

**Joseph A. Robichaud
Veteran**

**Michael Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewer**

**New York State Military Museum
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MR: This is a home interview, 511 Roby Avenue, Syracuse, New York. It is the 17th of January, 2003. Interviewers are Michael Russert, Wayne Clarke. Approximately 11:30 AM. Would you give me your full name, your date of birth, and place of birth, please?

JAR: Joseph A. Robichaud. Date of birth is June 6, 1920, in Fitchburg, Massachusetts.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering military service?

JAR: I had one year of high school. At that particular time were the Depression years. I loved school, but my brother got me a job to help at the house, which I did. It didn't last too long, six months, and I was out. But I never went back to school, even though I liked it, I never went back. I used to like sports.

MR: Where were you and what do you remember when you heard about what happened at Pearl Harbor?

JAR: I have a cousin that I eventually ran into in Italy. [That day] We were coming back from this park. We always went to this park, three or four of us. Every Sunday, we walked up there and back, named Cogshall Park in Massachusetts. Coming back, we were near this bar restaurant, and a lot of commotion was going on; we didn't know what was happening. One guy went in there and came out and said that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. We were in shock. I figured, we'll clean them up in about a week, but it wasn't to be. They were well prepared. But that's where we were when we came back, the four or five of us.

MR: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

JAR: I enlisted. A month and a week after Pearl Harbor, January 14th, 1942.

MR: What branch of service did you ___

JAR: The funny thing about it, I enlisted for the Air Corps and I went to Boston, passed all the tests, physical, mental, written. At that particular time, the Air Force was part of the Army. So, from what I understood, they filled up the Air Force and I got stuck in the Army. We used to hear about Camp Croft, South Carolina, which was an infantry basic training center. We used to hear about that, and I used to say to myself, I'm glad I'm not going there. I eventually ended up going there because of this buck sergeant up at Fort Devens, Massachusetts. It used to be Camp Devens, Fort Devens, now. A buck sergeant woke me up and said, Robichaud? I said, Yes. He said, Up and at him. You're on your way to Croft. I said, Not me, I'm going to Camp something [not sure of name], Missouri. It's an Air Force base. He said, You're going to Croft. You know, that sort of let me down some, because my intentions were getting into the Air Force. Finally, I went down there and I reported downtown to the Army. I believe we were trained, not bussed, to Fort Devens base, or Camp Devens then. From there we were brought into the Boston Army Post. That's where we took all our physicals and all that. I passed everything, went back to Devens. I think we took a train. Of course, we were given uniforms and what have you. I only lived twelve miles from there, my hometown. I think Fitchburg, Massachusetts is about twelve miles from Camp Devens. I called my people and told them where I was, and they came up to see me that Sunday. Stayed there a couple days, then went down to Camp Croft, South Carolina by train. I found I had a lot of guys like me, you know. They weren't too happy. You ran into that kind of people, they were drafted. But I volunteered. I figured I'd get what I wanted, which I didn't get. So it was a big disappointment for me, let's put it that way, but I figured, hey, I'm in here, I was sworn in, I gotta do it, keep my mouth shut or get in trouble.

My brother actually was just about ready, he was on that one year's compulsory service. They used to go in the Army for one year, then they came out. He was ready to come out in about a week and a half or two. He told me the whole works, what the Army was all about. He said, Keep your mouth shut, you won't get in trouble. Open it, you're asking for trouble. So I always had that in mind. So I learned to keep my mouth shut real early, which was hard to do, but I did it. [laughs]

But, I got that big disappointment not going where I wanted to go and ended up there. Once you got in there, especially in basic training, you ran into people like you are, and I finally adjusted to it. It was a rough training center, believe you me, that Camp Croft. And who the heck was it? Oh yeah, before I left Devens, let me see here. No, I'm thinking about Patton. He came after that, he came later. At Croft, I got my sixteen weeks of basic training. Then I was shipped back to Devens. We didn't know who it was, but it

was the 45th Infantry Division. They came out of Colorado, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. That was an NG outfit, National Guard. That was the outfit I was put into. I had played about twelve years in the drum corps, playing the bugle and valve bugle. So going into basic training, they put me into what they called Runner School. I wasn't in a band. I was a bugler of Company G of the 188th Infantry, the 45th Division. At Devens, a lot of times we used to go out and practice in the woods. Usually I was put in charge because I had a lot of bugling, out of all the buglers. Once in a while we had a couple of guys play bugle and we played poker. [laughs] That was a little sneaky thing. But one day a lieutenant came by and caught us. And my gosh, we figured we were in deep trouble. He asked us where we were and I gave him a fake company. I didn't give him my company. We never heard about it from that time on. That we were caught playing poker while a couple of guys were playing the horn. [laughs]

Once we got to Devens with that 45th, it was a rough outfit. I mean, I don't know, some twenty four different tribes of Indians, I believe, in that division. And you had your cowboys, too. When I walked in there, it was like a rainy day. Going from a basic into an outfit like that, and you saw these guys, they were dark, the Indians, and they were polishing their bayonets and cleaning their guns. I said to myself, What the hell did I get into here? I couldn't figure this out. But, I would have never gone overseas with anyone but that bunch. You could trust them, if you were their friend, You never got against them, because most of them carried knives. Where they put them, I don't know, but they used to carry them. One time coming back on a bus from Ayer Mass, which is a little town outside of Fort Devens, some commotion took place on a bus. A couple of GIs, probably drinking and all that. One knife came out, but nobody got knifed. The bus driver, an Army guy, told the MPs when he got up to the gate. They looked throughout that bus and they never found that knife. Never. They looked and looked and looked.

After staying there for about, I'd say...I know my mother used to tell us that there used to be a lot of GIs in my section of town which was a French section of about twelve thousand people. Another section had Italians, another one had Greek. West Fitchburg was the Irish section, and Layton Street was Finnish. She said they used to see a lot of GIs, and all at once they disappeared. They didn't see any more. Once our outfit moved up there, that was it. I mean, there was something...they wouldn't take crap from anyone, in other words. Well, you take Indians and all those different tribes. I stayed there for let's say for about six or eight months.

From Devens we moved to Pine Camp, presently called Fort Drum, New York, in Watertown, upstate here. That was when I moved up here with the outfit. I came into

Syracuse one weekend, just around Thanksgiving time, I believe, in 1942 we moved up there. We were going to Canada, me and two other guys. We were at the bus station or the train station. We ran into some of the guys from our basic training who asked us where we were going. I told them we were going to Kingston, Ontario. That was what it was. We were going to go up there to dance and all that. They said, Why don't you come to Syracuse with us? Never heard of Syracuse. So, they finally convinced us to come to Syracuse, which we did, and went down to the Jefferson Street Armory. Across the street was a hotel. We got to our hotel, and asked the clerk downstairs where the dance hall was. He told us, Snell's, which was where the Chinese building was on Salina and Warren. You kept going down Salina about a couple of blocks down, the dance hall was there. We had to go upstairs to go to the dance hall, and you had to have a necktie to go in. They wouldn't let anyone without a necktie in that place. We went up there and I met [my future] wife. The first one I danced with. I saw a cute kid across and I asked her to dance. I figured she'd probably tell me no. She didn't. Danced all night with her. Took her home up on Spring Street in Syracuse here. Got invited back the next day for dinner, which I appreciated, because I slept in a YMCA downtown.

Kept going in every weekend until finally the middle of, I think, January sometime, we were told that we were moving out of Pine Camp. We came up here for winter training, but the snow was so bad in Watertown that we couldn't go out and train or sleep outside. They finally decided to shove us down to Camp Pickett, Virginia. I gave her a call and told her that we were confined. We couldn't tell her that we were moving out, you know, that sort of a military secret. I said I couldn't come in this weekend, and that was it. I kept corresponding with her, once we got transferred to Pickett, Virginia, where the Blue Ridge Mountains are. In fact, [that's] where the Natural Bridge is, we maneuvered around that. I believe down on the bottom on the right side, George Washington's initials are written there. And it's still there. I believe it's still there today. We were in awe about that. We maneuvered down there. In fact, overhead from that bridge is this main highway and one of our G.I. trucks went over. I don't know how many G.I.s got killed. That was quite a fall. In Pickett, we did mountain training. From there we went into Newport News. We were about ready. Those hillbillies up there were something else. They used to say, You expect the war to come on? In that old hillbilly talk. [laughs] We said, Where the hell did these guys come from? They were mountain boys. We played along with them and all that stuff, but we found it very interesting and funny.

Finally, we left the Blue Ridge Mountains, then went to Camp Myles Standish, which was a port of embarkation and debarkation, way down the coast of Virginia. We stayed there for maybe a few days and we hauled overseas. We were right in the harbor. The

funny thing about it when we were on that ship, our whole division was there, the whole 45th Infantry Division. All the training that we got, we had mountain training. We also went to Cape Cod when we were in Fort Devens for amphibious training. We went through the whole works, mountain, amphibious, and that. Finally, we went to Camp Pickett, Virginia, then we hauled overseas. We went through...that channel that goes between, you can see Spain on the left and Spanish Morocco on the right.

MR: The Straits of Gibraltar.

JAR: The Straits of Gibraltar, that's the one. We went right through; we saw that.

MR: Did you go overseas in a convoy?

JAR: Yes, the whole 45th Division. Yes. They told us once in a while. I know they had U boats. But whenever they had one, they said, Oh no, it's nothing. But we saw our destroyers. We had our fleet with us, destroyers and cruisers. We saw the destroyers take right off drop these depth charges. But they said, No, it's not Uboats and Nazis, because they didn't want to stir up the people. That was going overseas. Then finally went into the Strait of Gibraltar, and into Oran Harbor. That's in North Africa. And we did a little amphibious training up there too. We stayed there. We went in, set up our pup tents and did some amphibious training. We saw our planes from Africa going in to bomb Europe and all that. We didn't know where they were going, but I imagine that they were softening up Sicily, because that was the place we headed for once we left the harbor in Oran. They had a major storm and they didn't know whether they were going to call that off or not on account of the weather because of all the ships. But the storm sort of ceased, let up, and finally we saw our cruisers and our destroyers from the shelling around the Sicilian Coast, which is around Gela. I believe that was where we were supposed to go inland. We saw them shelling the hell out of it and they were throwing shells at us. I got seasick, believe you me. I don't know what you call the LCIs or LSTs, they open up from the back. And of course I was [bent] over [the side] throwing up. My captain, Otho Butler, from Oklahoma, a pure Indian, kept pulling me down. He caught me right on the head, and said, You want to get your head blown off? I said, I told him, I said, I don't give a damn. Because I was seasick and nothing was coming out. [laughs] So that was one experience.

And finally we went down the, what do you call it, the nets for the invasion. While they were shelling, we were down and then we came out. We saw the shells going on shore and some of the shells were coming by. So we finally got into these landing crafts and headed for shore. Those crafts hit dirt, which was still maybe about this much water [gestures about three feet]. The back end opened and we started going off. Then my

stomach felt just like a million bucks again. We went in, but we didn't encounter anything funny on landing. We went onto the beach, and I got in with my unit. I was a runner for Company G. Every company had two runners that went to the battalion. We communicated from the battalion to our company, whatever message that the major or the colonel had to give, that was our job to get it to them. When we landed, we went in, then we went up. They called them hills, but they were mountains. On the right side as we went in. We went inland and went on top of the mountains. We saw the harbor and across from us was another mountain. The German tanks came around but they couldn't see us. We were up in the mountains with trees and all that. Our major contacted the ship, the destroyers, the cruisers, and gave them instructions where the tanks were coming from around the corner. And they started firing. Of course, if these Germans knew where we were and where that information came from, of course, they would have blasted the hell out of it. It wouldn't have taken much with those 88s that they had. The Major kept telling them, and eventually they knocked out, I think, a couple of their tanks. Finally, the rest retreated back around that mountain. Our ships knocked out a couple of them. Then the Germans planes came in, those onepilot planes. I don't know what they call them, Messerschmitts, I don't know what. But you could see the pilot where we were, you know, with his stick and all. Of course, if he would have seen us too. We saw him in the valley going in towards the harbor to throw bombs at the ships. He bombed one of the ships; we saw it. He set it on fire.

That lasted so long, and from there I think...well, we kept going. We walked, let's say, five miles, then sat down for about ten or fifteen minutes, got a little shuteye, [then we got] up and went again. And we kept doing that, and then we ran into a big retaining wall with a big building. We figured we didn't know what it was. We found out later, we landed into a German command post. [laughs] Of course, with that wall, it had an opening like this. [gestures a square shape]. I imagine it was a window, whatever it was. I heard damn bullets coming through that. Once the Germans found that we were there, they started opening fire and I heard bullets coming through. This buck sergeant told me, ready, shoot at the house through this thing [window]. I said, Yeah, okay, Sarge. If you think I'm going to stick my head there because you heard bullets coming through; you heard phwing. I said, Uh-uh. So he went away and I said, Bull. I could tell you better bull crap, but I'll be more respectable. [laughs] So finally we were told to withdraw. You don't retreat in the Army, you withdraw. That's the way the American Army works. So we did.

I went back and I ended up in the woods. The other guys went that way, this way, [gestures different directions] and all that, and I ended up in the woods. I couldn't find anyone. I said to myself, Where are the troops? Eventually I ran into a paratrooper. I

believe it was either the 1st or the 2nd or 3rd Airborne Division. He was a paratrooper. He was lost. He was looking for an outfit. He couldn't find it. So we got together. Then we ran into a Sergeant Medic. He was in the same position as we were. He couldn't find a unit, so the three of us stuck together. We traveled in the daytime and slept in these gullies at night. Finally, traveling, we saw a farmhouse from where we were, and a house there. All at once this woman came out, and then we started looking towards them. We got up, then she started yelling, Americano! We kept telling her, Keep your mouth shut, because we didn't know where the hell the Germans were. She kept running, was happy and all that. Then the daughter came. We asked where the Germans were, and they told us the Germans left. They were in the back of their home. They went out that way in the woods. They had left early in the morning, so we felt pretty secure. I had a black onyx ring. We appreciated the people who told us where the Germans had left so we could go back to our outfits. So I gave the young girl my black onyx ring. On top of the [paratrooper] parachute, when they landed, they got a little pure silk parachute. The paratrooper had that and gave it to the mother in appreciation also. Then finally we sort of separated and I went towards the Biscari Airport, which we heard our troops captured. We saw GIs walking up, so we got in line. The medic ran into a medic outfit and went in with them. The paratrooper ran into a trooper and found out where some of the paratroopers were. He went his way, medic that way. I followed these GIs and figured that if they captured the Biscari Airport, my division had to be in that, which was the 45th Infantry Division. They were part of capturing that airport.

In fact, before we even got there, in a gully once, we saw what they called a railroad station, you know, the building and all that. We saw a German tank up there, and one of us got wise and said, Why don't we go up there and take one of our... what the hell do you call them? Those little, you pull the pin out.

WC: A grenade?

JAR: A grenade, yeah. Go up there and throw it down the turret, you know. After that happened, we started thinking, my God, what the hell would that grenade have done to that turret? We decided not to go, and that was when we went into the Biscari Airport. We split up.

Then I ran into my captain, Captain Butler. He was about ready to send notice that I was missing in action. The [notices] go through the battalion, regiment, then the division, then to D.C. and then they notify your people that we were lost and missing in action. He said, You just made it. Because I was just about ready to turn you in as missing in action. We stayed and then we started going. Like I said, we moved, walked five miles, slept about

ten minutes, got up, and walked. We kept doing that until we ran into this one building I told you about. After that, there was so much that took place.

I know one time they sent me out. When I finally joined the company, the captain was glad to see me. He said, I was about ready to report you missing in action. I gotta start thinking here. [tries to recall] Yeah, okay. So we finally started moving. Then we went into this railroad tunnel. When I got up there, I found out that my captain had gotten killed on a mountainside next to us. They called it a hill, but on the mountainside. I was very close to him. To me, he was quite a guy, Captain Otho Butler. I wanted to go see him, but we slept in that tunnel all night. The next morning, in the front came about five or six Italians with weapons and they gave themselves up. They told us they were at the other end of the tunnel. They knew we were there. I mean, they could have killed all of us. Because we never knew they were down at the other end. They just came around, gave us all their weapons, and gave up. We were very fortunate. We could have been all killed with a grenade or anything like that. From then we started going towards Palermo, the capital of Sicily. Finally, we took the island over after thirty eight days, I believe. We were in a rest and staging area, then all at once, we were getting ourselves ready for another one.

MR: Did you ever see Patton while you were on Sicily?

JAR: Yeah. Uh, he talked to the whole division in Fort Devens before we came to Pine Camp, New York. That was after the African campaign. He brought a tank with him, and he showed us the tank. I don't know if you want cussing, but every three or four words he had a cuss word. You don't accept cusses, do you?

WC: No, it's fine.

MR: It's okay.

JAR: He said, If you capture those goddamn Huns, Germans, kill them! Because the food they give them may be the food that you were supposed to have and you wouldn't have it. Kill the son of bitches! I don't know about the other guy, but to me, if you're a POW, you're a POW. But to him, I mean, when they said blood and guts, he was. Every three or four words was a goddamn or a son of a bitch or whatever it was. So finally...I had to figure, [tries to recall] I know, this was up at Fort Devens. He brought that up there. Well, anyway, that was what he was telling us. If you run into any guys, don't take any POWs, which was a bad thing because that outfit we were in was bloodthirsty. Well, to my opinion, maybe they weren't, but to me...and I hope to hell nobody gets in trouble on this. But when we started, we took no prisoners. They grabbed guys and went in the back. You saw shooting. With that, we always figured Patton was the one that told the guys [to

do that] And you didn't have to tell these guys twice, because they were bloodthirsty. They shot them. I still think about what happened around Bastogne and all that. You remember when all those GIs were getting shot? Somewhere along the line, this must have come up. The Germans must have seen that no prisoners were taken at the early part of the Sicilian campaign until Washington got wind of that and put a stop to it. Patton was relieved of his command in Sicily, I believe. That was when he slapped that GI. Remember that?

MR: Were any of the soldiers aware of that happening?

JAR: Oh yeah, we knew. Patton was in a hospital in Africa. He asked one of the GIs up there, one guy had a leg off or an arm or something like that. He looked at him and he felt sorry for him. The guy next to him looked to be in perfect health, you know. That, we got wind of. He [Patton] said, How about you, son? What's wrong with you? The GI said, Battle fatigue. And Patton slapped that GI in the face. Boy, he had to apologize worldwide for that incident. That was when he got relieved of his command over there, and he was sent to England. I think it was Clark, I can't remember, that took over the whole thing up there, command. But to me, that wasn't right. I still think in the latter year of the war, maybe not, because I know they killed a lot of our GIs up there, when they invaded from England. They found a lot of them. That could have been seen, I don't know that. I'm not going to say yes, I'm not going to say no. I don't know. But I don't think, in my opinion, that should have been done. I mean, if you're a POW, treat them as POWs. But they got the word. You didn't have to tell these guys that twice, because they were bloodthirsty. That's what we were trained for, you know.

WC: So anybody that surrendered, they just shot them?

JAR: They shot them at first until Washington got wind of it, and put a stop to that real quick. That was when Patton got relieved, I believe, of his command. I'm not quite sure, but I think that was the incident. Some of the guys were told to get rid of them, take no POWs. When that ended, we went into Salerno, Italy, from Palermo. We went around into that strait and right into Salerno. And that was when Mussolini gave up. We heard that his people captured him up north with his girlfriend. They hung him in a square up by Milan somewhere, if I'm not mistaken. And they hung him upside down. They figured that we'll go right into Salerno. The Italians gave up then when that happened. They gave up. But the Germans got wind of it and they took over all their positions in Salerno, in Italy. Some of the guys were starting to go in and all hell broke loose. The Germans took over the positions, which we thought we could probably just walk right into and take over. So that was quite an affair in Salerno, and finally we got in there. Planes came in and ships started shelling the shores where those guns were coming from, and we finally

went in there. We went into the mountains up there, and that's where General Clark...I think, he came up Thanksgiving. It was around Thanksgiving time. He came up there and had turkey with us in the mountains. Of course, you know, cameras were there. Had a turkey, took a piece of turkey, he took off as quick as that turkey went down his throat. My mother wrote to me and said, We saw that your General was up there having Thanksgiving with you. [laughs] Yeah, he came and he went. But that was good for the U.S. [General] Clark ate Thanksgiving with his troops. So that was quite a laughable thing for us.

We weren't doing much moving because the Germans were in strongholds. They were up by Mount Cassino. That was a monastery where monks worked. And in the mountain, they probably had enough food up there even to last up until today. The Germans were there, and our planes bombed the hell out of the place. All the trees and everything was all knocked down. The Germans had OPs on top of the mountain. Every time our troops went up, they killed a lot of our troops. Because they could see them. Finally, we stayed there for quite a while around Cassino in that mountaintop until they decided they were not getting anyplace here. So somebody came up in a rear echelon, General Clark or whoever it was, to make another landing, which we did at Anzio beachhead. Our bunch went up there the fourth day after the initial landing. Once we got up there, some of our guys went right into Rome. That wasn't too far. They went in jeeps right into Rome with no opposition. Finally, they came back figuring they were getting into a trap. When we came back, this major general of ours, whoever, I can't remember who the hell it was, said to dig in. Which was the worst thing because we could have gone right in and taken Rome then. So we dug in. The Germans started reinforcing their troops. They took some of their troops off the Western Front and brought them to Italy. Hitler gave the order to knock us off Anzio beach at all costs. That was when the German troops from Cassino withdrew. Because once we got into that, they didn't want to get trapped. I think their objection was to go across the peninsula and trap that whole bunch of Germans that were in Cassino. Like I said, they'd still be there today because they had food way down in the mountains at Cassino. So that was what happened then. But eventually they withdrew and they got out of Cassino. In Anzio, we lost quite a few troops, quite a bit. They had a place they called the Factory. [tries to recall] I can't remember what the heck it was that they...anyway, we stayed there for a while. Then finally we started attacking to break out at Anzio. I was at an OP, what they called an observation post, with the runners. There were two runners per company. A shell fell up there and killed about, I don't know, two, three or four of our runners. I got knocked out. When I woke up, I was going back to the rear evacuation in one of those, the big, what do you call them, GI trucks that they carry the troops in.

WC: Deuce and a half?

MR: Half ton truck?

JAR: Whatever it was. Yeah, and that's where I woke up going back, and finally I ended up in Anzio on a beachhead. They took us there on a ship to Naples. Finally going into Naples, we were sent to Oran, Africa. Landed back in Newport News, Virginia. Then sent to Fort Devens. My parents didn't know about that. I called my godmother from my hometown in Fitchburg to tell my parents that I was at Fort Devens and that I would be home late that day. I didn't want to walk in on them. They thought I was still overseas as far as they were concerned. So it wasn't too much of a shock. When I left Devens, I took the bus into Fitchburg. Going into Fitchburg, I got off the bus and was getting ready to go on another bus to our French district, and I ran into my second oldest brother. I looked at him. They used to call me by my middle name because my uncle next door was [also] Joe. They used to call me Albert so it wouldn't be Joe. Every time they yelled for Joe, he answered. So they called me Albert. He [brother] yelled at me, Albert, what are you doing here? [I said] I just came back. He didn't know that I had come back. So we took the bus together. Of course, my parents knew because my aunt called my mother and told her I was coming. We took the bus to my section, Cleghorn. It's a French section of Fitchburg, Mass. It was quite a reception, with my parents and all that, tears and what have you.

I kept communicating with my girlfriend all the time because I had gotten engaged before I left Syracuse when I was in Pine Camp. I sent her a ring when we were in Camp Myles Standish. And the funny thing about it, I had the money to buy the ring, and when I went back to the camp, I was watching this poker game going on upstairs in the room. Now these people, maybe still up to today, think that I got into that poker game, which I never did get into. That wallet was either stolen from me or something. I sat down and it was gone. It had all my money. I had to send my mother a message to send me money so I could buy my girlfriend an engagement ring. My mother did. [laughs] Finally, I sent it up and she kept corresponding with me all the time, which was a good thing for me, getting [letters].

Because unless you get into a war, you don't realize what the situation is. I know you guys probably were in, I don't know. If you're not in, you never know if the next shell is going to hit you or not, let's put it that way. Because one time when I was carrying a message, I was running in this field at night. I stumbled over a guy, and I saw a pair of eyes looking at me. It was a dead German. I went, Oop, you know. He was dead. But it sort of shocked me a little bit. [laughs] Then another time, this was at night too. They

must have seen another time when I delivered a message. They must have seen my shadow at night because they started shelling that open field that I was at. I had a tree, I think the trunk was about this big, [gestures about ten inches in diameter]. I was holding on to that as if I was holding on to a house or something. I held on and heard shells hitting. They told us in basic training, when it's shelling, never move. Stay where you are. The one that will hit you, you will never know, and one you will hear will scare the hell out of you, which it actually did. I stayed there and heard them shelling. I heard them firing. In other words, you heard that zzzt, [imitates sound of projectile] then the damn thing exploded. Finally, I said, well, if I had any prayers that I forgot, I believe you, I remember them. I prayed my heart out. When I heard that gun not firing anymore, I took off. Believe you me, I think Jesse Owens didn't have nothing on me. I took right off to where I was supposed to go. It was a weird, weird feeling. But I used to say to myself, I wonder if I went there, what heaven looked like. I mean, the craziest thoughts you had. Not knowing if one of them could have hit me because they were hitting all around me. Why I never got hit, I don't know, but that was that one experience as a runner that I had. We had others. There were so many that you can't remember them all.

But, when I came back, I landed in [Fort] Deven, then I went to see my people. Stayed there for about two or three days in Fitchburg, which is about ten, twelve, thirteen miles from Fort Devens, or Camp Devens. Then I came up here to Syracuse. Told the girlfriend, I called her up and told her I was coming in. We were engaged to get married, so we came up here. We set a wedding date. I think I had about a month's vacation. So in the meantime, we got married, which was real quick. My wife's uncle was some sort of a head salesman. I can't remember what outfit he worked for. But anyway, he had a lot of influence. So on the honeymoon night, he got us the Onondaga Hotel, which is demolished now. Which you couldn't get [a reservation then]. He got us a room there. We stayed there overnight, went back to her folks, and eventually went to New York City, Times Square Hotel. I don't know if you ever heard of that place. It's right in Times Square.

WC: Lexington Hotel? Hotel Lexington?

JAR: Well, it was in there. I don't know. We went there and when we were there, the war in Europe [gestures the end] Right in Times Square, Hitler gave up. And that was quite a thing to see the people celebrating. We stayed there, but we got a message. She called her parents and they said that I got a thing to report back to Camp Butler, North Carolina. Of course, they told them that we were on a honeymoon, so I told her, Don't tell them where. I went back to Syracuse up here. Then I had to report back to Camp Butner, North Carolina. That was a reassignment center. Then from there we went to Fort Devens. Then

we went...what the hell was that? [tries to recall] The Boston Army Post. They wanted to make an MP out of me. I found out you got no passes. Every six months they may give you a day off or something like that. You were on duty all the time, right in Boston. I said, This isn't for me. I said, I gotta get the hell out of this thing. Finally, when I went up there, I went inside the office and he told me I had to carry a .45. There was a captain at the desk. I said, I'm allergic to weapons. That worked. [laughs] From there, they pushed me back to Camp Myles Standish, then I could go home. I had just gotten married. I wasn't about ready to get my ass stuck for six months, not even going home. So I got out of that. I was in a Boston Army post, and then I was sent from there to Cape Cod, that camp up there. What the heck's that? There's a fort or camp up there towards Cape Cod. Where the hell was it? [tries to recall] Anyway, I got discharged from that place. I'll think of it. But that's where I was when the war ended. And in fact, I was walking in a little town up there in the USO club. We came out and heard that Japan had given up. Then just a week and a half or something like that later, maybe two, that's when I got totally discharged. Because I enlisted for duration plus six months. They didn't know what the heck to do with us, so I got an early discharge and I came up here. And I've been up here ever since.

WC: We have two minutes left.

MR: What was your reaction when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

JAR: We felt real bad, real, real bad. It was hard to describe it, you know, because he was our leader. Your father is your household [leader]. He was our leader of all the... and we felt real bad about him passing away that way.

WC: What did you think of the atomic bomb? Were you happy that they dropped it? How did you feel?

JAR: It was a mixed feeling. In a way, I hated to see a city and all those people destroyed, but it did save millions of our GIs from getting killed. If we would have landed in Japan, I'm quite sure at that particular time they were fanatics. They would have stayed there until the last one got killed. And I know we would have lost a lot of people if we had gone into Japan itself. In a way it was a bad thing, but still it was a good thing that saved a lot of our GIs' lives. And otherwise, if Japan would have had it, it would have [unclear] 1.01.20 no doubt. But that's the same with what's going on today.

WC: About twenty seconds, do you want to—

MR: There was something else, but I think it might be a little bit longer than that.

WC: You want to change tapes?

MR: Yeah, just go to another tape.

JAR: ...Of course, at that time, ackack was a racket, antiaircraft. But when the Germans made that big drive, they all [unclear]. 1.01.59 They gave them all the guns, see. [laughs]

MR: Well, one thing I wanted to ask you, you mentioned here when you were in Sicily, you saw Bob Hope.

JAR: Yes. Bob Hope and Frances Langford. Frances Langford. And a guy by the name of Smart, he was a guitarist. I can't remember his first name. Smart or something like that. Yeah, Bob Hope came up there. He was quite the guy. He made quite a crack. Finally he made some crack and he looked at the whole bunch and said, I see you guys are doing pretty good. When this is all over with, I want you guys to look me up in Hollywood. I need protection. [laughs] It struck us funny. The guy was fantastic though, he was. Frances Langford was that singer. She sang, which was beautiful. Jack Starr [unclear] 1.03.03 was the guitarist with them.

MR: Did you ever use the GI Bill when you returned?

JAR: I did, but I got into the wrong field. I got into what they called refinishing, like furniture and all that stuff. I got into that field. The guy I was working for was one of the tops in Syracuse. But all he had me do was errands, running here, running there, stripping a piece of furniture once in a while. But the trade itself, he never gave me anything. So I eventually blew him to the government. In case anybody else was sent there, make sure that they wouldn't be sent there. I won't mention the name, but it's downtown somewhere. He's dead now anyway. But that's the only thing that I took advantage of.

MR: Did you ever use that 52/20 Club?

JAR: 52/20 Club?

WC: It was like unemployment insurance.

MR: Unemployment insurance. It was twenty dollars a week for fifty two weeks.

JAR: I think I did a little, but not much of it. I did some, but not much of it.

MR: Did you ever join any veterans groups and be active?

JAR: Yes. In fact I've been the commander up here in East Syracuse of the VFW 3352. They're all up in age and a lot of them are sickly. I'm one of the few healthy ones. We seem to be keeping the same officers year in and year out because there's no one else that can take over the place. I've been commander with them for quite a while, and I also was commander of the Disabled American Vet Chapter 5 in Syracuse. That was only for one year.

MR: Do you have any contact, keep contact with anyone that you served with at all?

JAR: There's only one guy I kept contact with, and it was a runner pal of mine from Dundee, New York. We kept in contact with one another even after the war ended. He came up here, he got married. After a year or so, something like that, I wrote to him and I never got a response because he was working for that plastic factory or something like that. Then I never heard from him anymore, since that time. Whether he's dead now or whatever happened to him, I don't know, but he did live in Dundee, New York.

MR: How do you think your military service had an effect on your life? [ponders]

WC: He probably wouldn't have met his wife, right?

JAR: I wouldn't have met the wife, there's no doubt, because I would have never come up to this part of the country. But the funny thing, you know, in civilian life, in peacetime, I played a lot of sports—basketball, baseball, softball. And I did a lot of ice skating, roller skating, dancing, all that kind of stuff. I was very active. Now you mentioned how it affected my life?

MR: What effect did it have on your life?

JAR: You mean the war?

MR: Yes.

JAR: Well, it was good in one way, not the other one. I'd say mostly good. Yeah, mostly good. No one's going to go through life without running into a bad thing now and then. I don't care who he is. If he is, he's lying like hell. He doesn't want to tell the truth. [laughs] I enjoyed Syracuse. I enjoyed it very much. In fact, I've got a brother that lives up here. He's got his own business now, refinishing and that. My youngest brother. We were nine in a family.

WC: Now I see, looking into the bedroom, I see a Bronze Star award.

JAR: Yeah, I got that.

WC: What did you get that for?

JAR: They never gave me an explanation. But I brought a message in Anzio to my captain to pull the troops back, so they wouldn't get cut off, because they were surrounded on three sides by the Germans. I brought that message. They withdrew. That's the only thing I figure that I got that Bronze Star for. Of course, being a runner too. There were a lot of things I did that were life-threatening all the time, no matter what. But that, I remember. That could have been it. Because my company would have been cut off and

probably all captured if I didn't get that message through. You know what I mean? Which was very important. I got that after I came out of the service, but I imagine that was on record.

MR: Well, thank you very much for your interview.

Yes. Thank you, sir.