report it quickly to the captain. We'd see some movement here and we'd shoot at them if we'd had to. It was no problem.

INT: Now when you got to the Philippines you went to Lingayen Gulf you told me?

FC: Yes, Lingayen Gulf.

INT: And how was that?

FC: Nice. It was good.

INT: You went ashore there?

FC: Oh sure. There was a station there. I was stationed there, it must have been close to a year I believe.

INT: You were there for a year and during that time you experienced combat?

FC: Oh yes.

INT: And you had written a manuscript here about one of those episodes, you want to tell us about that?

FC: This episode?

INT: Yeah

FC: Is that when...? Let me see [looks at manuscript] Oh yes, well what happens is, all our ships are all around when we're landing here [pause] they see

the Japanese. I'm the guy that caught the ship, the Japanese ship coming in on the radar. So I'm yelling at the guys "I got one." And by now he's five, six miles out. He's coming heading straight for us. And they guys are yelling "Stick with it Frank, stick with it" while they're all going to their dugout there. So I was in there and I could almost hear the plane overhead.

FC: Now in the meantime, the plane is dropping bombs. Our ammunition dump was no more than maybe a quarter of a mile away from us. One of the bombs hit right into that ammunition dump and everything blew up. Then a ways from that—quite a ways from that—maybe a mile or two there was a hill. And that's where the Japs had all these guns. These short guns and long guns that they had stolen from us when they took over the Philippines. Well, all of a sudden they're shooting at us but in the meantime I got out of that radar [unclear] and I ran. I had told my buddy to make a hole big enough for me. But I get there and I'm just laying right on top of him and I'm above ground. I said "What happened? Why didn't you dig deeper?" He said "I can't." The coral reef was under there and you couldn't dig through. But there's where we sat. And these guns, the little guns were too short to do anything to us so it was going off before us and the long guns were going over our heads. Vroooooom BANG. And all night long that's all we heard and you heard was things go off, it was very exciting. But ours [chuckles] I said to my friend I was laying on his back, I said "What the heck is the matter with your heart? Your heart is beating so hard." Well he said "What's that banging on my back?" He says "Your heart's going pretty good too." Well, he says, "I'm just as scared as you are" so what are you going to do? So we pulled out of that. We were ok.

INT: Can you think of any other...

FC: Thank God for long and short guns!

INT: Yeah right [both laugh] Can you think of anything else you'd like to tell us about that time? Any other combat experiences?

FC: No, that's about – well... Once you—the thing that phased me the most—I walked through some areas just searching for guns and stuff which I brought home, a nice rifle, TWO nice rifles...In looking for these things I walked through a field where I bet you there were a hundred dead bodies. Jap bodies. And you had to step, you know [stomps feet] here or there to not walk on top of them. You know, it was very exciting. It didn't bother me of course because they were Japs. Bt, I was glad to see them rather than our own men so....

INT: Were there many casualties of your own in your unit?

FC: No. Because we were in radar and we weren't in attack. We had one or two casualties. Nothing major.

INT: Well those were some of your most memorable experiences during that time. You were of course awarded a number of medals for your service and we talked about that before. You got the good conduct medal?

FC: Yes.

INT: And the Asiatic and Pacific Campaign medal. And the World War II victory medal. And the Philippine government gave you the Liberation medal for liberating the Philippines.

FC: They were very nice to us.

INT: The Filipinos?

FC: The Filipinos were very nice.

INT: how did you stay in touch with your family during the time you were in the service?

FC: We could write letters. Of course they were checked on by the commanding officer.

INT: They were censored?

FC: Yes, we were censored to make sure we didn't write anything. I was called a couple times [unclear] (chuckles)

INT: Is that right? They talked to you about it before they took it out though?

FC: Oh they read the whole letter. Then they sent it out. They made sure we didn't tell them where we were.

INT: And you got mail from your folks?

FC: Yes.

INT: Fairly regularly?

FC: Kind of regularly. I was a hero because I would get a lot of boxes with candy and fruit and what not, you know.

INT: So you got care packages from you folks? From your mother?

FC: From my brother because I had a big family. They all sent packages.

INT: How was the food aside from, you got nice stuff from the family...?

FC: Most times it wasn't bad. A couple of times we almost starved because the food didn't come through. It got stopped along the way.

INT: So you did have sometimes a shortage of your supplies?

FC: Yes, yes.

INT: Were you able to get your equipment, your technical equipment and like that regularly?

FC: Yes, we got in alright.

INT: So they sent that through but not the food?

FC: Not the food. [laughs]

INT: That sounds about right. Now obviously you felt some pressure or stress I guess during this time? You mentioned already with your heart beating under enemy fire.

FC: Oh yes

INT: Generally speaking, how'd you feel about it?

FC: Well I was counting the days. I had a regular calendar. There's another day gone, another day gone. Couldn't wait to get the heck out of there. But it didn't make me anxious or anything. I took it in stride, knew what had to be done. What're you going to do?

INT: You didn't know when the war was gonna be over did you?

FC: No, I had no idea.

INT: Is there anything in particular you did for good luck or anything like that?

FC: Not really, no. But I was the first guy to hear that the war was over, that Truman was signing...

INT: Tell us about that, how'd that happen? You were the first man in your unit to hear about it?

FC: I heard it on the radio. I just happened to have the radio on and I ran back to the guys and yelling to them "Hey, the war is over! The war is... [laughs]!" "Get out of here!"

INT: They didn't believe you?

FC: They didn't believe me but then "Put the radio on, hurry up, you'll hear it, Truman's signing the papers now."

INT: How'd you feel?

FC: Oh, great! Just great.

INT: Rest of the fellas felt the same way I guess?

FC: Oh yeah. And then we were sent home by the service. That didn't take too long to do. That was...pretty much, quite early.

INT: You expected to probably stay in the war until Japan was invaded, I guess, right?

FC: Well, yeah. Well my cousin stayed in the army afterwards, they didn't know what the army was. They came in after me and they wound up going to Japan. I said that's pretty good. I fight the way to get over there and they come in and they go see Japan.

INT: Occupy Japan.

FC: I was on the ship one day and readying the sail one day to go somewhere near, heading for Japan. Just then they pulled the ship back and said "We don't have to go, the Japanese have surrendered. Stay right here." Later, hell, I want to go to Japan

INT: You want to see Japan now?

FC: Sure, but I never did see it.

INT: And we talked about this before, you did get entertainers sometimes? Tell us about that.

FC: Well we'd be several companies. We'd go out in these fields and they'd do a big city in the field and then Bob Hope would come out and entertain. Frank Sinatra would sing. And there was another guy with them I think.

INT: Was it Jerry Colonna?

FC: Jerry Colonna! Yeah, I was going to, it was an Italian guy. Jerry Colonna.

INT: And he was very funny?

FC: That was very helpful.

INT: Did you have other ways of entertaining yourselves at all?

FC: Well we had our ways of playing certain games. I got to be pretty good at tennis and what not.

INT: Were you able to have any, let's say liberty or leave in the Philippines to go...?

FC: No.

INT: Nothing. Now when you were at home you had some leave I guess?

FC: Yes but by that time the war was over there was no place to go. [pause] About leave over there, and which I like was going to the airport, hitchhiking rides to planes. A neighbor of mine, Nick Eschenzo, he was a pilot also. In fact he was a pilot on the plane going to bomb Japan. He was a bombardier. But he says unfortunately he wasn't able to do that, bomb Japan. He was an excellent shot, but I did work with him.

INT: Now you got a chance to hitch rides on planes some other times?

FC: Oh, yes.

INT: Where was that? Where'd you go?

FC: In different airport—regular army airports, you go in the air and you talk to the pilot. "How about a ride here there and wherever you want? Where you going?"

INT: That was in the States though right?

FC: No, overseas. Overseas, that was nice.

INT: Where'd you get to go?

FC: Well I went Malaita, and different islands. That was nice.

INT: What'd you think of the officers and your fellow soldiers?

FC: All great guys. Great people

INT: Did you keep a diary?

FC: No.

INT: Now you already mentioned you remember when the war came to an end and you were the man who gave the information to your troops. Once you got back to the States, you mentioned you came back Camp Dix down here in New York—or New Jersey actually and you got a couple weeks there, right?

FC: Right

INT: Now you sailed all the way across the ocean coming back right?

INT: Sure yes

INT: What'd you put into when you come back?

FC: [pause]...We did go into San Francisco. I was in charge of the train coming from San Francisco to New York. See that the guys behaved.

INT: You were welcomed pretty well in San Francisco I guess?

FC: Oh yes

INT: It was a long train trip back across the country, right?

FC: Well it was – it must have taken us two or three days I guess. I forget now. It's too long.

INT: Now you got discharged at Camp Dix...

FC: Yes.

INT: And then you came back home to Glasco?

FC: Yes.

INT: And what did you do in the days and weeks after you were out of the service? What'd you do with yourself?

FC: At the time I mostly hung around the house, visited my mother and father, but I don't recall what I...there's nothing special I did.

INT: Did you get more education with the GI Bill or anything like that?

FC: No, like a fool I didn't go. I should have.

INT: Where did you work at after?

FC: Prior to going in I was a shader in a factory. I shaded material. As for color. You put all the colors together. You'd have these webs of cloth and you'd put all the same colors together and then the odd colors you'd toss aside.

INT: Where was that?

FC: In a Manhattan shirt factory in Kingston. But I didn't do that when I came back, what the hell did I do? I know what I did I started my own business.

INT: What was your business?

FC: I started my little bar down in Glasco. Actually I started a pizza joint. And it was the first pizza joint in Ulster County other than one in the city of Kingston. Tony Sacrahed. He was the first guy in Ulster County but he never promoted the pizzas. He never did much with it. Now with me they came from all over. They came from Catskill at the top of the mountains. Towns from all over.

INT: Pizza became very popular after the war was over.

FC: Oh it got so popular. Then lot of people tried to imitate me open their own. For some reason they never made it.

INT: What was the name of your place?

FC: It was Frankie's. Frankie's Pizza.

INT: And how long did you have the business?

FC: From there I moved up on the main highway. I was down in my old place a couple of years and then I moved up on the highway. That's when business really boomed. I stayed there maybe five or six years. And that was that.

INT: So that was your career it sounds like, running your own business?

FC: Yes.

INT: So you had a bar and a pizza restaurant?

FC: Yes.

INT: Interesting you get to meet a lot of people. Now you made some friendships in the service, did you keep in touch with the fellas or...?

FC: Not too—except my friends here, Ryan, and a couple of guys from Massachusetts, and one from Pennsylvania. The four of us, we worked our radars together. Very close.

INT: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

FC: Oh yes, I joined the American Legion right away [unclear].

INT: And you mentioned the V.F.W. too?

FC: The V.F.W. I think I wound up being in the VFW in Poughkeepsie. For some reason we came through there when we got laid off – discharged.

INT: They were the people right at the train station.

FC: They were, yes.

INT: You mentioned that you haven't attended any reunions. Tell me, what do you think of your experience in the war, how it affected your life?

FC: It made me an entirely different person. It opens your eyes to so many things that you weren't aware of before. You always apply that to your army experiences and you put them together. It's very healthy, I think.

INT: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

FC: No, I'm glad I was there and I wouldn't want to be a guy who didn't get to go. I'm glad I went.

INT: We're glad you came back too.

FC: Yes [laughs].

INT: Thanks very much. I appreciate. Thank you a lot.

FC: You're very welcome.