



William M. O'Connor
Narrator

Robert von Hasseln
Wayne Clark
New York State Military Museum

Interviewed at DMNA HQ
Latham, NY
2 January 2001

RH: Please tell us where and when you were born.

WO: I was born October 7, 1923 in Schenectady, New York. I came from an Irish family of ten children, along with my Father and Mother and my Grandmother who lived with us. I had a very fortunate existence. Our family life was good. I graduated from a parochial school in Schenectady. I didn't realize that I had a regents diploma until I applied to college six years later after the war. WW-II was very fortunate for me, as I came out way ahead.

RH: When were you drafted?

WO: I was in Schenectady and reported to Board 356 at the central fire station. Actually I was part of the first contingent of younger draftees after they changed the age from 21 to 18 years old. There were a whole bunch of us younger guys plus a few older ones to fill up the quota. We all went down to Camp Upton on Long Island.

RH: You were a young man in Schenectady before you were drafted. What was the war like in Schenectady?

WO: I waited to be drafted rather than enlist. Many of my friends enlisted and couldn't wait to get into the action, but I didn't want to enlist and regret..... (lost audio).... so I'll wait to be

drafted and take my chances and do what I have to do and serve how I have to serve. I worked for Army Ordnance at the American Locomotive Company when I was drafted and worked with tanks. I thought for sure that I would end up in the Tank Corps because of that background. But that is not how the Army works. Of my friends, one had a year of college and a couple others worked at GE. Almost everybody in that area worked at GE in Schenectady. We had a very unique outfit. Everyone was drafted from Plattsburg down to New York City and out to Montauk Point. We had every county represented in my company and we had 22 from Schenectady. We stayed together for three years which was also unique. I never got home on a furlough in three years. Every outfit was unique but ours was more so. We all went in on the same day, went through the same training, the same battles, came home on the same ship, got discharged the same day, and rode home on the same train. That was a little bit different.

RH: Tell us about your first duty station.

WO: (lost audio)... That was quite an experience. Fortunately we were only there a short time. We had just enough time to get our shots, get our uniforms, and pull KP duty once. Then we got on a troop train down to Texas. That took three days and was a good ride. We got off the train in a cold rain and one of the guys asked what they trained here. They said it was MP (Military Police) training. We all went "oh no!" None of us wanted to be MP's.

RH: Why not?

WO: We all wanted to be pilots. We wanted to be in the Air Corps. That is where the promotions and glory were. I didn't want to be in infantry or tanks. We were thinking quartermaster, ordnance, or artillery maybe. But in retrospect it was a good assignment. It worked out to be very interesting. I was at a headquarters and involved in all kinds of investigations. For two and a half years I came to know Naples (Italy) as well as I knew Schenectady. I wound up in headquarters because I got pneumonia and was in a British hospital in southern Italy for two weeks and then in an American hospital for two weeks. When I was discharged from the hospital I called headquarters and asked them to pick me up. Otherwise I would have been sent to a replacement depot and likely wound up in the infantry. I was not excited about being in the infantry in Italy in the winter of 1944. They said not to worry and they came down and picked me up and brought me to headquarters.

Naples was an interesting city. (lost audio)..... five hospitals in Naples taking care of the wounded from Casino, Anzio, etc. They were filling them up pretty good.

RH: Let's go back to Texas. What was that like?

WO: It was a pretty good time in Texas. (lost audio)... and then we went through 3 or 4 months of military police training for guarding prisoners of war, transporting prisoners and traffic control. I went to a map school, which was one of the reasons I got into headquarters. I

could type, I could drive a military vehicle, and I was considered the battalion artist so those things didn't hurt me.

We guarded a stockade at Camp Swift, Texas. That was not a happy time. There was a very difficult Colonel running that stockade and he was not the most compassionate person in the world. It was a tough assignment.

RH: How come?

WO: Well, he had a lot of vicious people that worked for him. They did some very violent things to the prisoners. We had the same thing in Italy when we set up a stockade. It must be a certain kind of individual that they put in charge of stockades as commandants. They were very hard and not very protective of the prisoners.

RH: You saw the stockade duty differently?

WO: Yes, we were New Yorkers and tended to treat people as we did other New Yorkers. The black and white issue was coming to the fore. We would go into town and pull town duty. Soldiers would be lining up for the bus and a black soldier would be told by the bus driver to get to the rear. We couldn't understand that as New Yorkers. We would see that kind of thing come to pass throughout the war. I thought at the time that there were things that needed to be sorted out after the war, and they have been sorted out to a great extent. There were a lot of things we were learning quickly as 19 and 18 year olds. We were seeing the real world, not just from the eyes of a country kid from upstate New York.

RH: How did you get along with the rest of the New Yorkers in your outfit? There must have been a lot from the New York City area.

WO: Yes. In Corona, Long Island they must have cleaned out entire city blocks with the draft. There were a lot of Italian.... (lost audio). Our Captain came from Minnesota and our medics came from Illinois and they thought we were smart aleck New Yorkers. The New York City boys we didn't treat ... (lost audio). One Italian kid, Tony Domirio(sp?) from Corona, saved my life when he went and got the medics when I got pneumonia. We still have dinner with him in Florida. They turned out to be pretty good kids.

DH: What was it like being in the south?

WO: We liked Austin, TX. It was kinda nice. We were in map school and we would go swimming. We were in map school in the morning and would draw military maps...(lost audio). We didn't care to go to town that much. The camp had everything we needed. We were only there for seven months and most of the time we were quarantined for one reason or another. So it was a good hitch in Texas and we were glad to get on the train, though we had no idea where we were going. There were all kinds of rumors about our destination. This kid from the Bronx, Marty Brodsky(sp?), says "I hear we're going to Camp Shanks in New York". The MP's

grabbed him and took him into headquarters to question him about how he knew where we were going. So right away we all knew that was where we were going. (lost audio)... through Buffalo and coming from there over to Albany we waited to see Schenectady as we went through, but at Amsterdam we cut south to Selkirk and missed Schenectady. In Selkirk we stopped. I guess the train needed water. One of the guys' father worked in the Selkirk switching yard so he asked one of the workers to tell his Dad that he was on his way over. But none of us got home. Some of the New York City kids were going AWOL every night and getting back by 6:00 am. One night 110 guys were AWOL and the Lieutenant said that he just hoped they were all back in the morning. To keep us busy they had us marching back and forth a lot of the time. One day a whole platoon was doing that and made a right turn over the tracks and went AWOL into the city. They all made it back and to the ship. So we boarded the ship...(lost audio)... to North Africa. That was a nice ride for two weeks. It was a little frightening actually.

DH: How so?

WO: Well, we were in the lower hold of the ship, the Dorothea L. Dix. If we had gotten torpedoed we wouldn't have had a prayer. So I and three buddies would stay up above until around 2 o'clock in the morning, playing cards and talking. Then we got to North Africa and we were happy to get there safely after two weeks. The war in Africa had ended about two months before we arrived in September, 1943. People were throwing roses to us on the trucks. But it was not good duty for the month we were there. We were guarding 100,000 German and Italian prisoners of war. One of our jobs was to march them out to the Mediterranean (lost audio). We would march them for hours. Five of us MP's would guard 25,000 prisoners. They had no place to go as we were right on the edge of the desert. Most of them were happy to be prisoners. Some of the hard-nosed Germans were tough but most were happy that their war was over. They were eventually going to POW camps in the U.S.

DH: Did you have any problems with the hard core Germans?

WO: We didn't care for the SS troops at all.

DH: How long were you in North Africa?

WO: Only about a month. Then we boarded a troop ship bound for Italy. Sicily had been invaded and they were moving through Sicily fast. We waited in Bizerta harbor for a couple days and then went straight across to Naples. We unloaded there and landed in Higgins boats because the harbor was still mined. Naples had just fallen around October 1st and we came in on the 6th. (lost audio)... University of Naples (lost audio). Then we moved from there on out. The worst days of our war were from October 6th until June, 1944 when we took Rome. We could hear the artillery but we were ten miles from the front so were somewhat safe. But we had a lot of air raids, land mines, strafing, etc. We were close enough to not have to wear a tie or salute but not close enough to get killed.

DH: At this point were you still guarding prisoners of war?

WO: No. In Naples we had all kinds of duties, traffic control mostly, and guarding ships in the harbor. Naples was handling as much ship traffic as New York City. Naples was supplying the American 5th Army and the British 8th Army. There were some interesting experiences there. At one time they were drying out gun powder that was going up to the line damp and it was misfiring. Naples was loaded with tunnels that they were using as air raid shelters. They were putting all of these munitions in there to dry it out and it caught fire and started exploding. It was blowing holes right through the ground and killing people, so they called out our battalion and we had to clear out a whole big section of Naples.

Then another time we had to clear part of the city when they re-connected the power. The Germans had really messed up the power system and we were afraid they had rigged it with time bombs. Some streets blew up two weeks later and the post office blew up two weeks later. They had detonations for about three weeks. Buildings, etc. were blowing up so we had to clear people out. Aside from that we had a lot of black market, armed robbery, etc. We had everything. It was a really tough city at that time.

DH: What was it like with the Italians?

WO: Well, we had several Italians in our outfit. The locals were very receptive to the Americans coming in. Some of the kids were looking up their relatives.

There was a kid in the infantry who had inherited some property. He had requested a 3-day pass to go down to southern Italy to straighten out this inheritance. There were no furloughs allowed. So this kid went AWOL. He was just going for a weekend to find a lawyer and take care of this property. Thirteen months later we get word of this deserter picked up in southern Italy. Apparently some poison pen relative had turned him in. I was in charge of investigations so I send a couple guys to go down there. They walk into this barber shop and here is this kid cutting hair. He says to them "I guess you've come for me". They say yes and he asks if he can finish the guy he's doing and they let him. He finishes with the guy and then asks if he can say good-bye to his wife. He had gotten married and was running for mayor of the town and here he was, an American soldier. He was a nice kid. He had fought through Africa and Sicily and then up through Italy and decided that he'd had enough. So we brought him back up to Naples. We brought his wife up as well and put her up in a hotel. There were a lot of those stories.

DH: Tell us more.

WO: There was this kid, Pete Simonelli(sp?) from Chicago. He was a professional gambler and he was at headquarters in our MP battalion. He had served on the lines through Sicily and Salerno and up through Italy and he went AWOL. He made a living playing poker at the Red Cross in Naples every day. He had all kinds of forged documents. Anyway, he steps off the curb one day and gets hit by a jeep. He cusses out the jeep driver so they bring him in and find out

he's an American soldier who has been AWOL for about a year. They court martial him and give him time and put him in the stockade. At that time there were so many guys in the stockade that they would bring them up before a board to try to rejuvenate some of them by having them serve. He tells them about his infantry service and says he will do anything. So they put him in the hospital to help out. The hospital closes and they want to put him back in the infantry. He says if they put him back in the infantry he will go AWOL again, so they put him in the MP's. He was a real asset to us because he knew Naples. He knew all the criminals, etc. He worked with us for the duration. I went back to Naples in 1966 and ran into a couple Italian policemen from the war days. I asked if they ever saw anyone else from the war days and they said Pete Simonelli. I couldn't believe it. He had stayed in the military and had made a bundle of money playing poker.

DH: At what point did you end up in the hospital?

WO: I was in the hospital a few times. I had infected Athlete's Foot one time and some x-ray therapy one time. I was down south when I got pneumonia. They were loading for Anzio and we were pulling guard duty on the docks. I came off guard duty and I was chilled and feverish. The guys didn't believe me and thought I was goofing off. My buddy Tony Dominio(sp?) insisted on getting the medics for me and I was out of it for three days. The nearest hospital was a British hospital so they took me there. I was there for two weeks. Then they transferred me up to an American hospital in Naples. At the British hospital they were marvelous care givers. As I understood it, the British personnel who worked in the wards were reclaimed combat people who really appreciated the job. The American medics were not as compassionate with the patients as the British were. The British asked me if I wanted tea and when I declined they made a pot of coffee every day just for me. I was the only American there.

My wife and I went to England in 1989 and we got to talking to these two older women. They were celebrating the Battle of Britain and one of them gave us this program for Westminster Abbey. My wife takes my picture with these two women. I told them that I would like to send them a copy of the picture, so she gives me her address. We sent the pictures and at Christmas we get this card and a picture of a plaque dedicated to Bill O'Connor and his buddies that they placed in this Field of Remembrance.

DH: Let's go back to Naples. What did you do when you got out of the hospital?

WO: I went to headquarters. I drove for a while. I drove a two and a half ton truck hauling supplies. We had about 800 guys and there were daily supply requirements and moving the mail up, etc. An interesting aspect of the war was the logistics of supply. For each fighting soldier there were 10 or 15 guys behind the lines supporting him.

There was an interesting case I investigated, which I turned over to the Counter Intelligence Corps. Our battalion was the Provost military control of Naples at the time. We had CID which was the Criminal Investigation Division which was a notch higher than us, like the FBI. Then there was the CIC. A photo came across my desk of a brand new P-38 fighter. Some Lieutenant

had defected and flown it just north of the Anzio line to a German airfield and turned it over to the Germans. It seems not even plausible but he was angry over being passed over for promotion. Actually his promotion to captain came through a month after that.

One of our company's duties was guarding the stockade that had mostly American prisoners. We had some German prisoners and we hung a few. We hung a few American prisoners for rape, etc. Our outfit would have to fall out to witness these things. Nobody writes about those aspects of the war.

DH: Did you have to fall out to witness any of these?

WO: No. I didn't but my three buddies did. That was an awful assignment, the stockade duty. The commandant was vicious. He wouldn't authorize medicine for the guys with venereal disease. We had a really good medic, from Rock Island, IL who we called Doc Potter. He wanted to go after the guy when the war was over, but you get out and get home and a lot of stuff is just forgotten.

For that matter, General Mark Clark was not revered by the troops of the 5th Army. The 36th Division took an awful pasting, five times across the rivers. They wanted to see him court martialed but nothing came of it.

I was at Battalion headquarters and I was a corporal. I had a Tech sergeant over me and a Lieutenant over him. Both of those guys couldn't have cared less about the investigations. One guy was living with a countess and the other guy was nowhere to be found. So I took care of the papers and assignments. I had seven Italian policemen and seven GI's that were assigned as two-man teams. One day this little Italian guy comes in with his daughter and a GI. So the three of them are there and I asked them what the problem was. The Italian guy says this GI made his daughter pregnant. The GI claimed she was maybe common ground for a number of guys. It was felt that she just wanted a trip to the U.S. I asked him what he wanted to do. He said he did not want to marry her but he would give her his home address and she could write to his mother and ask her to send some money and clothes for the baby. That's how it ended. The Army would never make him marry her and many of those women were prostitutes looking for a ticket to the U.S. or a cash settlement.

Another one involved a couple guys that got into a confrontation in a park that was populated by prostitutes. They were on their way home from the infantry. They didn't know each other. They got into a big hassle over a couple hundred bucks that were in a cigarette case. They came before me and I acted like a judge. They both claimed ownership of this thing. One says he bought it but didn't have a receipt. I finally determined which one owned it. I asked them why they were making a federal case out of this when you are both going home and will never settle it. The one guy swore his girl friend was very honest. I asked how long he had known her and he says two days. He wanted to give it to her. I told him to get out of there, get on the boat and go home.

I had a lot interesting things like that in investigations, when the other guys were just pulling guard duty, etc. We had all kinds of money available from the black market. I had \$100,000 in envelopes in a trunk next to my desk. Nobody in the Army would have ever known about it. We turned it into Army Finance.

One night we lost five 2-1/2 ton trucks off the port. They disappeared completely with their loads. Sugar was selling for \$8 a pound, flour for \$8 a pound, coffee \$8 a pound. Cigarettes were \$20 a carton when we were paying a nickel a pack. We got a lead on one and picked up the guy. What they would do is pre-sell all of the stuff and then distribute off the trucks. They would pull into a place the people would crowd around and take off with just the stuff they had bought. So if they got caught it was only with a couple pounds of sugar or whatever and we would not have much of a case. We would accumulate black market money like crazy. One night a couple of our guys stop in my office and throw a bag on my desk, asking me to count this while they go have a cup of coffee. It was about \$8,000 and they handle it like paper.

I was also in charge of all of the confiscated weapons south of Rome. I had a closet full of guns. I had a Luger that I lost in a crap game and a P38 pistol that I gave away to a friend in Vermont.

DH: You experienced aspects of the war that people don't hear or read about.

WO: They wouldn't have any idea what the MP's did. On day this Italian comes in to my office. He has the trip ticket for one of our trucks. I asked him where he got it and he says one of our trucks crashed into his building and the driver gave it to him. I said that a driver would not have given that to him. He insisted that the driver gave it to him. I got hold of the driver and he said it was missing and he was wondering what happened to it. I threw the guy out. It was interesting to have that kind of authority.

DH: Did you see any organized crime activity over there?

WO: If you mean the Mafioso, no. Italy worked on a system of deference and respect toward anybody above you. When we first arrived we would walk into a building and everyone would click their heels and salute you. Everybody was "King Tut". But after a while, when we didn't exercise our authority or expect that reverence, we didn't get that. After we were there about a month we had this captain from Texas who was a tough cookie. He was a good soldier, but he was tough. With him you were either going to do it or get court martialed. But he was good to serve under. You knew he was going to take care of you. One day he was walking down the street and people were bumping him and jostling him. I happened to be on guard duty when he got back to headquarters and he says: "O'Connor, wait until tomorrow. They may not like me but they will respect me.". The next day he is walking down the street and some Italian came along reading his newspaper and bumped into him. He turned around and decked the guy. He comes back the next day and says: "wait 'til tomorrow". The next day he walks down the street and everyone crossed to the other side and gave him the whole sidewalk.

But speaking of organized crime, it was all about payola. Naples is still about as corrupt I think, more so than most other port cities over there. There was a system, and we had to work within that system. We had a pack stolen out of one of our command cars. A kid reached in and grabbed it. We wanted it back because it has some aerial photographs in it that we needed. So I put a GI and Italian policeman on it and they go down to Piazza Giribaldi. They would work with the underground of kids. They brought donuts and coffee and paid them off. By the next morning we had it back.

One night a Red Cross nurse came in and she had lost her suitcase. So we put a couple guys on it. We got it all back except a carton of cigarettes and a couple small things. I called her up to tell her we have it and she asks me to send it up to her hotel room. We worked to get it back and she didn't seem to appreciate it.

DH: What kinds of problems did you have with American troops?

WO: Well the Black Market was the big thing. You could make a bundle and even our MP's were working the Black Market. We had murders, rapes and armed robberies. Drunk and disorderly was the lowest form of offense. There were stolen vehicles. The jeeps didn't have keys of course, just a toggle switch. We were supposed to remove the distributor cap and remove the rotor. That was supposed to serve as the "key". We had jeeps stolen from right in front of our headquarters. The infantry guys would come in and just take them. They didn't seem to care if they got thrown into jail. It was a very difficult war there from October 1943 until May and June of 1944. There were a lot of really terrible battles with a great loss of life.

DH: Did you have problems with combat soldiers coming back to the rear?

WO: One of the big problems we had was breaking up fights between the Army officers and the Army Air Force officers. The Air force officers would come down from Poggi and Bari to go to Capri. The infantry had taken the island of Capri, then the Air force requisitioned it and took it over for their rest center. There were a couple clubs in Naples where officers gathered. The infantry officers would come down from the front hell bent for election and the flyboys would come down. They needed each other in the war and they respected each other but when they were back from the front lines there was a lot of animosity there. the Air Corps guys would fly their missions and come back to hot meals and warm beds while the infantry would be up there on the lines for 30 days at a time.

When there was an infantry shortage at the front they cut ten of our guys and sent them up there. Two of them got killed. There is a cemetery near Florence where my two buddies are buried. There are tragic stories about why they didn't come back. It is a subjective thing when you talk about soldering. You wouldn't send your best soldiers up there. You would send your drinkers or the guys that didn't show up for work on time. If they didn't soldier well behind the lines they probably didn't soldier well at the front, but who can say that is why they got killed?

DH: So where did you go after Naples?

WO: We went into Rome on June 6th, 1944. We moved into Rome and that is where I saw one of the big wartime atrocities. We were at headquarters when a little Italian undertaker comes in to me and asks my permission to investigate a cemetery grave. I said sure, go ahead. So I grab a buddy and a vehicle to go see what this is about. We go out to a place called the Ardeatine Caves. We walk into this room larger than a living room and walk around this pile of bodies that had been buried there for three months. The Germans had assassinated over 320 Italian civilians. Do you know this story?

DH: No I don't.

WO: Italy had several communist groups fighting for power at that time. The Vatican actually had a better relationship with the Germans than with the communists. They foresaw a big post-war political problem with the communists so they went along with the Germans. One day the Italians plant a barrel full of dynamite on the street. When SS guards are marching by to change guards it blows up. It killed over 30 SS troops. In reprisal the Germans take ten Italian civilian hostages for each SS soldier lost. So they go to an Italian jail and take over 300 people (priests, children, Jews, etc.) from the jail and machine gun them. They brought them to this cave and dump them in a pile and when they are all there they blow up the cave to cave it in. If you look up "massacre in Rome" it is quite a story. Few people are aware of what happened there. There has been controversy about whether or not the Pope might have intervened to prevent it. It resulted in a war crimes trial. The colonel in charge of the SS in Rome got a life sentence.

DH: How did you feel, being there and knowing you were witnessing such an atrocity?

WO: Well when your 19 I guess it just kind of rolls off you. There were no GI's involved. For us it was not as bad as what happened in France where the Germans killed all those American soldiers. I can understand the police mentality easier than other people can. I'm not defending it and I don't agree with it but you are expected to rise above human emotions when these things happen. Coventry, England was bombed by the Germans. England knew it was going to be bombed. It was pretty well destroyed. Well when England got on top in the air war they bombed the hell out of Berlin, mainly just to get even. Similar things occurred in the Pacific and even in Vietnam. It is hard to understand when vindictiveness and human emotions are involved. When you take a pasting and then get your chance to get even, what is enough?

There was also the temptation for graft and greed in the MP's. A GI came into my office in Naples one time and he was furious. He had just gotten married and had invited some relatives from Rome. At the time there was only one road coming down from Rome and we had an MP road block on that road. In the course of our investigation we became aware of an MP that nobody wanted to work with because he was extorting money from Italian civilians. If civilians had anything American in their possession we could confiscate it. So this vehicle comes down the road and this MP asks them if they have anything American. They say no, it is a Fiat and all

Italian. He asks about the inner tubes in the tires? They say they are also Italian. He tells them to remove the air from the tires so he can see the tubes. But they have no way to put air back in the tires. This MP says that is their problem. So they ask how much it will cost them to continue and he says \$40. So they pay him \$40 and go on. When they got to Naples they told this GI about it. We investigated and arrested him and he served some time.

At that time we had so many guys in jail that we had to reclaim some of them. We had around 5,000 GI's in jails just in Naples. When we went through Rome we had 5,000 AWOL's. some of them came back in a few days or weeks. They had been through all of the combat and when Rome fell they thought their war was over. But it went on for another year.

DH: What did you do after Rome?

WO: Some of our outfit followed the front north. I returned to Naples until VE day. Then in November, 1945 we gathered all our troops in Naples and we boarded the carrier USS Wasp and came home. We spent Thanksgiving in Naples before we got on the ship. The ship had 3,000 Navy and 5,000 GI's on board for the five-day trip home. We spent two days at Hampton Roads, VA and then went to Camp Dix, NJ to be discharged. The we got on the train and came home after three years together.

DH: What was your plan for after the war?

WO: Well there was another interesting occurrence. We were in a tent at camp, my three buddies and I, when this kid from Mt. Pleasant high school stops in to visit. He was an information non-com for Camp Dix. He asks one of the guys about what he was going to do when he got out and he says he was going back to college. Another guy says he was going to go to RPI. The third guy says he wanted to go to work, not school. He asks me and I I wasn't sure but would probably just go to work. He suggests that I go to college but I didn't know where I would go. He reminded me of my drawing ability and suggested art school. I thought that might be a good idea. He gave me a book about Pratt Institute to take and read on my way home. So when I get home I tell him that I want to apply to Pratt. So I applied to their Advertising and Design program, a two-year program. The dean sees that I have a regents diploma and suggests I should become an art teacher. He tells me to go over to their other school and see if I would like to go through their four-year degree program and become an art teacher. So I went over there and that is where I met my wife of 49 years.

So, all of those things added up to a lot of payback for the War because I certainly didn't suffer. I was one of the fortunate ones. I came out quite a bit ahead. It was a good experience for me. I can speak enough Italian and French to get by over there. We went over to Italy again this year and visited the National Cemetery outside Florence. There is one at Anzio with 7,500 guys and one outside Florence with 4,500 guys. I looked at those and knew I was lucky.

DH: It must be very different over there than when you served. Do you think the Italians still remember?

WO: This was our second trip back there. We also went back in 1966. This time I got a sense that they were not enthusiastic about talking about the War. I don't think they are happy with their war experience. I think they feel that they got sand-bagged by Mussolini. They paid a huge price with a lot of devastation. Naples and other cities were pounded by both the Germans and us. I think they would just as soon forget about the War.

Italy's political life after the War is interesting. I just finished a book, *The Secret Surrender*, about the German forces in northern Italy trying to surrender a month or two before the end of the War. They were secretly negotiating in Switzerland and then in Italy, but the German generals would not break their code of allegiance to Hitler. I think they were afraid for their lives once Hitler found out about it. But the minute Hitler committed suicide it happened.

And that was a problem when you had to take in a million and a half prisoners and supply them with medical services and food, etc. Even in the African campaign when we had to deal with 100,000 prisoners it was a big job. We fed them three meals a day. They were actually eating better than we were. Guys used to steal bread from the POW camp. That is a part of the War that people don't realize.

DH: Looking back, what stands out for you the most?

WO: Probably my good fortune, my marriage, my two children. My wife doesn't think I will ever forget WW-2 and I probably won't. I am a great collector and I still have all of the photos, the memorabilia and the letters that I wrote home. My friendships with three guys who still stay in touch 58 years later.

DH: Why have those friendships stayed so close?

WO: We had common interests and respect for each other. We were all from the same area and served in the same outfit. I knew one of the guys before we went in and we have double-dated for 58 years. We don't gamble or drink heavily but we like to party. We share funny stories about the war. I remember one time, before I went to headquarters, I was on patrol when some of our trucks go by and a whole box of comforters falls off one of the trucks. There are five in the box, so the guy I am on patrol with and I flip a coin and I win three out of five. So I take three and he takes two. I bring them back to the University of Naples where we are billeted. So we have thereof them and four guys. So we flipped coins for them and I didn't get one. We had a good time. But that is how close we were.

DH: So the war really changed your life.

WO: Oh yes, dramatically. I wouldn't want another war. I can't imagine another war being such a world war as that one was. We were in WW-1 about a year and a half, and in WW-2 for four years.

DH: Was the war worth it?

WO: Oh there's no question about it. Hitler had to be stopped. I met former German soldiers who had become citizens of the U.S. and became friend with them. They were good guys. They thought the Jewish situation and the holocaust were bad. However, they thought Hitler was good for Germany in other ways, just as many think Mussolini was good for Italy, in terms of improving the economy, the schools, etc. They just went way beyond what was expected and paid a very severe price.

You have to keep in mind that 98-99% of our people were behind the war. Practically everyone was doing something in support of the war effort. It was a different era in many ways. You see what part the telephone plays in our lives today and I think back to when I was in Texas. We had to wait for Sunday to call home. We would go to the telephone exchange building at 8:00 am to sign up. Then we would go have breakfast, attend church, and wait all day for our turn to use a phone to call home. Then, most of the times I didn't get through. I think I got a call through to home two or three times in the seven months I was down there. On Mother's Day or Easter it was out of the question. You could never get a line through.

DH: Do you have any closing thoughts?

WO: I appreciate the opportunity to tell my story. I hope in the future someone will find it of interest.