Arthur Mecomonaco
Veteran

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Interviewer

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Watertown, NY

RH: Tell me where you were born and when?
AM: I was born January twentieth, nineteen twenty-six in Watertown, New York

RH: Did you grow up in Watertown?
AM: Lived there all my life, from the day I was born. The only time I've been away from Watertown any length of time was when I was in the service, world war two.

RH: Tell me about your family, what did your father and mother do when you were growing up?
AM: My father was an immigrant from Italy back in the early 1900's, met my mother here in Watertown, where they married and had six children, five children, one of which died at an early age, the four of us are still living. My brother lives in Massachusetts, I have a sister that lived in Alfred, New York, another sister lives down in Washington working for the government and myself here in Watertown, retired.

RH: Do you know how your father came to live in Watertown?
AM: Yes, it was before World War 1, everyone in Europe was coming to America because it was the golden age in this to them and they'd manage to enough money to come to Watertown. They had some relatives that lived in Pennsylvania, they went to Pennsylvania first and migrated to Watertown because at that time Watertown had a big rail center and were hiring a lot of people. My grandfather worked first for some railroad for a little while, then he went to the paper mills, of which there was a lot of them in northern New York. Then he went back to Italy and when he went back world war one broke out and he severed in the Italian war during world war one, as a machine gunner, and when the war was over, he took my father, who was the oldest child at five years old in fact, was the first child, a couple after that brought him over there and worked in Watertown until he earned enough money to bring the rest of my family from Italy, one or two at a time until the whole family came here and by the early 1920's, middle 1920 before the depression years, they settled in Watertown, it raised a good family, a large family [Laughter].

RH: Tell me, growing up as a boy in Watertown, was it much different than Watertown is now?

AM: Not an awful lot, the only difference in then and now is the progress that has gone on over the years, this is things we can't stop, progress is always going to happen but, what I remember when I was a kid in school, I remember second grade we were taught that Watertown is a city in Northern New York not far from Lake Ontario and the Canadian border, and a population of about 34,000 people and as of recently it still was still 34,000 people [Laughter].

RH: Just not the same people [Laughing].
AM: No, not the same people, but we never grew or shrunk in proportion, you see.

RH: When you were in high school what did you think you wanted to be when you grew up?
AM: Well, I went to a very good school and the teachers were excellent, we had a very great scholastic record there because, they would take the time and they didn't have any failures. They wouldn't allow it no matter what it took, discipline or otherwise we learned and at that point I had no goal in life because I just wanted a better life then we've had because I was a depression child, I could remember much about it even to this day. My family had a very hard time during those years.

RH: Tell me about it.
AM: Well, my father didn't have work for quite some time, I remember in the middle of the night, I was probably four or five years old, no electricity so we didn't have any lights in the house, welfare food. I remember one night my mother was cooking some potatoes and I had to throw half of them away, because they were rotten, she could only salvage the good parts. I can remember that my father didn't have clothes to go to work and when he did finally get a job, my mother had to borrow a shirt from an uncle so he could go to this first job, I can remember that I've had clothes from welfare, which were hand-me-downs from other people, first time I had a pair of pajamas of my own. I remember that when we wanted coal or wood for the furnace, welfare provided it, all we had to do was call and tell them, they didn't give money in these days or food state stamps or anything. They provided food if you wanted food, and if you need fuel they provided fuel. So it was all extra stuff that you had to live on, medical care was taken care, but we didn't go to the doctors, unless you were nearly dying. So it was a very, I couldn't remember clearly that and the only thing that brought us out of the depression of course was World War II. We started to pick up and just at the beginning of before the war started, my father's first job, a man had a wholesale business in Watertown and he was an Italian friend, and he hired my father at fourteen dollars a week to raise five kids on and at that time the economy being what it was, I suppose that was reasonable, but it's built still pretty tough, we didn't have, we didn't have a nickel for an ice cream cone, we had the ten cents for a loaf of bread.

RH: Mhm.
AM: You see, but it's at times like that we struggle for everything, and then for a couple, he worked for the man but a year or two then he gave him another two dollar raise and it

was up to sixteen. I'm trying to make a long story short, couple years later he asked for a raise and they couldn't give it to him, I don't know how he managed to do it, but he managed to save 250 dollars and went out and bought a truck of his own, went out, opened the same wholesale, and a time went on and the Wise Potato Chip company in Berwick, Pennsylvania, seeing the reputation my father built in his business, hearing about it came up and talked to him, wanting him to be an agent selling Wise Potato Chips in Northern New York and that's how Wise Potato Chips got started in this area, and now it's a big business up here.

RH: Mhm.
AM: But he died before he could make it a big success, he dies at 52 from a heart attack, we all said he killed himself working you see, because that's the kind of person he was but he was a family man, a hard worker and diligent worker. So, that was my life and early years before school.

RH: Let's jump ahead, where were you, you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?
AM: Yes, I was at the Olympic Theater in Watertown, which is now gone, that was on State Street. We were watching a movie, I came out of the movies, just about dark, five o'clock in the afternoon on a Sunday and someone said they bombed Pearl Harbor. Nobody knew what Pearl Harbor was, what's that, well it was the Japanese, they bombed Pearl Harbor, we're gonna' go to war, that's what I heard about it.

RH: What were you thinking when you heard that?
AM: Sixteen years old, I wasn't thinking too much I, I was in the state militia at that time and we play this game you know, cops and robbers that type of thing, never took it seriously because it wasn't, it wasn't a serious thing at the time, but when we got into school and I went to catholic school of course and the players were offered as they always do for that this war would not last long and as the reports came in as we get into the war more and more, we started realizing, what it really meant, and then we really got a new one when all the programs came in, the price controls on everything, rationing programs of everything, drives for everything. Rubber drives, tin drives, all kinds of drives to support the war. The rationing was the toughest, you couldn't get anything in the grocery stores without ration stamps and books, you had one ration ration book for each member of the family, and the blue book was for all types of general groceries and the red book was for dairy products and meat, butter, and things like that, you went to the store with your ration book and you tore out a coupon if you got a pound of steak, you tore out a coupon and gave it to them. You bought enough food for your family for that day and that ration book lasted a month, if you didn't let it last a month, and you ran out you just waited until the next month. So we did without an awful lot of things, sugar was at a premium, all the candy went overseas, we never saw it but they said they were sending it to us, but the people back home were doing without it. But everything was rationed, tires were impossible to get because they needed them for the military and

so, if your tires ran out in your car you couldn't get anymore. Gasoline was rationed, they gave you a sticker on your car, A, B, or C, whichever one was qualified you to get so many gallons of gas per week. Business men had a B ration which gave them more, important people got a C ration which gave them even more, A was the least, you got enough to run your car for your groceries and errands, things like that. So, it wasn't easy, it wasn't easy at all, but people got into it, they pitched in, they worked, they pulled it together. It has been known in the United States was a democracy, we supported the whole war, even before we got into it, we were furnishing England, those places over there for everything they needed, if we hadn't done that, that war probably, England probably been defeated, it would have been a different war, at that point.

RH: Do you remember anything about the civil defense in Watertown?
AM: Oh yeah, I was a part of that, yeah we all volunteered for that. I was a street warden, we wore that white helmet with a civil defense triangle on it, an arm band and we were authority. You walked down the street and you saw a light on in the house when we were doing a practice blackout if the people didn't put it out you said I'm going to go, I'm going to have you arrested and they had to do it, you know what we weren't that way but we felt kind of powerful being kids, I was only 15 or 16 years old, but it meant something and we drilled on that and so these events were a big thing we learned how to, how to put out fires in case of an ascending attack near a remote possibility was that it could happen here. That was the worst kind of dangerous events, you see and sandy area bombing because he just burned everything.

RH: What other kind of training do they give you in a civil defense?
AM: Well, first aid mostly because if any population, people of population got hurt you want to know how to take care of first aid with them till they got the better treatment. Conservation of anything if you saw someone doing something around their home that shouldn't be being done, I can't give you an instance because it's too nebulous in my mind but anything that you thought wasn't exactly what they were suggesting we do to make things right we had to caution people on a mistake.

RH: did they ever try new and Mike aircraft recognition?
AM: oh yeah they tried, they spoke of not so much in Japanese but they did the German because there's no chance of them coming over but once you recognize the planes just in case someday you may need to know you see.

RH: Did they set up any spotting stations around?
AM: yeah oh yeah we had, especially on Dry Hill which has served as, after the war serves as a radar station for the Air Force but they did has been stationed up there at Camp Pine at the time which is now Fort Drum, they had a lot of spotting up there for that reason, security was tough and strong out there, they book that camp awfully fast, I remember it was nothing but sand and pine trees and they built a whole camp in three or four years before the war, because they started trading up there because our government saw this war coming on, they knew it was just a matter of time, we were

going to get into it, they just didn't know how, didn't know when and the decision was made with Pearl Harbor, but you see Roosevelt did such a great job which is kind of going back to her you asked me earlier about the depression years he started programs of the PWA or the WPA, works project administration my father got one of his first job with that, they had to borrow a shirt he get to work there but he got him to work you see and he'd go out and water, water lines at Thompson Park during the summertime when it's so hot the grass was burning, at night he would go water the lawns in the park entrance which had some beautiful hedges, that didn't want them to die so that was his job, he got paid for all that. Although stone pillars and walls you see around at Thompson Park, he helped build the master and that project. I have three uncles who were in the CCC people don't know what that is, civilian conservation corps, this is where they took teenage boys, not primarily to get them off the street, all the kids were getting in the trouble these days everybody store is the only way to get anything so they cut down on crime by putting these kids places, type of army camp which was a good experience for them, because being in the CCC they wore uniforms, they were, they were supervised, lived in barracks and were out in tells woods somewhere, and all they did was conservation work, cut brush, plant trees, fix up old roads, build some new ones, all the things that they do in the, in the end all of the big parts of this country were started during that time. State and national parks, get these kids but they got money for it, but they had to give so much to their parents, so it's also a means of income to the family and they could go home once a month and visit and that was a prattle to war. That they got an idea what it was like living with another bunch of people like themselves and it served good for them when they did get in the service, it gave them a little bit of training of what it was going to be like when they did get in. So there was a little hidden advantage there.

RH: Let's go back to two points and then we'll move on to your service in World War II, uhm, you're talking about the Dry Hill and air warning service, at that time did anyone think there was a chance that the Germans might bomb Upstate New York?
AM: No, no because if you remember before the war we adopted an isolationist government type of living you see, because we figured we had two oceans separating us from everything and at that time the world was a pretty big place and a plane didn't come across the ocean as it does today. They used to have to fly and land every so often and what you'd never be could, be a surprise coming across, they know you're coming so if you know we never really took it seriously. I was just, just in case type of thing.

RH: People would go up the hill with the equipment and watch for planes?
AM: No that was, that was done by the service, you see by the government, the established people, there was no Air Force as such at the time but whatever jurisdiction the government put it under. They go up and just was prepared to look you know? And more for training than anything at that time because eventually if the war came out they had to go somewhere and do this job they'd be prepare for it.

RH: Pine Camp grew very rapidly after 1940?
AM: Oh yeah, before then all it was, was sand as I said, palm trees, pine trees, people used to come from all over to pick huckleberry, it was a great huckleberry place, you could get tons of huckleberries up there, they grew a while.

RH: Were they first called Pine Plains?
AM: They were first called Pine Plains back in the Civil War actually, that they use it for General Grant was up there and they came up lived in, brought tents, and lived in tents and did training up there then they developed it and the National Guard put up some cement buildings up near where the airport is now, and they were five or six cement buildings is all and they used it for training area periodically, nothing steady then it grew from that and from pine, Pine Plains to Pine Camp then they developed it, then there was the threat of war, then they started this big building program and the old camp still stands and those buildings were only supposed to be temporary buildings for ten or fifteen, or twenty years, they're still using them.

RH: They've spent a lot of time in those.
AM: Yes, and that lumber didn't shrink or warp, they're as sturdy as they were when they were built like the, the lumber you buy today.

RH: Well, then what was the impact on Watertown, you had the 4th Armored Division there?
AM: It was good for Watertown, if anything because just as now, if Fort Drum were to close down I can't imagine what would happen to this area, it was the same then, we depended a great deal because there's always some kind of troops up there, maybe not in big groups or big quantities but there was a big help to the economy, especially the bar rooms [Laughter].

RH: Alright, now tell me how you came to be in the army.
AM: Well, when I tell the kids in school and I give these lectures, when I was your age in school like you are today, we had nothing to look forward to but being drafted. Now back before the war started as you recall President Roosevelt started the Selective Service System and it was simply a draft system where every boy who turned eighteen was automatically going to be taken into the army. Picked by lottery number, and then they went into the service and they're supposed to sere one year and then they would come home and the next group of eighteen year olds, each year it's be a new batch that would be going in and that's why they did Fort Drum. They count by gap at that time. Build these buildings just for getting the number of thousands of boys that were going to be going in and place to put them in training. That's how it all started all over the country and when the war broke out it was no longer one in one year, next year it was going to be you're going to be drafted and you'll be in for the duration of the war plus six months, and that's the way. So I was eighteen on January, in January and I got my draft notice a few days later. My teacher, my principal managed to get me a deferment for six months because I'd be graduating in June, and get ready. Graduated June 18th, July 9th

I was drafted in the service, went to Fort Dix, got evaluated. Something about listening to some sounds and earphones, made me radio operator qualified. They sent me to Fort Dix or Fort Bragg, put me in the artillery and I became a forward observer radio operator. First I was just a radio operator but something about, I guess I was small, easy to get around they thought I'd make a good forward observer. You're being any recovery probably know what that means [Laughter].

RH: Oh, yes definitely.
AM: Living expectancy of a court observer is not very good.

RH: Seventeen seconds.
AM: Exactly, Exactly I went overseas with forty-two guys, picture there were only two of us come home, scared me.

RH: Though Art, what was the unit you were assigned to?
AM: Well, after I took basic training they sent us over to Fort Ord, California indoctrinate us for going overseas, get shots. We all got shots for everyone so they all seem to want to give you shots, we're getting forward to the incidentally you walked through a line, two guys standing beside each other, each one give you one on each side, you always raise your arms to give you one in your armpits, [Laughter] production line, never forget that. Then they put us on a ship in San Francisco, I remember the ship very well, USS Effingham a Liberty Ship which is, which was a hastily constructed ship, just for the war, put them together quickly. That's another whole story of mass production, the Kaiser built them in the coast of Washington, he had all these shipyards there and he adopted the principle of mass-producing these ships. Used to take him several months sometimes to build a ship, if not several months, even a quick small ship took him two or three months. He adopted the policy of taking, building in one ship yard just the hull and the keel, another shipyard would build all the stuff that was supposed to go inside the ship and, build it all together. Another shipyard would build all the superstructure that went on top then with these tremendous, bug cranes, they'd haul all these things together and in three weeks' time they had a ship.

RH: Sometimes less.
AM: Sometimes less.

RH: Ten days was the record.
AM: I'm talking the average of three weeks because of all different sized ships, that's the way it went. But then, I got into Fort Ord, California in the Fort of San Francisco and took seventeen days from San Francisco to New Caledonia which is a French island, south Pacific, just northeast of Australia. I went the 4th replacement depot there and the 81st division had just come out of combat in the Palau Islands and they've gotten shot up pretty bad, there was a very bad battle and we later found out it wasn't even necessary. Was not a strategic winning or anything, it didn't help at all, and what the next step was, but they thought it might need it. Was through main islands there some

had battles were fought there, and I got into that one with the 81st. That's where I joined them in New Caledonia. When we came back out of that, the division was so badly shot up, and disease that's a bit much, that took more toll than actual fighting in the Pacific. All kinds of diseases, sicknesses, Malaria is the biggest one, Dengue Fever, insect bites on all kinds, highly poisonous snakes, centipedes and scorpions, spiders as big as your fist, things like this all poisonous things. The swamp water is bad because it's swamp water, some of those places if you went into it, you've got a thing called Schistosomiasis, this is called commonly blood flow, this microbe you can't even see without a microscope but it could penetrate your skin through the pores, it didn't have to get in through and opening, and once it got set in your system, in your blood stream, it settled into your vital organs and overtime it would kill you, there was no cure for it. That's the way it was, a lot of guys died from that you see, not fighting and most of the casualties I would say were more from diseases and sicknesses and wounds, more than the actual being killed in battle.

RH: So, when you were assigned to the 81st division, you were assigned field secular position right?
AM: Immediately, got my training and then with it because as I said my job is essential because they couldn't keep enough people in that work, we were three-man team, we had a lieutenant and then the next man was a map man, he was a lieutenant but had the binoculars to spot targets, map man would have the chart where we were in relation to what we were going to have as a target and where our guns were, which is well ahead of where the infantry was, my job of course was to be with the infantry or even a head. You can imagine the situation, you are in the middle of no man's land presumably so the Japanese are on one side of it, your own man are on the back of you and both are firing each way to each other and you are in the middle of it, then you got the third hazard, some guy makes mistake back at the gun , He makes a 10 mm mistake on his elevation site and he's dropping the a shell right down on top of you, so you see there's a down on top of you, so you see there's all kinds of things that cause the living period to you shorten all the time. Very hazardous and we never stayed in a position more than 10 or 15 minutes if we could move because the Japanese had a way of ferreting assault to, you see so that's the kind of war it was, and in those islands it wasn't a defined war like in Europe, you had distinct lines of fighting a thing like that over there it was a lot of little worse because you wouldn't, sometimes you wouldn't see the other guy next to you fighting you see, so you'd be fighting and a 10 foot area and he'd be fighting and 10 foot area and you would not even see each other because jungle on thickness like that.

RH: and this was your first combat in your lifetime?
AM: No, on my first combat was the Palau Islands with the 81st when we went back to New Caledonia. They broke the division up, sent the sick ones and wandered back to the states some of the older man we're in good shape, they made a kadri (?) out of them, several hundred men. Kept them over there for training units to train your replacement methods. That was what the war was about at the time, no longer did organize units go

over as a unit in the comeback, we all got trained as replacements, went over and filled in for where they needed us. So, then the rest of us that were well. I've been fairly new from the station, still in very good health, they shipped us off to other divisions. I ended up going to the 77th right back into the same work within two weeks I am right back in combat with them again then we go to the Philippines next, I have a short battle in Guam when I was with the 81st in Palau. The 81st was in trouble, they lost most of their combat people radio operators need and they were cleaning up and they needed someone to go over there and help them site and they wanted to finish the island by destroying the caves the Japanese were hiding and they didn't want to fight a man's man war anymore, just cleaned up and get out of there because they needed me somewhere else. So they called for a radio operating team to go over so they put us on a boat and sat us over. Took us three days to get over, three days to get back, one day to do the mission, and we did we sealed up all the caves just calling and artillery onto these caves and sealing the Japs, didn't have time to fight them. Once that experience that I have at that, I think the saddest thing I did see in spite of everything else was when we were sealing these caves up and we had a Japanese interpreter with us and he was talking to the Japanese trying to get them to come out of the caves well they wouldn't come out naturally, but all of a sudden out of one cave it was a little felt a little low, it didn't look like a cave just like the bottom of the cliff this little fella came out surrendering like this [shows how the boy surrendered] and we got him out of there and it turns out he was a Korean, and he said to the interpreter people in there want to come out and he said whilst tell them to come out he called them to come out, they're not going to hurt you. Outcomes of woman with two Trojan, no kids, I'll boy and girl and I was with in 10 or 15 feet when they came out because I was that close, and she came out and I said to them, over, come over, come over here and she just looked at me, and the interpreter tries to talk to her and she's just not listening she takes the two kids, and I have to give you a little geography hear the clips in the cave like this goes down to the clips over here which were about 50 feet into the ocean [showing with his hands]. She just looked at me, she took those two kids by the hand and she turned around, walk to the cliffs and just jumped over because they were told how terrible we would treat them if we took them as prisoners, and these were people who were civilians and worm brought to these places by the Japanese before the war to do all the work that they don't want their army to do because they spend all of those years in the Pacific occupying these islands you see. Before the war that's why they had such a command over there, they owned the Pacific.

RH: Was this in Guam or Saipan (?) ?
AM: This was in Guam as well, Tinian was part of that group. We didn't get that we just had to clean him up, Tinian they wanted because, that in Saipan were both great islands, they had great airstrips on now, Graham had a small one they wanted for small planes, but they wanted to develop others for the bigger planes. Bearing in mind who I happen later was that much closer to Japan they could do some big bombing range to Japan instead of the smaller planes.

RH: It's terrible what the Japanese told the Chamorro natives.
AM: Oh yeah, they traded all those natives on any islands they were at, I promise from one thing but treated them just the opposite. They wanted to bring and what they called into the Asiatic family you know, Asia for the Asiatic the Philippines where especially bad, they were terrible to the Philippines.

RH: You tell us about that.
AM: Well, I didn't, of course that was after we got into the Philippines after we cleaned up Quam and the Palau Islands then they never told us where we were going to go next until we got there, even sometimes we got some places we didn't know where we were and never found out. It might have a code name, or number for the place. So one day we finally left New Caledonia once more, with the 77th and went to the Philippines and they told us they were going to Lake David, and they told us we've got about a day or two out when we get to like David, we had very little resistance from the attack, they got us oh about a day or so before the Japanese counter attacked. But we experienced a new weapon that hadn't ever happened before, the Kamikaze plane. Now Kamikaze is a Japanese word that means "divine wind", I am what this was this Kamikaze planes, was a pilot gets his plane, he finds a target of opportunity and just dives his plane, how's himself and takes whatever he can with him, it might be a body of troops, a supply dump, a ship, whatever he could hit. Well, we learned this was a new weapon that we had to cope with then when we got into the island itself we met the Japanese and we beat them, and gave them a good fight they were tough and we took a lot of casualties, but we did beat them. Then we had to get across the island to the part of the Ormoc (?)which is a good part on the opposite slide, west side of it. They started across, there was a dirt road that went across, a good road, but it was an open jungle, wasn't the heavy foliage, tall trees 150 feet tall we didn't realize it as we land we probably went five, six miles across that road and I was suddenly start losing people from behind, people getting killed from behind. There was snipers in those tall trees and beside the road there were banks that went up five or 6 feet, and the size of those banks were holes, and they call them spider holes it'd be Japanese concealed in there and when I passed by they came out and picked us off, up from behind and we lost a lot of casual times and where you were gonna make it across the whole lot at the rate they were going. So we turned around and came back and put us on the LST planes did it around and the plane came up and took mock from the west and from that point it sent up one force up and got blown out of the water by artillery on a small island off Leyte. They didn't realize anybody was on that island so the task force had to come back, it's only two or 3 LST' ass, not a very big one, they thought they might start, get out I'll be established over there so they sent them back and they took care of it, and since they couldn't find anything on the island, looked for any size of force so that gave us a full force. So they gave us a full force in my unit gotten to go as the artillery part of it, regiment of artillery infantry some supply units and a couple Navy man and they took us to a small island and let us off, we were going to take this island over. Well we got in a couple of miles,

nothing happened so by that time it's getting dark, we settle down for the night, about 10 o'clock at night we got a bonsai attack in these Japanese came out of the jungles howling and screaming, well just know you can imagine buying you clothes and coming out with sticks, some clams and swords and there a band that plays and they drove us right back to the ocean. So, they decided they had to find out what kind of floors they had on that we did discover that they had artillery, it was blue the ships out of the water when they went by and that first trip so, best so we got to get and artillery observation to team up front there, find out what's there and let's blow it out of here because we can't wait any longer. So, my team got selected to go. So, just about darkness first, the next night we crawled through the heavy jungle, and it just started to mess that night, it doesn't often rain at night in the jungle but this night it did. Made it tougher we got up in there and where we thought we should be, we hunker down and we waited till daylight, and just before daylight we started hearing activity, couldn't see yet but just hearing them and I lieutenant said I think this is, we are near some kind of jacked and can't met here so will hold it down, when daylight come, we could see the movement of the Japanese troops and some caves again. These caves were what the Japanese, if they don't have them they made them if they have they had them, they made them and if they have them and they made them they interconnected them, they were a complete defense system you couldn't get at you see. So he says we will call back a mission, start something going here. Somehow, I don't know how but the volume on my radio was up and I didn't realize it, I never turn it up until I turn on, but I got turned up, probably taken the cover off the cleaners, I don't know how and I turned it on and the signal was when we were in position, it was supposed to take my mic and push the button twice that would make give you clicks that they'd hear in the back there, they would come back with one click, no one told me that they had received me when we would figure out our mission, I turned the radio up to where I could talk and I would talk back to them and you tell them what we wanted, well when I turned the radio on I gave the clicks and a blast of static came out of it, I had it up loud and it just so happened a Japanese patrol was walking by about 20 yards from us and they jumped us, smashed the radio and took us in, so for three days we were their guests and they had this Colonel that spoke better English than I did and he talked to us and said well I'm not kind of a force that wasn't worth facing because we won't give up easy, we probably won't win this, but we're not gonna make it easy for you, what's your unit we told him that the others in this convention, we are not obligated to give anything more than our name, rank and serial number, and that's all we did, got sick of hearing it, he says hey we're not a signatory to the Geneva convince, we don't recognize it and we will get out of you one way or another and they did, they beat us they do everything they could to make us talk, and minor tortures, not real messed up enough. You wanted to talk, and I got a stubborn after a while, it got to where it hurts so bad it didn't hurt anymore, just ain't anymore or you can do to me that's gonna make me tell you anything that's going to help you, I'm just not gonna do it. So, the third day he comes up to us and he says we're going to pull a bonsai attack tonight at 10 o'clock and he says I'm not going to be responsible for what'll

happen to you from that point on, I don't know what my man will do to you, I don't know what's going to happen in the attack but I'm not gonna worry about you, he says you can bet none of us are going to come out of this as well. So, the three of us sat in a cave that they assigned us, talking in the lieutenant said well if you guys want to talk I won't turn it in, he says you've gone through a lot and I'll just turned your because I think we've gone through enough as I just don't care anymore I think if I wanted to die at that point, anytime I think it was at that point, I just didn't care anymore. I didn't want to ever die but you do reach a point that you wander what, which is the easiest way, so just at that time on the bonsai attack was supposed to start, I heard this explosion, long way off being in the artillery we became so familiar with our guns, you could even tell which gun was firing when the fired individually and I said listen, I said Lieutenant as I think I heard number three gun just fire, he says I don't think so. I had it more have said that I shell landed in front of our cave killing the guard, so we got his rifle and I said come on let's get out of here, we have a chance to go. So, we started out and we came around us outcropping of rock for Japanese century came to see was going on and you raise his rifle and shot, and he caught the lieutenant right through the chest the bullet came out his back, right past my ear, didn't kill him, later found out it went through the top of his lung and I said to the other fella, assault, come on help me, he shot, here we got another rifle, we took care of the card because we got one rifle. Let's get him out of here, so I will use their two rifles as a stretcher, picked him up and carried him, I don't know how long, it was dark, maybe 100 yards maybe in the jungle him and something about being in the jungle you do, your senses become clear and you see things that you don't think you would see. Of course in the jungle, it's dark but here's a place that looks a little bit darker, I said they headed for that, it happened to be it was a square hole cut, they were making a pillbox and all those three sides, the front as two sides, the back was still open, no roof was on it, it was a good place to wait this out because when that barrage comes in you know what's going to happen because they're going to fire those shells all over the place to like make sure they saturate everything. So, we got in there and waited out all through the night in the barrage didn't happen. About daylight the next morning a couple of scouts were coming up through to see what the lay of the land was. Infantry Scouts said they all sent them out and I happened to be looking over the edge of the thing just a day like I saw, there's a little more than about fifty yards away, I just thought well it's just things in the jungle happening but sometimes you think you see things, and I saw the movement again, I could make out the roundness of a helmet, I waited and they crawled a little closer and finally was able to call out. I said "we're over here" I said we're so and so I gave them a 906 field artillery and it's sniper stuck his head up just as a machine gun on a hill back, was fired and killed him. The other guy tried to get away to get away too, and he stuck his head up, he got killed too, so I crawled out, got their jackets off and their medical kits and water because this gentleman suffered, he wasn't bleeding bad for the two wounds but he didn't have any clothes, they took our clothes away from us, all they left us was our shorts and socks, took our ID bracelets, watches, dog tags, everything, souvenirs you know. I went over and got their

stuff and we gave first aid as we could, the sulfur drug, which was a miracle drug at that time, we all carried them, pills and powder. You got wounded, you sprinkled the powder on the wound and just took all the pills that you could take by water and build tremendous defense against infection. So, I've got these medical kits and we took care of the lieutenant, we used our under shorts and socks to staunch the bleeding on his wound till we got the medical kits from these two fellows. Then we put the compress bandages that come out of them and later we found out they told us if it hadn't been for that he would have died sooner, he laid all night that way you see, I guess was done in time. So it was a while longer and then we finally saw some more movement coming up and we heard battle starting where we come from so the attack was going on and it was scouting team came up, a whole squad of men, so I said "let's go, let's get down" as a machine gun nest up on the hill over here. And the guys said who are you and I told them to get down, I said. So we said a couple of flank of the machine gun on a couple fellas up with it, they got around each side of me, threw a couple of grenades, they destroyed the nest. They came over to where we were and said "oh you must be the three guys that has been missing" I said "yeah we're the three guys, don't we look it", and there's these twelve guys standing around, never saw twelve guys cry like those guys did..[Crying] they felt worse than we did I think. They called in, they got us back, called for some stretcher bearers of first aid people. They got us back in our lanes on the line, that's the most of what I remember until they put us on a boat and sent us back to Leyte and put us in a field hospital. Lieutenant got sent back to the states, he made it back and he lives so the other fella and I, we were just run down from the malnutrition, not eating good, didn't get hurt too much physically, just the torturing and things like that and then when we finally cleaned up Leyte and then they put us in the hospital as I said, we came out okay, went back to our units and just took it easy for three or four weeks, has a beautiful place on the beach nice, just as beautiful as any of the beaches you see in the travel logs, we had a good life for three or four weeks there. White sand beaches, tropical waters, palm trees loaded with coconuts, bananas hanging from trees, mangos, all the fresh fruit we wanted. The natives to do our work, do our laundry, we took it easy for awhile then they came around and the animals decided to visit all units to congregate four, five units at a time. You're gonna give us a talk where we're going and he said for the first time we're going to tell you where you're going, you're going to Okinawa. You know, the Pacific is loaded with islands of all funny names and it didn't mean anything to us. He says well I'm going to tell you right now that Okinawa was the first of the Japanese home islands. He says you know it's not going to you think you've had a tough now, easily gonna be worse when you get there so we'll start an intensified training program, new weapons, new methods, new training to cope with that what you're gonna have to be prepared and learned your lessons. He said look at the man next to you, we said, we did, says the reason I tell you to do that he says, when we get through Okinawa, one of you isn't going to be there. They expected fifty percent casualties.

[Video goes out]

RH: Take two, interview of Mr. Arthur C Mecomonaco, Carthage Armory 28 March 2001. Alright Art, we were talking about you were being, preparing, for the invasion of Okinawa, what actually happened?
AM: Well, I guess I left off telling you where general gotten all units together and told us to take, pay good attention, the training we were going to have because there's a new type of training we're being furnished with all new types of weapons that they come up with new strategies, and I told you about the Kamikaze planes that we first experienced in the Philippines. So we knew that was gonna be a, probably a big obstacle in Okinawa. Closer you get to Japan shorter their supply lines are getting and their advancements could be a lot shorter, being a lot closer, our supply lines and having to go a greater distances and meet them were taking place at the same time. Of course we were better equipped to do that than they were, no question. So when I told you that he said that look at the man next to you because one of you wouldn't be back, wouldn't make it through, that they expected fifty percent casualties in Okinawa, he said to go to work and learn your lesson. So we did, two weeks of very intensive training on ships sailed north went to Okinawa, Easter Sunday morning, April the 1st 1945. We landed in Okinawa and I had to transfer off my ship and go onto another smaller boat to meet with the infantry unit I was gonna go, I was in the initial landing gonna be on shore, ready so a soon as the artillery got in and they might need it, I'd be ready to give the transmissions back for the fire mission. So I got off my boat and just off maybe 400 yards away, just as we got away from that boat, the Kamikaze attack started and the Kamikaze plane came right down and hit the ship I just left, killed everybody on the bridge and we had one commanding officer, Lieutenant Dan Zilla, it was one of our colonels not lieutenant, he got killed there. So, I went and met with the injury unit and we were right on shore, now that Navy had developed a strategy for coping with the Kamikazes and what they did, was any ship, there were 700 ship that went from the Philippines to Okinawa and when we got there, every ship who was not involved in the actual invasion, supply ships, troop ships, ammunition ships, anything like that. Just the battle wagons that we had a couple of, the aircraft carrier, had a lot of cruisers, a lot of destroyers, any one combat ship that was not there to support the invasion was given the job of being out twenty miles out to sea and he formed them in a circle and they just steamed in a circle continuously steaming like that the strategy being was to aircrew catalyst showed where the air strips were on Okinawa, so they know which direction that they attacked by air would come from So, they positioned those ships in a strategic area so they can meet that onslaught. So, ships were sailing in a big circle, you couldn't see one side of the circle from the other and the Kamikaze would fly over and when they came over the other side of the circle they set of a curtain of fire. I don't know how anything ever got through it, I couldn't tell much in the daytime if you saw it at night, just a solid sheet of metal, going up and you have to remember the troops break their tracers up and the tracers is only every fifth bullet, so you see how much is going on up there, you're only seeing 1/5 of what's going up and it's an actual curtain and so they did. They'd get a bunch of those planes shot down by sight, then they come over to the

middle of the circle nothing's happening but when they got to the inside of the circle they get another curtain of fire going up at them and they took them out but in in spite of that they come with such great numbers that some did get through and they did, they did crashing the ships and smashing the smaller boats landing, groups of men that were on shore piles of supply that supplies things like that, and they did a lot of damage so we, got in, they didn't meet us at the beaches, as far as the Japanese on the island, they sucked us in for a couple of miles, thinking to attack and flank us you see. So we got in surely enough, we got in a couple of miles and all of a sudden then it came out with full fury and from that day on there was never a day there wasn't fighting, constant fighting for nearly four months, day after day and it was intense. One place I remember was called the escarpment, it was like a line of low hills and 30 feet high you couldn't climb up them, like they were so steep, even as they were more like a hill than a cliff but you still didn't go up them and seeing this they planned, the brought grappling hooks and some ladders that would reach the lower places, thirty foot ladders. Well we got to that they were going to try to get up there, put these ladders up and as soon as the infantrymen climbed up those ladders, and I'm with them because they figured they might need artillery support up in there, yes my team was with them, as soon as these men stuck their heads up to the top the japs were there waiting to shoot them down so fast as they went up, so finally they said well let's throw grenades, so everybody, all these infantrymen all had grenades and they were throwing them up and the japs would throw them right back down, so they developed a strategy of counting, count three and then throw it by the time the grenade got up there because it takes five seconds for a grenade to explode after you let it out of your hand, so they tried to time it but even then , that still wasn't working and they called for more grenades, and someone brought the needs up and the boxes they came in I was helping taking them back out of the boxes, out of the fiber cases and handing them to the infantrymen and they're throwing, getting frustrated because nothing was happening, and we were getting hurt just as much as they were getting hurt, as they had damage they were doing so finally were able with this strategy to cause a lot of damage and they did get a few men on top and then we started to get more and more and we had to take over that ridge and that was called the Shlur Ridge, there's a not hot line on the Shlur Ridge and it was intense fighting there for two days for we could break all crossed it from then on we just slowly went up. All up in a little bit of that time. We got half way through the highway before the war was over at that time, but we had a lot of causalities, just like we predicted, and not only do we have that, a typhoon hit us, it destroyed a lot of our equipment, we had a plane, a c-5 plane, no a c-5 plane, was a piper club we used for artillery observer and that had been destroyed, it was one I would have gone up into to observe fire as an artillery observer if it came needed and we had to sit on that thing and hold it down in the typhoon to keep it from blowing away and that typhoon cost our, there seven teen inches of rainfall fell in two weeks as a result of the typhoon and the plane was just a big mud hole so now there's another thing were fighting the elements and the mud and I guess off with my inflammatory unit I was with them for thirty two days never got back to main unit for

thirty two days and the only thing I could get to eat in those thirty two days was whatever my infantry fellas could get for me because I couldn't get back to them. I never had a hot mean for that time, didn't change my clothes from that and I was a sorry mess when we finally got that. I was able to get back after that. I was hungry, they sent me back to the supply depot, got me some new clothes, got me some food but we had an awful time. In fact thirty tremendous days after I received the infantry badge. I earned that being with the infantry for so long. They made an exception, they gave me one, gave me a little pay raise too. Not much but they did change their regulations, instead of holding it to just infantrymen , they said anyone who spends that much time in combat deserves it, doesn't have to be an infantryman, and I got it. That's probably my most proud thing I've ever got and it was because of how well those men took care of me. When I look back to this day and think of the odds I say why me? You see I've lost forty two friends doing this job and I often wonder but as I went back over my life, few years ago, it's all the things I've done in my life I found reasons why me, if I hadn't done this job, if I hadn't been here to do them, it wouldn't have been done, who would have done it?

RH: Well, let's talk about and then we'll come back, back to a couple of world war two thing, what happened after the war?
AM: After the war, well first of all let's get to the end of the war, were fighting our hearts off, when one mooring imp standing on a radio watch your backs at the guns incidentally we had one radio set up so we could use that to pick up newscasts from Hawaii and san Francisco we had a special high-powered radio and the captain had me back there he took under his wing because he knew his losing us faster than he could afford, he took me under his wing he didn't like to send any more than absolutely necessary because you knew the odds were against us so he says I want you to stand radio, watch and be ready if we need you to machine gun or something and I said okay. So I'm listening the radio and it's about ten o'clock this morning and a newscast came on that we have had new news that a bombing raid had come over and had been conducted on jean and the bomb had been dropped on a city in japan, the power of about twenty-thousand tons of TNT. I know what a 105 shell would do out there in front of me and what damage that does, well what is 20,000, you know? We just thought it was our son Welles type of thing. So I said the caption , I said come over and listen to this and it was repeated, he said age and shrugged his shoulders, I don't know, we decided to call headquarters, he got back up at the division headquarters and says yeah we got the report but were investigating it that's where we left it. So over the morning till the middle afternoon this report kept coming so finally it came down officially from the United States from Washington. That this happened and they were going to use this weapon again. Two days, three days later we dropped the second one, and that was how the war ended. Imagine going into japan prior, so now all of a sudden the war was over, we just couldn't believe it. Just like that, it was over. I don't remember rejoicing, I do remember sitting down saying a prayer, being thankful, I may have cried a little bit, but

it was all like a dream, ya know? Finally it hit us all, that the war was over, and they got us all back to the beaches, with showers and places to eat, with hot food and we started getting good food, gave us all new clothes and took weapons and everything away from us. I guess I looked pretty sick when I came back, my clothes were all torn, my helmet gas a dozen dents in it, and as young as I was I did manage to get a little peach fuzz around a inch long, and I didn't shave and when I got back I did look pretty bad. They got us all cleaned up and put us on boats and we sailed to japan and our job was to Northern Japan, that's all in the same latitudes we are, winters had a lot of snow and it was really cold. So we landed there and we went into combat loaded, they gave us all new weapons, went in with bullets in the guns, they told us we didn't know how we were going to be revealed, we don't know what the population is, so we went in nice and slow, walked down this mainstream, going to a railroad station to take us to another village, occupying another base down there. So we walked down the streets, the people would bow their heads, and we took it kind of as a sneer and as a insult, we couldn't understand why. We felt kinda bad about that, we weren't there, we got out of the train and went to the village and they put us in army placement camp, they were basically big tall, wooden buildings. They sent me back to the division artillery and that's where I spent that winter, and of course I was sick, I had malaria, and my ears were in bad shape and ringing all of the time with ear aches, so I had to be given light work so they put me in the office. We had it good. The city was a modern city, they had nice ski slopes, movies at night and good food, a complete departure. It was kind of hard to get used to, like something's bad going to happen but nothing ever did. In the other village, we were quarantined for about two weeks, they didn't want us to bring anything to the Japanese, we didn't know what diseases or sicknesses they had, so when we were finally allowed to go into the town there were always little kids going to school, happy little kids going to school, they always had smiles on their faces. So we got into town and the first place we had to go to was this shop. We sat there and talked to the guy, he spoke pretty good English, so I asked him something, I said, all these kids keep asking me if I'm from Ohio, and I keep telling them no, I'm from new York, and he said that Ohio was a Japanese work for good morning. And then I was assigned to drive a Chaplain for three months, I was never on any heavy duty, the main job we had to do was to go around countryside and check for guns and any weapons, and our primary job was to just keep the peace, and most people weren't a problem, they didn't even suffer through the war the way southern japan did, so we lived pretty good there. So I was assailed the chapel and I had to take them anywhere they wanted to go, and during that process I met a lot of interesting people, that the Japanese didn't treat the best, and they were foreigners, and they looked bad, and I managed to get them feed, and medicine and introduced them to a few people I met, and one of them was a college professor in japan. He was a philosopher, and a philosopher in my mind is just someone smarter than me, so he invited me over for dinner one night and this young lady comes out and say to come for dinner, she said to come in that my father wanted you for dinner, and here when a guest invited you for dinner you go no matter what, so I went in and he said that I was part of

this party. So they went through a whole Japanese ceremony of a Japanese dinner and a tea ceremony. And the customs were dove's eggs, and rice in every form, rice cakes, ice boiled, rice steamed and it was so good. And I was talking to this philosopher and I said a strange thing happened, when we were walking down the street everyone was turning their backs on us, and we didn't think it was very polite and he said oh no, that is a form of respect and I said how so, and he said it was decided that after the war was over for us, and the emperor, we never heard of him, and they were never allowed to see him in public, only certain people were, they just knew about him and when people heard about I'm they showed him a great form of respect, we aren't coming in here to disrespect them, and that's what they did. They don't consider themselves worthy enough, so when they turned their back it was all a form of respect.

RH: What happened to you after the war?
AM: They sent me to northern japan, there was a point system there we had to get out of the service. So many points per month, and every invasion or battle, we got so many points, and every decoration gets you pro points, and then when you receive a certain amount of points they sent you home. So they sent me to a reevaluation center down in Tokyo and we had been doing a lot of outdoor work, got on this train, an unheated train, because it was the middle of winter, and when it was cold I wasn't feeling well, and I came down with malaria again on the train and we were about seven-hundred-eight-hundred miles, and it took us about five days to get there. Trains weren't in the best of shape, and the snow kept slowing the train down and by the time I got there they had to take me by ambulance, to a hospital in Tokyo, and the hospital was built by Americans, after a 1923 earthquake, and I spent forty-five days in there in that hospital because I developed ammonia, along with the malaria, and I almost died, my folks were worried about me because they didn't hear from me in a while, so they got to the red cross and they found out. I went and got there in Fort Dixon, in July and spent a week in there to get evaluated and getting set up because of my disabilities, I qualified for some sort of compensation, got me all my paperwork and got me some travel money and I went home on August 3rd.

RH: Your life after the war, did you marry?
AM: Yes I married, and went to Syracuse University because I wanted to get into broadcasting and radio school and I qualified for that and came back and tried to get a job in Watertown but you had to know somebody so I didn't get that job. My first job was at the Watertown daily times for eleven and a half years, probably the best job was at the post office for eight years as a senior clerk and I bought a music store and ran that for fifteen years, and meanwhile married out of the service and adopted two kids and had one of my own. Ran the boy scout camp and trained a lot of boys that made it far in life and got in the eagle club for fifty-three years, which got me into my school lectures and my wife said you need to write all of this down and it never hit me, but then I thought, that one day she's going to have to go in my obituary and she wasn't going to know what to put in it so she wanted me to have it ready for her so I did, I wrote in it

and kept writing and writing all the things I did and then it hit me when I'm doing all of this, it says if I hadn't surveyed those other forty-two guys that got killed over there and me and the other one that did come home, if I hadn't survived, and I hadn't done all the things that I did, got married, had kids, what kind of home would those children have been in , a better or worse one, you see, we would have never had the one that we had of our own, when I had the boy scout camp, and he's got Bob Hickey. He was the admiral in the navy command aircraft carrier recently retired man in the Watertown Burckraft had a big plumbing business for years he inherited that this Bart Potter has got his own television thing there on Stone Street and he's got this beeper service and this answering service and all of this stuff these guys are successful and at times he'd come up and say jeez Art thanks for what you taught me when you were my scoutmaster, so I had to stop and think about all the lives you touch on, and that's what I tell kids in school, don't think one person is not important because everything you do in your life, every person you meet, every life you touch on, you have an effect on that thing and I look back on that and I can see why me.

RH: I think that's a good point to stop at.
Recorder: If you could say or explain one lesson that you took back from you being in a war, what would be that lesson?

AM: One lesson? The biggest lesson I can tell you is "war is not the answer to everything".

Recorder: What years were you over?
AM: July 10th. Overseas?

Recorder: No in the war.
AM: oh, July 10th, 1943 through August 10th, 1946.

Recorder: How old were you?
AM: I was eighteen when I went in and twenty-two when I came out, the best of my youth (laughing)

[Video shows photo of Arthur Mecomonaco showing a picture of him when he was drafted and medals we earned.]