

**John M. Canale  
Veteran**

**Jim Regan  
New York State Senator Patty Ritchie's Office  
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on November 11, 2013  
Oswego County Legislative Office Building  
Oswego, New York**

**JC:** John Canale, Veteran

**JR:** Jim Regan, Interviewer

JC: I was in the United States Army, and was a Staff Sargent and I led 12 men into battle, and my job number was 653 I still remember it.

JR: Tell me, if you can, do you have a lasting memory of your time overseas?

JC: Oh absolutely, I have a very long lasting memory of the battles that I was in. I was in the greatest land battle that was ever fought. Starting on December 16 of 1944 and lasting until January 25-28 of 1945. I always have a little bit of a joke, I didn't go in until December 22, and I am often asked the question: how did they get along without me? Because the battle started on December 16.

JR: What was that battle like for you?

JC: The battle lasted for 6 weeks and we fought in knee deep snow and, believe it or not, in temperatures below zero starting in Belgium. We started in Belgium, and then went through the Ardennes forest, and then from the Ardennes forest we went into a little piece of France, into Luxemburg, then into Germany, and then of course behind the Battle of Bulge. I ended up on the Czechoslovakia-Austria border 10,000 miles away from home, and I'd like to tell the men who are listening to this tape: don't ever say you can't cry. I cried whenever I was alone because I missed my mom, my dad, my brothers and my one sister. We were, in a sense, crybabies, and I'm willing to admit it. But when it came time to fight, we had the enthusiasm; we had the perseverance, and the patience to outdo the Jerrys (what we call the Germans). That's basically a little résumé of that. I could get a little more on that and tell you about some of the different experiences I had.

JR: Absolutely.

JC: One experience I had (there are really two that I remember clearly). One was at Bastendorf in the central part of Germany and after I came home I looked it up on the computer: six hundred

forty-four people live in that community and when you went into a city you would (in my case) have six men on one side, six men on the other side and as we moved on down we checked all of the apartments up and down. I noticed this group of Germans having a meal. Now, for the past two weeks prior to that we had beans of our ration and water, and I'm going to tell you, we were hungry. So I said to private Haas (I don't know if he's still alive, he's from Buffalo, New York and I actually had to whisper) "Private Hass, go in there and tell them to throw the rifles back and the staff sergeant is going to come on in" (I didn't know whether they knew I was a little man or not). When I walked in, all the rifles went in and I said to them "Stand up on your feet and on the balls of your feet or I will blow your brains out" (of course, I had my rifle). So they went up (I didn't have them stay there too long) and I said "All right, at peace" and I had one of my men march them out to the outskirts of town where we had a linked fence where there was someone there to take care of the prisoners. Then we went back, and I'm telling you, we will never forget that sumptuous meal. I even tell my wife, "You gotta make a meal like that". We had meat, we had potatoes, and we had (in my language) salata (salad), and we had some fruits and vegetables. We had all of the food we could eat, and I said to the men "Look, there is a little bit of wine and you could have a little glass of wine but please do not drink too much because we still have another battle to go into". But I'll never forget Bastendorf. The other city that always strikes me in this interview is Frankfurt. And let me tell you, that is not a hot dog, that's a city, and when we went into Frankfurt we started on the west side of Frankfurt and we had to cross this bridge to the other side. Before we tried to cross, I noticed a German on a bicycle and he was going from right to left and then left to right. I noticed when he went right to left, they threw a lot of bombs at us. So I figured from left to right I'm telling my men to go across the bridge. Now that goes to show you how intelligent the leaders of our army were. I just happened to be one of them. Our company commander was wounded and they asked me to take over the company. As we went across the bridge, just before we got to the end of the bridge to get to the east part of Frankfurt, here was our captain. His name was Kubarek, I still remember his name, and he was dying. You see, we are taught that you cannot stop to express your condolences. He was from Auburn, and I'm still thinking about going there maybe, and trying to look him up. Maybe someone in his family is still alive, and I could communicate what a great leader he was because he led us into battle and he died for us. I often think, for example I was telling the kids today when I was teaching them science (I work in a few of these wartime stories because when you get into science, you get into these things that have to do with, for example, iodine and things like that) that in my opinion, they don't know how lucky they are because in my opinion, I have been to hell and back, and then I lean over and say (and I look them right in the eye and even walk up to someone) "Do you know that you live on heaven on earth?". Of course, they smile and they don't believe that at age fourteen and fifteen. Anyway, those are the stories I try to tell. When we got across the bridge, (we had to continue on) we went all the way through Germany, through Berlin and so forth, and I ended up in a city by the name of Winterberg. Winterberg (I could never find it on a map) is right on the border of Czechoslovakia and Austria. While I was with my men, I noticed this guy was going up and down a hilly territory with a red roadster. I said to him "That's a wonderful automobile." First of all, he said "Oh, you are an American." He spoke perfect English, so I said to him "Who are you?" He said to me "I am the mayor of Winterberg". Little did I know that later on in 1995 (this was back in 1945) that fifty years later I was going to run for mayor. I said to him "How do you feel about the Americans defeating you?" He said "Sergeant, you did the best for us because we had a monster by the name of Adolf Hitler.

Because of you people, we destroyed him.” If you studied history, only 10% of the Nazis control 90% of the population in Germany, but 90% of the population was afraid to do anything, so they didn’t rise up. It took the American army, the French army, even the Russian army, and even some of the Chinamen worked with us to beat the Italians, the Germans, and the Japanese. We were very successful. I am so proud of the fact that I was able to live through the greatest land battle as told as Winston Churchill. He’s the one that said that the Battle of Bulge is the greatest land battle that was ever fought. I try to work that into all of my classes, no matter what I’m teaching. I also try to work a few of my songs into my class. If you grant me permission, I’ll sing a couple of these songs.

JR: Sure.

JC: The first song has to do with donuts. These are army songs, and I say to my students “The donuts that they give you” (I’ll point to the student) “they sure are mighty fine.” I’ll go to another student: “One fell off your head and killed a pal of mine. Oh, I don’t want no more of army life.” I’ll cross my arms and say “Gee mom, I want to go home.” Then I say to the students (and some of them have done this) “When you go home tonight, go up to your mom and look your mom right in the eye and ask her “Mom, did you have a nice day?” and no matter what she says, you say to her “The little man, Mr. Canale, said that I should love you, mom.” Put your arms around your mom, and kiss her twice on the cheek.” More and more of these mothers are getting back to me to tell me that it is a wonderful thing. I want, in lieu of what you hear in the newspaper and that television; I want our students to love one another, and to love their teachers even though they don’t agree with their teacher. Look at what happened in Nevada and Massachusetts, that’s terrible. I also tell the students that if ever a terrorist comes into our classroom, I’ll take the shot for you, (and this is where they get a little bit of a laugh out of me) and I’ll say “If I get to him fast enough, I’ll deck him.” I’ll never tell them how I do it, it has to be a military secret. Within the army, we learn this karate and we were told to never divulge the secret. I can tell a lot of secrets, and maybe I told a few, but that’s one that I live by every day. I will not tell how I would do that. If you gave that away, that would be the end of any veteran taking care of a terrorist.