

**Frank Mucedola
Veteran**

**Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on 24 September, 2003
At the Microtel Inn, Auburn, New York**

Q: This is an interview at Microtel Inn, Auburn, New York, 24 of September 2003, approximately 3 pm. Interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke. Could you give me your full name and place of birth please?

A: Frank Mucedola, what else did you want?

Q: Place of birth and date of birth.

A: Place of birth: San Severo, Foggia, Italy. May 21, 1921.

Q: Okay, when did you come to the United States?

A: 1922. September of 1922.

Q: Where did you move to?

A: We went from Italy directly to Pocatello, Idaho, and we lived for about, about three years. Then we came to Auburn in 1925.

Q: What was your educational background prior to going into the service?

A: I graduated from high school.

Q: Okay. Where were you, and what were was your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

A: I was at a movie, and when I came out I heard the talk on the street that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor.

Q: What was your reaction to that?

A: Well, being a young kid it didn't bother me too much.

Q: How did your family feel about what was going on in Italy at the time?

A: Well, they weren't too happy about it. My father, in World War One had served with the Italian Army. He was with a cavalry outfit and he wasn't too happy about what was happening over there. Matter of fact the reason that he left Italy was Mussolini started his march on Rome, and he didn't like what was happening so he decided to leave.

Q: Did he still have family there?

A: No, all of his brother and sisters are now dead.

Q: Did he have family there at the time?

A: Oh, yeah, at the time he had four brothers and three sisters. Yes.

Q: Okay, did you, were you drafted or did you enlist?

A: No, I was drafted. Matter of fact I was drafted on my 21st birthday. June 6th, 1940. I'm sorry, May 21, 1942.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

A: My induction site was Fort Niagara, New York, and then a few days after that I was shipped to Fort Meade, Maryland. That's where the 76th Division was being activated and that's where I was sent.

Q: So that's where you received your basic?

A: That's correct.

Q: How long was your basic training?

A: At the time I believe it was thirteen weeks.

Q: Did you receive any specialized training at all?

A: Not during the thirteen weeks, no. After that, yes.

Q: Where did you go for any specialized...?

A: From Fort Meade we went to AP Hill Military Reservation in Virginia for advanced combat training, then from there we went back to Fort Meade, then we were shipped to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin for winter training, and we took out winter training in Watersmeet, Michigan. That's in northern Michigan, up on Lake Superior.

Q: What year was that?

A: This is 1943.

Q: Did you, what kind of specialized winter gear did you have?

A: Well, we slept in one man mountain tents, and we slept in the snow, and at times the temperature was 25 below zero.

Q: What kind of foot gear did you have?

A: We had shoe bags, and we had rucksacks as opposed to the regular field pack that the infantry carried

Q: And you wear the overcoats? Did you have overcoats?

A: Yes, our gear was, our dress I always remember, we had woolen long-johns, and then we had wool pants over that, and then windbreakers over that. Plus the overcoat.

Q: Where did you go after your training there?

A: Then we back to Camp McCoy, and on Thanksgiving Day of 1944 we sailed for overseas from Camp MA Spanish in Boston.

Q: Did you go in a convoy or a single ship?

A: We went in a convoy. We sailed on, the ship I was on was the S.S. Brazil.

Q: Where did you arrive?

A: We landed in England on December 4th at South Hampton in England.

Q: Where you based there?

A: No, then from South Hampton they trained us down to Moorelith, that's on the English Channel. That was, rather I understand it, a resort, and we were in hotel right on the English Channel.

Q: Where did you go from there?

A: From Moorelith, England, we went across the English Channel, roughly I'm going to say about January 4th of 1945, and we landed in Lahoot, France. From there we were trucked, at the time the Battle of The Bulge was in progress, and we received our baptism of fire during the Battle of The Bulge

Q: So you were trucked right into the front?

A: Yes, from France.

Q: Did you have your full winter gear at that time?

A: No, not really. We had our regular infantry stuff. It wasn't the winter gear that we had when we were in Watersmeet.

Q: So you had better equipment when you were in the states?

A: Yes, that is correct.

Q: What kind of foot gear did you have? Regular shoes?

A: We had combat boots, and then they gave us, that's it. They weren't too happy with trying to keep their feet warm. It was a problem for us because in northern France that year was bitterly cold. And we went into Bastogne, but the siege had already be broken when we got there. And we went through Bastogne a couple of days later, and we dug in in Luxemburg.

Q: Could you just tell us about your experiences from then on? I believe you said basically in action for the rest of the war.

A: Right. I think I told you I was with the Company I, 304th Infantry Regiment, of the 76th Infantry Division. Our mission in Luxemburg was to prevent the expansion of the German bulge, the left shoulder of the German bulge, and Von Rutstein, the German commander, was in the sector that we were in, and our mission was to prevent the left shoulder of that bulge from expanding. And we face the Siegfried Line, during that period we did extensive day and night patrolling. And then we finally crossed in to Germany. I don't remember the exact date, it was about, and I'm going to say about February 7th or 8th, and we went into the Siegfried Line. We crossed plenty of rivers, and we became one of the first outfits to make contact with the Russian Army.

Q: And how did you cross these rivers?

A: The first river that we crossed we actually waded across. This was February and trying to stay warm after going across the river, with water up to your neck, was not a pleasant ordeal. And in some instances the engineers would come up and they put in a foot bridge and we would cross that. We crossed the Rheine on, of course on I guess then a baby bridge. That was our method of getting across. You either waded across or the engineers would have to put a foot bridge in for us to get across.

Q: What rank were you at that point?

A: I was a technical sergeant. I was a platoon sergeant of a riffle patrol.

Q: What did you carry? An M1?

A: I carried the M1 rifle, yes.

Q: Alright, so you basically constantly so constant contact until you encountered the Russians.

A: Right.

Q: Could you tell us, I know reading this you were injured when you met the Russians could you tell us about that?

A: We were on a daylight patrol, our mission was, we were on a reconnaissance patrol with my platoon, and our mission was to try and make contact with the Russians. And we obviously came under enemy observation, and they lobbed artillery in on us, and I got hit with some flying debris, some rocks hit me in the right arm. But we did not make contact with the Russians during that patrol.

Q: When did you eventually finally meet the Russians?

A: We made contact with the Russians about, I'm going to say around May 1 or 2, somewhere in there. I personally made contact with the Russians in the city of Leipzig, Germany.

Q: Could you describe that, tell us about that?

A: I was on a mission, I had to go to Leipzig, I don't remember what exactly I was sent there for, I had to get something from my company, and while there I ran into a Russian, I don't know, what do you call it? A Russian patrol in the city of Leipzig. I always remember that was the very first time that I ever saw a woman soldier. There were two Russians, and a woman soldier with them, and I had the opportunity to try and take a picture with them, the girl wouldn't get in the picture, so I finally took the picture with the male soldiers. And that was the first time I ever heard that there was a woman in the army.

Q: Were they friendly?

A: Yes at that time they were very friendly.

Q: Did any of them speak English? How were you...?

A: No, we just... take a picture... show them the camera... we didn't actually have any conversation.

Q: Did your unit pull; back after meeting them or?

A: Well what we did, the 76th Division, at the end of the hostilities, that is when the shooting war was over, we know ended up in what later became known as East Germany. So when, I think it was the big four: France, England, United States, and Russia decided where the boundary lines were going to be the 76th Division now found themselves in what later became known as East Germany, so they now moved us back into the western sector of East Germany and we did occupation duty in that section of Germany for roughly, see the war ended in May, we did occupation duty until August when the 76th Division finally got deactivated and all the personnel got reassigned to other units that were slated for the Japanese invasion. I was left out of, rather mustered out of the 76th and I got reassigned to the 8th Division. The 8th Infantry Division. I never reported to the 8th because in the meantime they dropped the atom bomb, and at the time I was in France getting ready to come back to the United States, and they just sent us home, directly from France.

Q: Where you ever aware of concentration camps?

A: No, I never ran across any personally myself. Not in my sector, no.

Q: Did you ever repatriate any of the American POWs or encounter any of their camps at all?

A: No, no.

Q: Now I noticed you received the bronze star. What was that for?

A: I received the bronze star with the V device that was for knocking out an enemy machine gun nest. We were, one of the river that we had to cross was the Kyll River, that's K-Y-L-L, and at the time the 76th Division was part of what they called a task force and our mission was... A task force comprised infantry and tanks. And our mission to go across the Kyll was to form a bridgehead so that the engineers could come in and put in a bridge and we would be able to hold that so the tanks could get across. Prior to any attack we would always had a briefing, and the briefing was if you can picture the river was in front of us, and there was a railroad track parallel to the river, and then a road that paralleled that. And we were told that there was a machine gun zeroed in on the railroad track. So our attack was scheduled for midnight. So when we got across the river the engineers put in a little foot bridge in this instance, and my platoon was the point of the company, and we went across first and when we got across the river we ran into a German outpost and we tried to talk them into surrendering, but he wouldn't, he comes out shooting so we shot him. And at that point the machine gun opened up and I crawled as far as I could. I saw the machine gun, the flash from an attic, and I got as close as I could and I throw a grenade at the top of the window in the attic, and trying to throw a grenade on your stomach is a little bit rough. And the first one didn't get up there, so I throw another one and that one also didn't get up there. So I decided, okay so I think what I'll do is get a bazooka up in there, so I called the bazooka man to come forward, and he come up with a bazooka, and I got lucky and the first shot hit the machine gun and knocked it out, and proceeded.

Q: Where were you, and what was your reaction when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

A: Well we, I think Roosevelt died April, what was it 18 or 20 something in there? And we were in combat at the time I remember when the word got to me it was night time and we were advancing and "you know hey, Roosevelt died". Not too much of a reaction to be honest.

Q: How about for the fifteen year day?

A: Well, we were very, very glad that that was over, because as I say we were in camp in France, it was called Camp Phillip Morris, in those days all the camps were named after cigarettes. Camp Lucky Strike, Camp Chesterfield. We were in Camp Phillip Morris and I remember I'm sitting on my duffle bag, and it sounded like a mile away I could hear a lot of hollering and I saw a small observation plane dropping a lot of leaflets and the plane is coming towards us and the hollering is getting louder and louder and louder . Finally when the observation plane gets over us it's dropping all these leaflets and I pick it up and it said "Germany surrendered". I mean, "Japan surrendered" so naturally I joined the crowd in hollering. And everybody is shooting their gun up in the air.

Q: When were you discharged?

A: I got sent home, remember I said I got reassigned to the 8th Division, I never reported to the 8th Division, now because all of the troops at that time slated to go to Japan all of the army camps, or the majority of the army camps were closed. So now that the Japanese had surrendered they had no place to send the troops because the army had closed... so what they did was told us to go home and stay there until we call you, so we were sent home with all our gear. The only thing that I didn't take home with me was the M1 rifle. But everything else, my pack, my duffle bags, all of my equipment came home, and I stayed home for 75 days in uniform. At the end of 75 days I got a telegram from the War Department to report to Fort Dix for my discharge. That was November 20, 1945.

Q: Did you ever make use of the G.I. Bill?

A: No.

Q: How about the 5220 clause?

A: Yes, I did take advantage of that, for roughly about twenty weeks of it.

Q: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

A: I joined the VFW.

Q: Have you stayed active in it at all?

A: Yes, I'm still a member, yes.

Q: Did you ever keep in contact with anyone that served with you?

A: Oh, yes, matter of fact about an hour before I came here I called one of my buddies in Oregon, Medford Oregon, we converse quite often. I'm in contact with a lot of the guys, especially the ones with my platoon, yes.

Q: Have you ever been to any reunions?

A: Yes, I've been to, our last reunion was in Chariot, North Carolina in September 4 through 7 of this year. And it was our 56th annual reunion. And our next one is going to be in Grand Rapid, Michigan. The actual date hasn't been set yet. Sometime next fall.

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

A: Well, I think it made me a better person. One of the things, if you talk to a lot of guys that were in the service, one of the things is that, I always liked, is the discipline. I always admired the fact that if they told you if you had to be some place at eight o'clock, you were there at eight o'clock. Not one minute after eight, but at eight o'clock. And that's something that stayed with me in all my work. If I got to meet somebody at a certain time, I'm there at a certain time. And if someone's got to meet me at a certain time and their not it bugs me. And that's why when you told me today that I was early, I'm always early. I was supposed to be here at three o'clock, I got here twenty minutes to three.

Q: Well thank you very much.

A: My pleasure.

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

A: No. Unless you'd rather route any questions

Q: Okay thank you.

Q: I noticed one your interview form that you helped entertain troops, could you talk about that please?

A: One of the things I always had fun with, in civilian life I was an accordionist, I earned my living and still do for a fact earn my living with the accordion. After basic training I sent for my accordion, my father tried to ship the accordion to Fort Meade and I used to play for the hospitals and I played for a lot of the officers clubs and every time they would have a function of some kind on the off duty hours I'd get called to play the accordion. One of the things that I remember, this was during basic training, or shortly after basic training. I was on a K.P. detail, I had to peel potatoes, so we had a pile of potatoes that was as high as this ceiling. So were sitting out in the sun, there's three or four of us guys peeling the potatoes and they sent a runner down and said "Mucedola the company commander wants you to report to headquarters immediately because they had a bonfire and he wants you to play the accordion for the troops". So I got out of peeling potatoes that day because of the accordion. So a lot of the times I would have to perform for some of the functions with the accordion. One of the USO shows I mentioned was, when we were at AP Hill, Virginia and the USO show was coming in and they had with them the movie star Carol Landis. At the time she was the pin-up girl of the era. So they brought in the stage, you've got to remember now at AP Hill, Virginia our billets were, we were living in tents, so we had no inside accommodations of any kind. So the stage was the back end of a two and a half ton truck. So they brought Carol Landis out and she did her thing and I played a couple numbers in the program, so that's probably the extent of my accordion work for the army.

Q: You were never able to take it overseas with you?

A: No, I was just getting to that now. Now we're overseas, right? We're doing occupation duties and every month we would have what we called a company party and they would bring in a keg of beer and a half a case of whiskey. So now some of the guys liked to mix the whiskey with the beer and they called those "boiler makers". I was, I didn't drink, so now one of the guys says to me "hey Mucedola, how about playing the accordion at our company party tonight"? So, I said "where the hell am I going to get an accordion"? He says "I know where there's one." "Where"? "In such and such a town". Well such and such a town now was in East Germany. I said "well the Russians are there now." "Ah, the heck with it we'll go anyway". So I said "now we got to get a jeep to go over there". Now the town was roughly about sixty kilometers away from us. So we went to the company commander and we asked him if we could take a jeep to go get this accordion. Company commander wouldn't give us the jeep, so we begged and begged. Finally he let us go, he said "okay, you go, but if anything happens, I don't know anything about it". Okay, so we hop on a jeep, me and two other guys, plus the jeep driver. Now we go into the Russian territory, we finally get to the town where this guy knows where there's an accordion. So we go into the house, and talks the owner of the accordion into letting him borrow the accordion and he says "no, I'm not going to let you take it because you'll never bring it back." I said "yeah we'll bring it back. Don't worry, we will". So anyway it took us about an hour, we finally talked him into letting us have the accordion. By now it's dark, so we're working our way back to the American lines, we got lost and ended up in a Russian camp. So we stayed in that camp for that night. And then when it got daylight, the Russians took us into their "war room", they called it, and they showed us the map, and showed us where we're at, showed us how to get back and we finally got back to the

American lines. And now I have an accordion and play for the beer party. So that's another accordion story!

Q: Did you have to return it? Did you return it, or...?

A: Well, unfortunately we didn't. That's part of another story. But anyway, about a month later I'm sitting on the sill of a widow and I thought I saw the party that we borrowed the accordion from coming up the company street: "holy mackerel, looks like the guy we borrowed the accordion from. He found out where we were." So now I get on the intercom and call the guy who borrowed the accordion, his name was Rogers, he had a nickname; his nickname was "The Leech." We called him The Leech because everywhere we went he wanted to come with us, so that was his nickname, so I got on the phone, I says "hey leech, you remember that accordion you borrowed"? He said "yeah." "Well the guy is here after it." He hung up! Couple of minutes later the phone rings, I got to report to the company commander. Now The Leech is there, plus the guy who owns the accordion. Company commander says to me "Mucedola, you got this guy's accordion"? I said to him "What accordion"? He slams his hand on the desk, he said "I'll give you five god damn minutes to get that accordion here". So I turned around, and I don't know how much this other guy over there had said, so I went back, I got the accordion, I brought it to him, and away he went. So I got a lot of accordion stories! Another one, another accordion story, this happened when we were under the Siegfried Line. We got into the bunker, and in the corner of the bunker I see an accordion laying there, so I pick it up the accordion and I want to play, at the time it was a favorite tune, it was very, very popular. It was called "It's the talk of the town". That was the name of the tune. So I pick up the accordion and I play one chorus of "It's the talk of the town" inside the German bunker, inside of this pill box, this German pillbox. So I play one chorus and the company commander says "alright Mucedola put down the accordion, pick up your rifle, we're moving out". That's another accordion story.

Q: All right, well thank you very much.