

Sebastian D. Andriello, Narrator

New York State Military Museum
Interviewers Michael Russert and Wayne Clark

Interviewed on October 7, 2006 at the Holiday Inn, Kingston, NY

INT: Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place birth, please.

SA: Sebastian Andriello, New York City, August 24, 1916.

INT: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

SA: I went through high school.

INT: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

SA: I was down at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. It was Sunday afternoon, we were watching a film and a general came out and said, "I have an announcement to make." He said, "Pearl Harbor was just bombed. You fellas that are thirty-eight years old that was supposed to go home tomorrow, go back to the supply office and get all your stuff back again. You're not being released." There was quite a bit of yelling and language that we don't put on anything. They sent our battalion, 2d Battalion, Headquarters Company, to Asheville, North Carolina to guard the reservoir there. I had the job of driving the Jeep back and forth to Fort Bragg to get the mail. At that time I was working in the mail. Every day I would have to go there and get it and bring it to the fellas. Then after that we went back to Fort Bragg.

INT: I've got to stop you here and go back to you going in. You said you were drafted?

SA: Yes.

INT: When did you enter service?

SA: January 21, 1941.

INT: Where did you go for your basic training?

SA: We went to Fort Dix and from there a week later they put us on trains and we went down to Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

INT: Was this the first time you were ever away from home?

SA: Yes.

INT: How did you feel?

SA: Not that good because I had just lost my mother and it was just my dad and I. When I went to the draft board, the lady asks me, "Is your father alive?" and I said, "Yes he's living but not my mother." She said, "Is he in good health?" I said, "Yes, thank God, so far." She said, "Then you can be drafted." I said, "Wait a minute ma'am, I'm an only child, it's just my dad and I and we just lost my mother." She said, "That doesn't matter." So I got drafted.

INT: Did you keep in contact with your dad with letters and so on?

SA: Oh, yes, my dad and my future wife. We were engaged at the time.

INT: How long was your basic training in North Carolina?

SA: I think it was a year or so.

INT: You said you were stationed with a headquarters company?

SA: Headquarters Company, 2d Battalion.

INT: What did you do in that unit?

SA: I took care of the mail for a while and then after that they had me doing anything that they could get me to do. [laughs]

INT: When you first went in, did you have the 1903 Springfield or did you train on the M1?

SA: We had the Springfield first and then we got the M1s later.

INT: Did you have the old helmets?

SA: We had one with the Triple A Bar Nothing (AAA-0) on the side of it. That's how they could tell our battalion. Paddy Flint, Colonel [Harry A. "Paddy"] Flint, there's a book out on him now. So they sent us down there, we were in tents for a while and then we went into barracks. When we left Fort Dix we went into barracks in the 9th Division. We stayed there for training and everything.

INT: You were explaining after Pearl Harbor, you drove the mail back and forth to different areas.

SA: From Fort Bragg to Asheville, North Carolina.

INT: How long was your unit stationed in Asheville?

SA: Can't remember.

INT: What was their job there?

SA: 9th Division? We were being trained, infantry training, fights and everything else. Whatever they had to teach us, we did there.

INT: Since you handled the mail, did you still have to go through all that training, too?

SA: Yes. No exceptions, you did what the rest of the fellas did. When it came to hiking, two of us were the shortest guys in the company, we were up at the head of the line all the time for a twenty mile hike. The guys used to laugh, "You're walking forty miles with the steps you're taking, we're walking twenty." We said thanks. The captain would look at us and start laughing. [laughs] He was a very good man.

INT: So you were the pacesetters.

SA: Yes, and walking in that sand in North Carolina, it's a good thing we got used to that because then when we went to Africa, the Sahara Desert, we got used to it.

INT: Did you go on many maneuvers?

SA: Yes, we went on maneuvers down South. You had to go through all those tobacco fields and we were warned, "Don't destroy the plants, this is their livelihood." So we had to be pretty careful.

INT: How long were you at Fort Bragg?

SA: From when I first went in until we left, I don't remember what the date was that we left.

INT: You went to North Africa then?

SA: Yes.

INT: You were always assigned to the 9th Division?

SA: Right.

INT: When you went overseas, did you go in a convoy?

SA: Yes we did.

INT: Where did you leave from?

SA: Hoboken, New Jersey.

INT: Whereabouts did you land?

SA: We were with the invasion team and we were supposed to land in Algiers but a few miles out, we were going with the ships and all, we were on the decks, and I look up and I see an airplane and I look at the markings and it was an Italian seaplane. I said what the heck is he doing here? Officers were standing around and they say, "What's the matter?"

What kind of plane is that?" I said, "It's an Italian seaplane and he has a torpedo underneath." They said, "He won't bother us." Ten minutes later we see him circling, then we see the torpedo drop, headed right to our ship. Sure enough he hit us at the back end, with the propellers and that knocked us out, we couldn't move.

INT: Were you in the Mediterranean when this happened?

SA: Yes. We couldn't do nothing but the officers were all wondering what's going to happen. After we got hit, we couldn't do nothing, the ship was just drifting. They told us, if we go drifting five miles down this part, we'll be in neutral territory and they'll take us all off these ships and put us there and we'll stay there for the whole war. We all let out a yell, boy that's good. Some fella yelled, "Here come the British." There were four destroyers, they threw a line to each one, they hooked up, and they pulled us into Algiers.

INT: Did the ship you were on have guns mounted on it?

SA: No.

INT: So there's no way you guys could have defended yourselves?

SA: No. They put us into Algiers and we went from Algiers to a little town called Boumerdes[?] where we were stationed until we were set to go into action.

INT: How long did that take?

SA: Two, three months maybe and then they put us on trucks and took us out to where were supposed to go. El Guettar and all of them. We got involved in it and that was it.

INT: So you were involved in actions in North Africa. You were fighting Rommel and the German Desert Forces.

SA: Right, the Desert Fox, he was a fox.

INT: What was it like, the first time you saw combat? Did you have a lot of casualties?

SA: Kind of rough, I wasn't used to anything like that being that we had foxholes and everything. We managed to work our way out of it. The only problem when we hit Cherbourg, it was all hedgerows. You couldn't see the Germans, they were behind all these bushes and you couldn't get through.

INT: How long were you in North Africa?

SA: I don't know how long it was, until we shipped to Sicily.

INT: Were you involved in the landings in Sicily?

SA: Yes, we landed at Licata, Sicily

INT: Were you under fire when you landed?

SA: No, not when we landed. After we hit, then we were put under fire.

INT: Did your unit suffer many casualties?

SA: Quite a few. The most casualties came just before the Bulge.

INT: When you were in Sicily, you were with Patton then. What did you think of Patton?

SA: Very good general but he was tough, very tough.

INT: Did you ever get to see him personally?

SA: [laughs] Yes, one night it was raining terrible and we were in foxholes in some part of Sicily, near Messina, and he comes rolling up with the tanks and said, "What outfit is this?" Nobody would answer him so the captain answered, told him who we were. He said, "You're the infantry, why don't you make way for me to go through to get to them?" The captain said, "Because I haven't had orders yet. We can't do it, these hedgerows are stopping us." He's yelling his head off, standing on top of the tank, his two silver guns there. We're in foxholes and I turned around and said you're the tank outfit, you make the way for us and then we'll come through. He jumped off that tank, wanting to know who said that. Captain Pedrico looked at me and said, "I don't know, sir." "Well you'd better find out because I'll really let him have it." He got up and sure enough, he started to go through and we followed. Captain Pedrico used to say, "Andy"—he used to call me Andy—"if he ever would have got to you, you would have been more than what he is." I said I know it captain, thanks a million. But after all, he had the tanks. We couldn't go through those bushes, it was impossible. So then one of the sergeants in the outfit got an idea and he told the captain. "We ought to put things on the front of the tank, weld them on, and push them through the bushes." Sure enough, that's what started to get us to move. He did that and we were able to move in towards Cherbourg. So when we got in to Cherbourg, we're driving in there, walking in there and hand grenades are coming flying out of the windows of the houses. We were ordered to go in the houses and anybody who was there that was German, you just do what you're supposed to do. So one fella walked in and a couple of us followed him into this house and we heard movement upstairs so he turned around and put his gun facing the ceiling and let go a few rounds.

When they got up there, it was all girls in German uniforms. These were girls who were married to German soldiers and they had trained them and they're the ones that were throwing the grenades at us. We were very surprised when the guys rolled them over and they were girls, breasts and all. We felt bad because American people don't do that. But the captain said it was either you or them, you saw what they were doing. We continued on and then they nailed the general that was in charge of Cherbourg, I can't remember his name. He had a funny German name. We got quite a few soldiers in those caves that they had and when we went in those caves we found stuff you wouldn't believe that they had taken from the homes of all these French people. They had everything you could think of

in there. So we got him and he surrendered with the fellas there and we kept going on to the rest.

INT: When you were in France were you involved in the Normandy invasion on D-Day?

SA: About two days after. But we still got involved in it. [laughs]

INT: So it was very difficult fighting through the hedgerows.

SA: Very bad. You couldn't help yourself because they could see you better than we could see them, we'd just fire our gun and hope it did some damage.

INT: You mentioned that you were wounded. Where were you?

SA: In Belgium.

INT: So that was a little later. Were you still assigned to Patton's Army?

SA: Until we left Sicily.

INT: Then who were you assigned to?

SA: First Army I think it was. Sorry, I can't remember.

INT: Later on you were involved in the Bulge?

SA: No, I was wounded before that.

INT: Do you remember about what time you were wounded?

SA: September of that year?

INT: Do you want to tell us what happened?

SA: We were walking along the road and shells started to come in. The next thing I know, there were five of us and each one of us got hit. I was pretty lucky, I just got wounded in my thigh, two big pieces of shrapnel. One of the fellas the arm, another one in the leg. They couldn't do nothing with us there in the field hospital and we were shipped to a hospital in England. They operated on me and I was there for about a month. Then they said you can be released. They released us and happened to be that five of the fellas who were with me, we were together, and when they shipped us back from England to France, they went to the repo depot. This major said now we're going to assign you to a division. We said, "Sorry sir, no way" and he said, "What are you telling me no way?" I said that we want to go back to the 9th Division where we started from in Fort Bragg. He said he didn't know if that was possible. I said we'll walk wherever the hell they're going until we get to them. He said let me check it out. About an hour later he comes back and says he has the information about where the 9th Division is. We were happy. "But I'll tell you one thing, you can't walk there, it's not that close." I said, "We'll get there." "Wait a

minute. There's a Jeep down there. Who drives?" I said I used to drive in the States. He said, "Take that Jeep. I'll give you ten gallons of gas, five gallon tanks, and you follow my map. When you need gas, you go to American gas depots and get more gas." And that's what we did. When we came back to the outfit, they were all in foxholes because it was as cold as anything. The captain said what are you doing here? I said, "They wanted to transfer us to a different outfit, Captain Pedrico, but we refused." He said what about the Jeep. I said, "He gave it to me." "He gave it to you? Oh jeez." It had a big red cross on it. He said, "Go down to Supply and make the fellas paint olive drab over that cross and then just put ours underneath. That's your Jeep from now on being that you can't walk too good." I said thank you very much. He said, "You'll be working with Lieutenant Merrigan." I said, "He's the S-3." "Yes." Myself and a sergeant, I can't remember the boy's name, we took off and he'd go around before everybody. Driving around Belgium, we come into a town, into the main square, and there are ten Tiger tanks. All these Germans were so surprised to see us and we were surprised to see them, the lieutenant said, "Turn this thing around and get out of here." I said I didn't think we could make it and he said to try. But then we were stopped and this colonel comes out jabbering in German. The sergeant that was with us spoke very good German and he kept talking to the guy. Sooner or later we turned the Jeep around and we took off. But we did find out from him that they were going to attack our battalion the next morning. They showed us on the map where they had the whole 2d Battalion of the 39th surrounded. When we got back to our captain we told him what happened and right away they started calling for artillery. Thank God they never did get to us, we were lucky.

INT: Any idea why he let you go?

SA: Not to this day! When we were driving back I said to Lieutenant Merrigan, "Hey Frank, why did he let us go?" He said, "Andriello, you know as much as I do." The sergeant said, "He said we couldn't do anything, there were too many of them."

INT: You were involved in the Bulge?

SA: No, I got back to the outfit the day before it was over and I didn't have to go in.

INT: When you went back to your outfit did you have winter gear?

SA: We had it already.

INT: Did you have boots?

SA: Just regular combat boots.

INT: Did you have to change your socks a lot?

SA: Yes, that was a problem because once your socks got sweaty your feet weren't worth a dime. We kept changing them. When we'd get a day or so rest the first thing we'd do is try to wash your stockings out in the helmet, take the liner out and use the metal helmet. Get them dried out so we'd have enough socks on us.

INT: What kind of weapon did you carry?

SA: I was issued an M-1, then a submachine gun, then a .45 pistol.

INT: Thompson? Grease gun?

INT: What were your duties? You had this Jeep, were you a driver?

SA: Yes, my duties were to drive the lieutenant around, with the sergeant, ahead of the outfit to see what was going on. I told Captain Pedrico, I said "Frank, I'm better off walking." He said, "No you're not, that's your job from now on." So I had it until I was sent home.

INT: Did you call the officers by their first names?

SA: Yes, they didn't have any emblems on their shoulders or nothing. When it was over we used to go to town and they'd come with us. Nobody knew who they were, lieutenants, captains or nothing, and they were just like buddies. The officers I had were very good officers.

INT: Could you describe your experiences from Belgium through into Germany?

SA: It wasn't good. We were always under fire. You just prayed to God that you'd make it. Some of the fellas weren't that lucky. I was wounded but still in all I came back, thank God. Some days you just sat there and were dumb and wondered what are we doing here? What are we fighting for? It just didn't hit you. Then when we hit Germany, that was the biggest surprise of all. We'd get into these towns and these people would just look at you, not a word, and they'd start waving flags and all. Here we are fighting them and they're waving our flags at us. When we hit a certain spot of Germany we were told by Colonel Flint to go ahead and look for billets for the battalion. We had to go to this certain town in Germany. When we got there we said how are they going to put everybody in these houses? We had to go around to the houses and see what was going on in there, we assigned houses to the whole battalion. So we get to this one house where the lieutenant and I and the sergeant stayed with an elderly couple. She was holding her arms and scared stiff and this fella in German told her, "You don't have to worry, we ain't gonna hurt you, we just have to stay here." She showed us the rooms we could have and we got the rooms, and she asked him in German, "Are you hungry?" Naturally he said yes. She said we'll go and get some eggs and chicken and ham. I said "Ham? Where you going to get the ham?" She takes us to the fireplace and makes us look up the chimney and there's a big smoked ham that they were curing. They said they'll cut that up. We stayed there for three weeks, four weeks and we really enjoyed it.

While we're there we nailed a German payroll truck that was being sent to pay the German soldiers so naturally we took all the money we could and put it in our pockets. We threw our gas masks away and put the money in that. When we left this home, we took our money, one of the fellas, the sergeant, said "Andy, what good is this money in

our pockets? We go out there tomorrow and we can get hit and somebody else will get it.” So I said, “Let’s give it to the two people here, they’ve been good to us.” We piled all our money on the table, they looked at it and their eyes went wide. She said, “That’s no good for us.” We said, “This money you can use here, you can exchange it.” She grabbed us and was hugging us. If I’m not mistaken, they lived quite a few years with all that money they had because there was a load. When I came home and told my future wife she said, “You’re sick, you took a chance taking that.” I said, “Honey, we couldn’t carry it, it wouldn’t do us no good. If we get hit, some other GI would take it out of our pockets. This way we gave it to those people.”

INT: I think after the war ended the German money probably wasn’t any good.

SA: No, it wasn’t any good any more but the money they gave the GIs was good. I don’t know if they ever used it all up but if they did, God bless them.

INT: Were you in on any of the liberation of the concentration camps?

SA: No.

INT: Were you aware of them?

SA: Yes, we came across Auschwitz. We saw fellas there that were skin and bones. They were very happy to see us and they took care of them.

INT: Did you liberate any of the POW camps where Americans were held?

SA: Yes. I can’t remember which one it was, we got them out of there. It was an experience that I wouldn’t want to go through again. At my age I know I’m not going to go through it again. [laughs]

INT: Did you stay in Germany when the war ended?

SA: Yes, we in the occupation force.

INT: Did you ever have any encounter with the Russians?

SA: We met them at the Elbe River. We had to stay there and wait for them. We met and that was it.

INT: How long did you stay in occupied Germany?

SA: I can’t recall how long it was.

INT: Do you remember where you were when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt? How did you feel when you heard about it?

SA: I forgot. Too bad, he put us here but he’s not here to help us anymore.

INT: Where were you when you heard about the end of the war in Europe?

SA: In Germany.

INT: What was the reaction from everybody?

SA: We're going home. But then they came out with the point system. Naturally us fellas that were with the original 9th Division, I had 149 points. One of the fellas said, "You're going to go home." I said I hope so. When they came out with that, we weren't with the outfit, we were traveling to get homes in Germany for them. When we heard that, I took the radio on the Jeep and called back, "Hey, Frank, get my papers ready." He said what do you mean? I said we just heard. He said, "You're not one of them because you're way out there. You have to wait until you get back with the outfit." I said, "Oh, man." He said, "Sorry." Later they were weeding us out and the ones with the highest points were sent home.

INT: Did you go home on a troop ship?

SA: Yes.

INT: When were you discharged?

SA: June 23, 1945.

INT: From Fort Dix?

SA: No, from [Camp] Shanks in New York. We went there and from there I was discharged.

INT: How did your dad feel when you got home?

SA: He was tickled pink because when I got hit, it was on Labor Day holiday and he was home and he got the news so he called up my fiancée and told her. Naturally, they all got excited. They left what they were doing and drove to Jersey to my father because he was alone. My fiancée said, "I'm going to write letters, we have to get you home." It didn't work. I said, "Save the stamps, honey."

INT: When did you get married?

SA: I got out June 23; August 18 I was married. [laughs]

INT: Did you make use of the GI Bill?

SA: Yes, I forget what it was, I got it for something.

INT: A mortgage for your house?

SA: No, I don't remember.

INT: Did you ever use the 52-20 Club?

SA: Oh yes, I used that up.

INT: I see you belong to a veterans' organization? You became active in a veterans' organizations? [SA wears an overseas cap with white lettering "New York Local Queens"]

SA: Yes, I did until they broke it up. I was working with United Parcel, they formed this here, but then things went wrong and they stopped, and I just kept the hat.

INT: You don't belong to any veterans' organizations.

SA: No.

INT: Did you ever go to any reunions with your organization?

SA: Yes, I went down to Fort Bragg one year with my wife and we had a very nice time.

INT: Did you ever stay in contact with anyone that was in service with you?

SA: For a while I did until they passed away. We used to correspond with each other.

INT: Did you ever go to see any USO shows while you were in the service?

SA: Whenever they had them for us we would go but they didn't have that many of them, you can be sure of that. We did see Bob Hope, Jerry Colonna, Marilyn Monroe. Not too many of them.

INT: How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect on your life?

SA: It made me look at life a different way. From what I saw when I was over there, I always say thank God it didn't hit the United States. People over here thought it was a joke sometimes and we used to tell them, "If you had seen what those poor people went through, you wouldn't laugh." But they felt that way.

INT: You have a photograph to show us.

SA: [Holding photo of younger self in uniform.] I can't remember where this was taken.

INT: It was probably taken either in basic or while you were with the 9th stateside. You have no ribbons or anything else on it.

SA: So it must have been when I first went in.

INT: Thank you very much.