

**Corporal Vincent F. Giardino  
Veteran**

**Interviewed at  
Rome Free Academy**

**Rome New York  
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Key

*HC*= Hayley Cataldo

*ND*= Nick Dematteo

*VFG*= Vincent F. Giardino

*HC*: When did you enlist in the Army?

*VFG*: August, 1944

*HC*: Was it on your own?

*VFG*: No, I was going to be drafted

*HC*: Did you do it by yourself, or with friends or any family members?

*VFG*: I did it by myself.

*HC*: Why did you choose to enlist in the Army instead of the Marines or the Navy?

*VFG*: No particular reason

*ND*: Did your family have any say in what branch you chose?

*VFG*: No, they didn't

*HC*: Where were you first stationed when you went to Europe?

*VFG*: There were no camps in Europe. I was assigned to an Infantry Division.

*HC*: Which Infantry?

*VFG*: The Third Infantry Division as a replacement. It was a replacement division.

*HC*: Did you go to any boot camps?

*VFG*: Yes, I trained for seventeen weeks. Camp Croft, South Carolina.

*HC*: Can you tell us some of your experiences from that?

*VFG*: Camp Croft is a basic training camp, and there you learn how to use, well it was an Infantry Division, so you learn how to use the weapons. Like rifles, machine guns, mortars, bazookas, hand grenades.

*HC:* Do you have any memorable experiences from there?

*VFG:* Well, you meet a lot of people, from all walks of life. In fact, I met a real good friend of mine there, from Kentucky and he had never met a person of Italian extraction before, and guess what he told me. He said, you don't look any different than I do. Seriously! He was serious! He became my good friend, and guess what happened. On the 15th of March, 1945, he got killed. He was killed in action.

*HC:* Can you tell us how he was killed?

*VFG:* Well, we were surrounded and he was trying to take shelter in a church, and he just went into the church when a shell hit the top of the church door and a piece of shrapnel got him in the head and killed him. Do you want to know his name?

*ND:* Yeah, what was his name?

*VFG:* His name was Douglas Paul Gibson and he was from from Hubbersville Kentucky.

*HC:* Was he the same rank as you?

*VFG:* Well, we were privates, just infantrymen.

*HC:* What country were you in most of the time when you were overseas for the war?

*VFG:* France

*HC:* Did you go to Germany too?

*VFG:* Yes, I was in Germany for a while too.

*HC:* Any other countries?

*VFG:* Well, England, but just for a few days.

*ND:* Do you have any memorable experiences in France?

*VFG:* Well, I got wounded. I was in the hospital. We were crossing a canal on a foot bridge at around midnight one night. We crossed the foot bridge into this village, which had already been taken by the [unclear] company who need help. So, we were going in to help them and we had to cross a meadow. We were under fire from an armored vehicle and that's when I got wounded. I stayed a whole day after I was wounded and the next day I went to the hospital and I was in the hospital almost four weeks.

*ND:* And this hospital was in France?

*VFG:* Yeah, up near [unclear] France.

*HC:* Did they give you good care in the hospital?

*VFG:* Excellent care!

*HC:* Did you ever come into close combat with anyone?

*VFG:* We had captured prisoners and I was captured. That was close.

*HC:* Can you tell us about your capturing experience?

*VFG:* We got surrounded, and then an armored vehicle pinned us into the cellar. We were lucky that they asked us to come out, because when you're fighting armor, infantry can't do too much

against armor. So we either gave up or he would fire his canon at us, and if he had fired his canon at us, I wouldn't be here right now.

*ND:* Was that about the same time your friend got killed?

*VFG:* Yeah, that was about the same time. About nine o'clock in the morning it was. It was early in the morning about nine, but we entered the village at midnight. We fought all night to take it and then we lost it.

*ND:* Were you in constant danger all the time?

*VFG:* When you're in combat, you're always in constant danger.

*HC:* Where did they take you when you were captured?

*VFG:* Well, most of the time we walked the countryside. We stayed on farms.

*ND:* So that's how you got around?

*VFG:* Oh yeah. And then, the man that you interviewed earlier, [unclear], eventually got us out! He could've been there as far as I know. Of course, you know, there are fifteen thousand men that were in the infantry division. Out of the fifteen thousand men, only nine thousand do the fighting, the rest are support troops.

*HC:* Did you ever rescue anybody from any danger?

*VFG:* Not that I know of.

*HC:* Was it hard to get supplies to survive with? (As a prisoner)

*VFG:* Oh yeah. You've got to understand, this was at the end of the war. The guys that got captured at the beginning of the war, they suffered a lot more. The Germans knew they were losing, so they changed their attitudes. They got us some bread every chance they could get the bread. There was always a few mean guys, but most of the guys weren't bad. There's always a couple that are kind of rough, but the head guy was fairly decent. The bread was terrible, because they would eat the bread themselves! They were running low on food.

*ND:* What do you remember most in France?

*VFG:* All the damage. The buildings were just like when a hurricane hits. A lot of damage.

*ND:* And where was this in France?

*VFG:* All over. Especially where the battles were.

*HC:* What battles were you in in France? Any major ones?

*VFG:* Colmar Pocket

*HC:* Can you tell about that one?

*VFG:* The Colmar Pocket was in the Central part of France, near the Rhine river. I was there as a replacement. That's where I got wounded. That battle lasted about a month.

*HC:* Was that a really big battle?

*VFG:* Well yeah. That was an infantry battle so there was a lot of close contact.

*HC:* Was it hard to make friends in the war?

*VFG:* No, not with your own people. Guys are friendly.

*ND:* So, it was mostly you and a lot of the people in your infantry? You were all friends?

*VFG:* Yeah, we were friends.

*HC:* Did you meet anyone interesting?

*VFG:* Not overseas, but I did when I was stateside. When I came back to the states, I was stationed in Fort Ord, California as a [unclear]. I was there almost about 10 months. The [unclear] are a permanent party of the camp. That is, when you go to camp, people greet you, they trade you. That's the [unclear], known as the permanent party. And that's what I did. I had a barracks I had to take care of, I had trading. The troops that we received at Fort Ord, had already had basic training. This was right after the war ended, and we were sending these troops to occupy Japan. We gave them nine more days of training. Day one was abandon ship drills in case they were on a troopship and the troopship hit a mine. Even though the war was over, there was a lot of mines floating around. They were given instructions on how to abandon the ship and use the lifeboats or the flotation gear which was mostly life rafts. And we had mock up ships, they actually used the [unclear], then they had more training. The other nine days was like booby traps, transition firing which is how to handle weapons and stuff like that, crowd control.

*HC:* Did you have any strong leaders to follow in the war?

*VFG:* They were good leaders I thought. Yes, very good.

*HC:* Can you tell some of the ways they led you strongly?

*VFG:* The best leaders we had were the ones you come in contact with which were the platoon leaders, just a Lieutenant, but the Captains we had always knew what they were doing. Nobody's perfect, but they knew what they were doing.

*ND:* Were they the first people out? First person on the field?

*VFG:* Sometimes yes. He's right there with you. Do you know what the highest rank is that actually does the fighting? Lieutenant Colonel. Nobody above Lieutenant Colonel fights. The Lieutenant Colonel is the battalion commander, a Captain is the company commander, and a Lieutenant is a platoon commander.

*ND:* So, he was right out there with you guys?

*VFG:* The platoon commander is right with you. He's the officer in charge. The there's also a Sergeant in charge. There is a platoon commander, a commissions officer, and a second or first Lieutenant. And the Sergeant is out platoon Sergeant. Then you have a Sergeant under him. Each squad has a Sergeant.

*HC:* Who do you feel was the strongest leader? Did you know any of them personally?

*VFG:* Yeah, Lieutenant Colonel; platoon leader. His name was Crow, he was the best leader I had.

*HC:* Do you have any memorable experiences with him?

*VFG:* No, not really, but he always knew what he was doing.

*ND:* I see you've received some medals after the war, can you describe them and elaborate on them?

*VFG:* Sure, the Purple Heart. Have you ever watched TV and seen a General? He usually has this, the Combat Infantry Badge. Infantry gets that. The Medics had a badge called Medical Badge. This is the only one that pays you money. You get ten dollars every time you get paid. If you have this badge, you get ten dollars a month added to your pay. Now, the ribbons are supposed to be worn in sequence. You don't just slap them on. Now, some ribbons were earned and some are called unit decorations. See this, the [unclear]. This was given because we fought in the Colmar Pocket, the whole division wears this. This was not awarded to me, this was a divisional salutation. Everybody in the division wears this cord. Authorized to wear. The Combat badge, you have to earn. This is a Bronze Star, the Bronze Star was given to me later because of the Purple Heart. There are two Bronze Stars, this one doesn't have the gold "V" on it. The gold "V" is valor, this one is for service. This is a Purple Heart. This one here is a Presidential Unit Citation. Now the whole Unit gets that. We got that for the Colmar Pocket, because of the way it turned out. This one here is Good Conduct, the red one, for good conduct for one year. Not for a day, you have to have good conduct for twelve months. Whoever is in charge recommends you for it and you get a Good Conduct Medal. This one here is for the American Theatre of Operations. Anybody that served in World War II to protect this country. This is for protecting the United States. This one here is the European Theatre of Operations. Do you see these colors? That's the German flag. Red, white and blue, that's our flag, this flag here, is the Italian flag. This is also for the Unit [unclear] and the tri-colors of France so the flags are represented in the ribbon. This one is the World War II Victory Medal. Then about twenty-five years after I got out of service, I was given this. I don't even know where it goes. This is the POW Medal. For being a Prisoner of War.

(Motioning towards his jacket)

*ND:* You don't know where the POW Medal goes?

*VFG:* Not really, the sequence probably, I would say, is either before the Purple Heart or after the Purple Heart. I don't know. This sequence is how I got it at the base. Yeah they have to be in proper sequence.

(Motioning towards his jacket)

*ND:* Can you tell us about some of these? (patches)

*VFG:* This is a Third Infantry Division shoulder patch. These are stripes, this is a Corporal stripe. Corporal is the lowest, non-commissioned rank in the Army. Corporal and Sergeant are non-commissioned and they go over a Sergeant that is commissioned, like a Lieutenant is a commissioned officer. Sergeant's are non-commissioned officers. If you have men and you have that on your helmet you can give orders.

(Motioning toward his jacket and helmet)

*ND:* Can you tell us how you wore two helmets?

*VFG:* Yeah, everybody wears two helmets. This is the liner, so the steel jackets slides right over the top and hooks right in. So most people don't know that, but in World War II, we all wore two helmets.

*HC:* Can you tell about these? (dog tags)

*VFG:* These are dog tags. When you get killed, this one goes into the skull and the officers will hook it to you, this one goes with your body. These are can-openers. We all carried these. They came so we could open the rations, they came with the rations. But these were all over the place. Every time you opened up a crate of rations, they had can openers in them. You'd be surprised how this thing works. It's just a small memento. Some guy gave it to me, the three of us, we were supposed to meet up after but we never did. This is a forty five caliber bullet.

*ND:* Can you tell us a little bit about the guns? And the machinery back then?

*VFG:* Yeah, we had the best rifle that had ever been made, the best rifle in the world. That's my own opinion. The M1 Grand. It fired eight shots, but it was heavy, but it was accurate and it had distance. This (indicating forty five caliber bullet) doesn't have distance. The Thompson, it's good for the movies but it only goes fifty yards tops, where the M1 Grand goes six to seven hundred yards. But, the best rifle was the World War I rifles, what they called the O three, a bolt action. That was really accurate. Fired six hundred yards. You could hit a person six hundred yards away.

*ND:* Can you tell us about how there were people in the platoon who had different jobs and what they did?

*VFG:* Oh yeah. A platoon, a rifle platoon, is made up of three squads. Each squad has a Sergeant that leads the squad and then at the tail end, there is an Assistant Squad Leader. There's two people. Seven riflemen, M1 rifles, then you have what they call an Automatic Firing Team, which had a Browning, I don't know if you know what a Browning is. The Browning is like a rifle, but it fires like a machine gun. It has a big magazine, twenty rounds and it takes two guys to carry ammunition because that thing burns through ammo so fast, it has to have help. So there's twelve men, if everybody's present, twelve men. Two Sergeants, seven riflemen and the Automatic Firing Team. Then , in a platoon, you have a platoon Sergeant, the Lieutenant is in charge of the platoon, and a medic that comes with you. Each platoon, as far as I know, has a Corps. man who came with us all the time. Have you ever noticed when you read about the Marines, once in a while a Sailor is killed. Have you noticed that at all? Do you know why? How does a Sailor get killed with the Marines? The Marines don't have a Medical Corps. The Sailor is their Medic, so when you read the reports at night, you say, "Navy man killed with the Marines?" you think, "What the heck was he doing there?!" He was their Medic. The Navy is the Medical Corps. for the Marines.

*HC:* When you were in the war, did you have a lot of chances to write to your family?

*VFG:* Yeah, you get a chance to write.

*HC:* How did you write them?

*VFG:* We had what they used to call these little "V-mails." You wrote on it, folded it into an envelope, and you mailed it.

*ND:* So, did someone come maybe once a week and collect the mail?

*VFG:* Yeah, the Supply Sergeant. Usually the oldest guy. The guy who takes care of all of our jackets and our equipment is called a Supply Sergeant. He has a truck, and he handles the blankets that we need. It gets awful cold at night. Yeah, the Supply Sergeant also has a helper that handles the rations.

*HC/ND:* What did the war mean to you?

*VFG:* It has different meanings for different people. Hitler, he had some bad people at that time. Your country calls, and Congress says you have to go, you go. Congress is the only one who can declare war. Because they're the ones that have to pay for it. They're the ones that have to collect the money to pay for it.

*HC:* Do you have any more memories that you would like to share with us? Or anything that means a lot to you from the War?

*VFG:* Well, some of it was good. When I went overseas, I went overseas on the Queen Elizabeth, that was something. The British did most of the transporting. Guess how many GI's were aboard the Queen Elizabeth? Eighteen thousand! Like sardines! The fact is that the ship was so heavy, it was divided into three parts. You were not allowed to leave your section. There was red, white and blue sections. I was at the fantail. Fantail, means I was at the back end. That was an experience, and it only took four days to get there! Four days and five nights, something like that.

*HC/ND:* Well, thank you for this interview, I think we're all set.

*VFG:* Okay, thank you!