Rosario N. Catalano
Narrator

Interviewer
Michael Russert (I)
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Brooklyn, New York

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I: This is an interview with Rosario Catalano, Comfort Inn, Brooklyn, NY. It's the 21st of March, 2003, approximately 7:40 AM. The interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke. Could you tell me your full name, date of birth and place of birth, please?
RNC: I am referred to as Bob, but the name is Rosario. I use my father's middle initial, "N" for Nicholas Catalano. May 14, 1924 is the date of birth.

I: And where were you born?
RNC: I was born in NYC, down in the Village.

I: Prior to entering military service, what was your educational background?
RNC: I was supposed to graduate high school. I did graduate. My mother had to go over and get the diploma because I wouldn't take the student deferment that they were giving out – six-month deferments at that time. My father said, "You don't know how to kill yourself next," so I rushed right out because they were drafting me anyway. I didn't actually volunteer but by not taking the deferment it effectively came out the same thing. I was scooped right up.

I: Do you remember where you were and what your reaction was when you heard about Pearl Harbor?
RNC: Yes, I had come out of a movie house, the [unclear] Plaza in Corona and it was kind of a shock and you didn't understand why it was a shock. Everybody was talking as you went through the streets. I guess now, in retrospect, looking at it, you didn't really take it very serious. You were home, you were secure, you just didn't…. It's not going to affect me. It never even entered your mind that it might affect you. So, that's about it. I think we were more interested in the movies that we had spent eleven cents to get into the movie house at that time.

I: You were still in high school?
RNC: Yes.

I: So, you ended up in the Army. Did you pick the Airborne?
RNC: No, I didn't know enough about that, that you could have any freedom to select. I was in the service a while and I went to ASTP, Army Specialized Training Program, and I stayed there for a while and then I think they were dissolving the program. I was up in Ripon, Wisconsin. A fellow I had buddied with, with a big scar on his neck, he was at Pearl

Harbor. He said, "We can select the paratroopers because they're going to assign us to an engineering or an infantry outfit." So, I said, "I'll go." The paratroopers sounded nice. It was more for the extra $50 and the jump boots. At 18, you're misguided. I went to Fort Bragg and they had – it was a four-week program. And the 4th week, you made the jumps. Three weeks of vigorous training. It seemed like they had all the time in the world just to [unclear] you to expand your lungs and run around the airport before breakfast and things like that. Any infractions, you were doing pushups. "Gimme twenty, drop down and give me ten," you know. The 4th week, it was four day jumps and one night jump. They always used to tell you on the night jump, "Be very careful. What looks like water, when it's shiny, that you slip out of the harness and dive in, be very careful because the class before you, a guy mistook the highway for water." I think they always gave out that same story, but that's one thing that stuck in my mind as possible. I failed on the 3rd jump. I failed to get up because I had twisted my ankle. By way of qualifying, you had to say that you'd never broken any bones, wrists, legs and arms. Naturally if you want to get in, you lie a little. And I had on the record that I hadn't had any broken bones and when they throw you in a truck and take you down to the doctors and they x-rayed the ankle, and like any American boy in the war, everybody had a broken arm or leg. I had a broken ankle at one time and it showed up on the x-rays and he turned around to me and he says, "Son, you have to be disqualified." So, I said, "Gee, I wanted to be in the Airborne." He said, "I'll send you to the Glider Division." That's how I went to Maxton Air Base in NC and they took you up in a glider. If you didn't get sick, they landed on a nice smooth runway, then you were qualified for the Airborne, the Glider Division

I: How many glider rides did you take?
RNC: Just that one. Instead of jumping into the invasion, they assigned me to a glider, not just me, the company. Actually, there was no runway there, when you landed in France. You actually just crashed; we finally stopped when we hit a wall. And the pilot and copilot, they were up front. I happened to be next to them. They didn't move; I'm pretty sure they died. Everything came flying forward. The laws of physics. Something hit me in the lip. But I was too afraid to stop and examine anything because you had to get out fast. One mortar shell would take out everybody – that was the thing. Move. Then one lieutenant came along and he said, "Loan me the shovel when you're done, Catalano. How bad are you hurt?" I said, "I'm not hurt." I'm digging away and nothing like fear to motivate you to move fast. Something had hit my lip. When your lip bleeds, my shirt was a mess. That was the adventure, landing in a glider.

I: So, after you trained in NC where did you go?
RNC: I went to Maxton Air Base and from there we had infantry training actually. What you are is when you come out of the sky… You're on the ground… We happened to be especially light infantry. We didn't have real heavy equipment. It was a mobile unit. It was the 550th. As I said, once you're on the ground, you're infantry. We stayed there and then we shipped out of… James Whitcomb Riley, Liberty ship, there were 550 men and officers in our outfit. That's how they derived the name. They tried to keep that number up. We landed in northern Africa. It took about 21 days.

I: Did you go across in a convoy or a single ship?

RNC: No, no, no, a convoy. They zigzagged. In 21 days, I think you could float a balloon across that faster. We landed in northern Africa where there was no action. Africa was ours at that time. I can't even remember the date. No, I don't remember the dates. But then from there, they had the invasion of Sicily. We were just support; we weren't really doing anything. But I know that a few of us… I know a fellow named Gullarro, he heard about volunteering for the paratroopers, no questions asked, so I went. I made – I don't know how many weeks it was. It was a shortened course because you had already been built up physically as much as you were going to be. We qualified, Gullarro qualified also. That's about it. Then from there, we went over to Italy.

I: Did you see any fighting on Sicily?
RNC: No, not really. Not even a mop-up group, just… But in Italy we sporadically had contact with Germans. Germans would hold a position for a while and then move. I remember Italy as mud; there was a lot of rain. The citizens there, they used to say it's because of the guns firing – that's why all the clouds come and the rains. The Indians used to believe that. I remember we had a lot of wine and things like that, but the mud…

I: Did you speak Italian at all?
RNC: My speaking Italian is broken Italian. I think if you hear someone come from another country, they speak broken English. I knew words. I know more now, but at that time… If somebody was talking and they mentioned in a dialect my grandfather had, then I would understand it. My grandfather was from Naples. But since that time, I married a woman that was from Sicily. She was born there, but she came over at 2 years old and her family conversed in the language, so I picked up a lot of the language since then. But mostly Sicilian. We went up there. We were pulled off the line. It's more than a few days, because August 15th was the invasion in Southern France. I went in on that on the glider. It was very difficult for that pilot. Of course, the Germans weren't stupid. They couldn't cover all the ground that they anticipated the troops would come in. They would put up poles in the fields and they'd put a mine underneath it, so when the gliders came in, if the wing happened to hit that pole and knock it over, the mine would go off. These poor fellas, the pilot and copilot, were trying to get themselves in the position in this field that they can land. But most of them were interrupted by [unclear] fences – Europeans had constructed for centuries. The moss and the age just made them as strong as cement and they would lift over as best they could a couple of times and then the one time it just couldn't and it hit this stone wall. These gliders are made of, like a lawn chair, with aluminum and just wrapping. They had plywood for a floor.

I: Now, were you in an American glider or an English?
RNC: American glider, yes. I saw pictures of the British gliders, too. They didn't fare much better either. This one just – well it broke after the impact but we landed in vineyards. It's August, they were just about ripe – I remember reaching over to get a grape or something like that.

I: Was there opposition firing at your glider as you were coming in?

RNC: Yes, there was. You could hear it. You could hear the mortars going off. Yes, there was opposition but they had defense for such a large area, it wasn't concentrated, but I suppose if you got up and walked around, you'd be a good target. But we were after…

I: What was inside your glider?
RNC: A bench.

I: It was just a troop carrier, like any other?
RNC: Yes, that's all.

I: How many men were in there?
RNC: You know, about 25, 27, or something like that. There was equipment in there, but as I say, it wasn't a jeep or anything like that. It was just extra, I don't know. I happened to be sitting next to the pilot, and the copilot. I'd never gone in an invasion before so I was really concerned. Something flew. I suppose it was a helmet or something that whacked me in the lip there. I don't know if you ever cut your lip, but boy there's no stopping it. At that time, I didn't realize it because I suppose you were paralyzed with fear, be the best way – you hate to say that you know, especially on the tape. So, we were after a town called Le Muy. The fact is, I have one or two of the fellas were active in – they've been back there a number of times and they were treated royally by the French people, at that time anyway. They put up a plaque in the town square and I have a picture of it. At home, they made copies and they sent it to all the fellows. The 550th has met each year for 52 years, I think it is. One fella, Al Rosier, has gone to every meeting. There's another fella running neck and neck with him – he's just missed one meeting. When those two are there, the contest is still going for the following year. If you want to have them in New York, you become the President and you make arrangements. They met in New York for a number of years before I realized they were doing that and when they were coming to New York it was in the early 50's and it was very reasonable. But now they can't afford New York. So, we go to the little towns. We've been to Chicago, Cincinnati. As I say, I've been in Kentucky, a little small town, the rates are better and there are a lot things to see. So, we've gone a number of places repeatedly, but the fact that we're still meeting – as my wife says, "The lean, mean fighting machine is getting kind of corpulent."

I: How long were you in combat in southern France?
RNC: I guess it was months. We went into the foothills of the Alps, I guess. What did they have, Barcillonnette, little small towns where the Germans that, well they'd dig in, you know these little small towns, especially if they're in a town that has a steeple. That's their favorite place. They always have a good shot up there. A friend of my named Bill Lees, we had to get across a courtyard. A courtyard – it's like the town just faces everything into the center. The animals lived downstairs in some of these places and the people lived upstairs. It's that cement houses or mortar or whatever and every little town has a fountain or a trough or something for the animals and you have to get across that – what could it be 75 feet, 50, 60 feet – and this one particular time we had to get across. A couple of guys made it, some guys didn't, they were laying out there. This fellow, Bill Lees, went across and you have to stop at that fountain because it's too much

of a journey across that courtyard. And he had dived down, there was snow there and when he went to get up, he couldn't get up. He started analyzing it. The way he tells it is very good. "My legs, I can feel my legs." He started assessing parts of your body, what's holding me down. To make a long story short, every time he tried to move, this guy up in the tower was whacking at him. And what it was, he had dove down and there was barbed wire down under the snow and his gun belt and everything else. Didn't pierce his body, but it was just… So, it didn't let him free. It sounds funny, you know, even when he tells it, but at that time you can imagine the kind of panic you're in, somebody shooting at you. At the same time, you've got your own problems. Because he wasn't as fast as I was. I was real fast. The more fright that's in there, the speedier you get. Because I told my grandson if I could, because he came in and he was, I think seventeen at the time, or eighteen and he said, "What about [unclear]," and there's big handball courts there and he's up there and had had beat some guy who was… If you win, you can stay on the court and this guy had been on the court for a couple of games. So, George played him and he beat this guy. He says, "Grandpa, you should have seen me. I was fast. I was over here, I was there," he says, "I was everywhere. Was I fast?" I said, "George, you don't know what fast is." I says, "One time, when I was running during a battle, a bullet came alongside of me and I just steered it away." So, he looked at me – he didn't know for sure, and then he said, "Aw, Grandpa." And incidentally that didn't happen – I was fast and I was afraid.

I: This was during the winter?
RNC: Yes.

I: Did you have winter gear?
RNC: No. That was the reason we ended up getting captured. I understand that winter gear was going to be issued not only to us, our outfit, but well, rumor had it, that the war would be over before we, before the break through that the Germans made. We figured, General Bradley and those guys figured the war would be over and there's no use in issuing gear because they were going to concentrate on the summer gear if you went over to Japan. Whatever their thinking was. But we didn't have any winter gear and the Germans had winter gear. When I got captured, they took my gloves right away, my boots, so that left me with a pair of snowpacks or galoshes or whatever they called them then, and no gloves.

I: Were you in Bastogne itself?
RNC: No, we were… We had been shipped to England and we were at an airport waiting for the fog to lift. I don't know how many days. It was Christmas. I get memory lapses. But we were trucked into the area where Bastogne is, into a town. We were captured at [unclear] Belgium and we were trying to break through to relieve the 101st that was in there.

I: So, were you in England on a kind of rest and recuperation?
RNC: Well, I suppose that's what it was. Rumor – everything is rumor at that time. We were going to be shipped to the States and go to the South Pacific.

I: Oh, ok.
RNC: Of course, that's about the time that when the Germans broke through in early December, they mounted the big offensive through the Ardennes, the same route that they, in WWI, I suppose, had taken. So that put a grip in the plans of whatever the higher ups had planned to do.

I: Now how did you get from England into the continent?
RNC: We went on a truck… Gee I don't know, I don't remember. But I know that we had a long truck ride after that because we were over by the English side of France and we had to get across France into Belgium. And that was cold. Some areas had cold and some areas had snow and some areas didn't.

I: So, you just had field jackets?
RNC: Yes. Well, we had the overcoats.

I: Oh, you had the overcoats.
RNC: Yes, had overcoats, the brown overcoat which is very, very obvious on snow. It was cold.

I: Now what kind of weapon did you carry?
RNC: I had a bazooka and of course, my rifle. I had had a German Luger at the time. When I got captured, I had a German Luger. But the issue was the rifle and the bazooka and the ammunition. A fellow, Ted Renicki, from Toledo, Ohio, he got wounded that day. We got captured at night on January 4th and he got hit in the hand and like a good buddy I told him to take his glove off, you know. It started spurting and he put the glove back on and put the sulfur back around the hand itself with the glove and he says, "I'm going to go." And I said, "Yeah, the battalion's down that way." Battalion 8. And as far as I know he was one of the few, not the only one, one of the few guys to get out before we were surrounded because towards evening, well, we were surrounded by… We didn't realize it. The Germans had picked… We had pushed ahead too far or the flanks didn't move up with us. No matter how you look at it, we were stuck out there, just like one finger in an appendage to the rest of the men. But the thing was, he was the last that I had association with. In fact, there's the bazooka was destroyed, got a hole through the thing. So, that was it. I think we only had about two shells left anyway. I never found them. We buddied up there for so long and I went to Cincinnati for a reunion and looked at a book, but there's so many Renickis, Ted Renicki – he might be up in Albany. I don't know where he was.

I: Well, the night you were captured, you want to tell us about? You said your unit became, kind of stuck out in the surroundings?
RNC: Yes. It was B Company. Captain Baxter was – he just died a few years ago – and by this time, I don't think he had too many lieutenants left. I think Captain Baxter was right up with us and he was moving around to different groups. We had taken the town, we lost it, we got pushed back, then we took the town again. By this time, that town was on fire and if you stand up in front of it, you were a silhouette, so you had to stay low and there was snow on the ground and it's frozen for a couple of months already and you

couldn't really dig in to make a position for yourself. There were some used foxholes and artillery shelves hidden – they'd make a concave something or other for you to jump into. After we took the town the second time, now it's dusk. There was no sunset or anything. The weather was bad. It was very cold. You know, you didn't realize it, but your feet were frozen, but not to the point that you can't walk. They're just so cold. You huddled together where it was feasible. And then other times, you had to move. I understand that Captain Baxter was with a group that, three or four guys, that they had – just running out of ammunition. They had to get out of there. The point is, different guys had different experiences. I know that Pratt was trapped up in a building that was isolated from the rest of the town. I don't know how he had an enormous amount of shells. He had ammunition. He was playing hell with the Germans. They couldn't get past that strategic spot that that house was in. And he was up there. And this fellow was, he used to supply food for himself in West Virginia with no address. He lived in the mountains. He'd hit the squirrel in the eye type of thing. And they finally had to bring a tank up to take the building out and take him out of there. And the Germans put him in a German hospital, I understand, it's only hearsay, but I spoke to one of his sons a couple of years ago. He never came to a reunion because it was a type of scratch the land existence and economically, he couldn't afford that. He never spoke to his children about that, but he did a tremendous job over there. The word went around; Pratt was over there. He could cook a chicken in mud. He used to call it mud chicken. He would dig a hole, take a chicken, the head is off the, feathers are on. It wasn't cleaned out or anything like that, put it in there, cover it with dirt and then build a fire on top of it and everybody would cook potatoes or something like that. This was August or September, after the invasion. When the potatoes were done, everybody had a stick or something like that, because we went through farms that had – the potatoes that were growing where they'd been blown up, so that he'd kick that fire over and dig up that chicken and he'd have it there and he'd whack at it and the feathers and skin would just come right off that thing. So, I mentioned it to the son on the phone. He said, "Oh," he said, "We still do that." I liked Pratt – he was big, tall guy. He was about 6'3 or 6'4. It's amazing he didn't get his head chopped off if he was so tall, you know. Short guys had an advantage because you didn't have to dig so deep. But, help me, I don't know where I am.

I: Your unit was being surrounded.
RNC: What it was, now it's nighttime, just about nighttime. I got caught around 11:00 January 4th and you could hear the rumbling of the vehicles around us, but what we didn't know was that that they were dropping off German soldiers, but they were dressed in white. They had the white parkas. They were equipped for this kind of weather. Naturally, you can't see. When you talk dark, you're talking dark. Other than that fire that's going on back there, when you didn't dare stand up, they were dropping men off around. I don't know how many at a time or one at a time. We found ourselves manually, men, just, it wasn't just machinery, you know. So that, it got to the point that, I know, a couple of guys started to go… Captain Baxter came down and said that the situation is hopeless. He said that in order to break off radio communications, and destroy the radio that the… "I'm going to surrender," he says, "I think it's the best thing to do." Well, look, he has information I don't have. He went, we all went… A couple of guys decided to break out, make it on their own, but they were cut down. I didn't hear of

anybody that got out of there. So that it was about 11:00 at night, it was January 4th. We had called for tank support, according to what I hear. We asked for artillery support and they couldn't give it to us for whatever reason they gave. So, we gave up and they searched us. In fact, the army overcoat, I don't know if you're familiar with the army overcoat, but it has a pocket about that long [motions with hands], about 16 inches at least deep. And you accumulated things. So, you had to get rid of, if you have any German souvenirs or something like that, because you had to kill somebody to get something like that. That's the German reasoning. I was making sure, and I find that the bottom of my right-hand pocket, all the way down at the bottom, is a hand grenade. You can't be like the movies, you know, the subsequent movies, years later. And I managed to get that grenade out and I dug a little hole and pushed it in there. How do you know? What are you going to say – one grenade is going to change the whole picture, you know? The only picture you'll change is your head they searched you and the guy took my gloves. They asked for the wounded to fall out. I dropped out, because I had gotten hit on the heel of my shoe by a piece of shrapnel and [unclear] slice an apple, and a clean slice and it just nicked the flesh. So, I fell out. I figured, somebody'd put a bandage on it anyway. He said, in pretty good English, he said, "Take off the boot." So, I took off the boot and I showed him and he says, "Take off the other boot." And I told him, "No, just my right foot, not the other shoe." He said, "No, I want the boots." I had jump boots. And he gave me a pair of galoshes or snow packs or something. They were kind of big. He left it untreated. It wasn't pouring blood or anything that bad. To digress a minute, as a kid, I used to get boils on my arm. I had a grandmother, an Italian grandmother who used to take the leaves – we call them dandelions but they're not really – it's a weed, they have a big broad leaf and she used to put it with a piece of octagon soap, it was brown soap, she used to put that there and put that leaf on there and wrap it up with a piece of rag. So, I couldn't get soap or anything like that, but I saw the leaves. You scrounge around and so you find a leaf and I put it on there and wrapped it with a sock. I told that to a doctor one time, and he said, "That's very clever. The Indians used to use leaves and things like that," he says. I had used that and it healed up fine. Just a little small scar. In the meantime, the boots were too big and they would go up and down so you got big blood blisters and things like that.

I: Did they give you any gloves to replace yours?
RNC: No. I was working with… Oh, I wanted to get back. The artillery support came. We had already surrendered and the Germans were taking us back across this big open field and our artillery opened up and we were caught right in the middle of that field. Naturally, the Germans went down, too. I hit the ground, one time, and I thought that the ground was going away from me, but what it was is, you'd have been picked up through the concussion and dropped down and I guess I must have gone up 24 inches or 2 foot at least, and dropping down again – I remember that specifically. The artillery was asleep. I don't think anybody got hurt, that I remember. And they brought us to a barn oh, maybe about a mile back, I suppose, I don't know and the thing is, they gave us soup, onion soup, I remember that, with a piece of bread. And that was great. I mean, you know, you didn't feel the pinch of being hungry. We never had hot soup when we were up on the line. And that was the best part of it. But then later on, it was a steady starvation diet. I got a, I don't know how it happened, I guess the luck of the draw or

whatever it is, I got put into a labor force, labor battalion, not necessarily the size of the battalion.

I: So, you were separated from the others? Was anyone else separated with you?
RNC: Yes. My best buddy, Frank Maravitch, he lives in Chicago – we're in constant touch, we see each other all the time – and he and I and a number of the others, but somehow or other… Now this is two-three hundred guys. You have to visualize, maybe you got some sergeant or lieutenant in charge, German officer, and somebody comes over that outranks him or has a need… I need twenty-five men. They take twenty-five and you never see the twenty-five again, because wherever they went, they went. So, that constant taking, I ended up alone. Frank ended up in, I forget the prison camp. But he was in a prison camp. The rest of them were all in prison camps. I was like the Lone Ranger out there and, the hardest that I ever worked, other than walking everywhere, although I did get shoved into a freight car, the 40 and 8 cars. The way you went in, that's the way you stayed. They over packed you. And you'd stay in there sometimes, 2-3 days. Sometimes, American planes would spot the train – they don't know that you're in there – they would have strafing. And then there's a need for bathroom facilities and everybody by that time has had diarrhea, and you're in this box car and there's one bucket which would slop back and forth because it was always… So, the floor absorbed just so much and that's all. They didn't feed you. They didn't open the door even when they pulled over on the side where I suppose a supply train or a troop train or something had to pass it. You'd stay there for six or eight hours and then another train, and when the track was cleared. In retrospect, you know what's going on. So that, now they have these guys, you're working, you're not eating… I ended up at 92 pounds.

I: Now who was in the camp with you?
RNC: I didn't get in a camp now. I was in this labor group.

I: Who was in the labor group? Were you with American soldiers?
RNC: Oh, yes. All Americans. But from my outfit, there was nobody left. I remember a plane strafed the column one time when we were walking and there was a guy named Lemontina. He was the last of the guys from the 550th… Well, we were close together and the plane came down to strafe the road and everybody just went [motions away with hands]. You don't have to be ordered to save yourself. Some guys went down and some guys went up, including me, into this pine wooded area. I would say forest, but there was a lot of pine trees. So, this American pilot, whoever he is, he didn't know and he took one bomb that he had and he dropped it in the forest and it made those trees like toothpicks just flying around. Lemontina got a 4-6-inch piece, pretty thick, right through his hand. So, then he got put into a truck and I don't know whatever happened to him, but he was going to be taken to a hospital or a doctor. So, that was… now, I'm all alone. But it doesn't make any difference, we're all in the same boat [unclear]; we're all Americans. But I worked the hardest at Limburg, Germany. They had a – it was a minor railroad center. I don't say it was major. They had to keep one track open. You know, a lot of help. They had a guy, the Americans had a man that would come in at about five or six o'clock, five o'clock before it got too dark, and he'd see the condition of the track that we were trying to keep open, and he'd drop one bomb and just make a hole and there

goes the work you had done. They would take a group of two-three hundred guys or whatever and somebody would go with one group and bring them over to a wooded area where they had track stored and the other group would go to the left to another wooded area where they had the ties, railroad ties and the remainder of the group would fill in the hole. All under the supervision of somebody who knew what he was doing. You talk about gloves, I got [unclear] only one time it happened, track and I had no gloves and it's cold and metal is cold. You know the business about sticking your tongue? So, I carried the track and they said, "Okay, let's drop it," dropped it, and the skin come right off my hand, but it didn't bleed because my hand was practically frozen between carrying the element outside. You work at that sometimes ten hours, eight-ten hours and the barn you slept in where they gave out the soup, well maybe tomorrow you might be there so you missed another day. You ate snow in the meantime. You just – working in the fields sometimes you would find rotten turnips that the farmers had no use for or they used to store the vegetables in the ground and they would have the turnips which were hardier at the top, so the sun would come out and melt that over there and then it would freeze again with the turnips on top that you managed to sit down there when they gave you a rest. You'd get frozen turnips, rotten turnips, that was a treat you'd have to eat. Otherwise, like I say, you ate snow.

I: You were never put in a camp; you were just constantly moving as a work detail?
RNC: Sometimes, somebody would, a truck would be stuck and then 30-40 guys had to push. Whatever jobs were encountered, came along. A lot of trucks were stuck; cars were stuck. And manpower was a big thing.

I: How much do you think you weighed when you went into captivity?
RNC: Oh, I was about 175, 180 pounds, solid, muscle, you know?

I: And you dropped to 92 pounds?
RNC: 92 pounds.

I: Were a lot of the men with you Jewish or mixed?
RNC: They were all mixed. Milton Bartle was Jewish. I think he's still living in Florida. That's the last I heard of him. There was Stern. There were a number of Jewish fellas. But Stern wasn't captured, that's right, Bartle was captured. I don't think there was any of the, what do you call it, antisemitism and there was no… They didn't go around checking your dog tags to see if you, which I didn't have. I had left them over in Africa on a nail when I took a shower. So, I could have been an unknown soldier out there.

I: Were any of the soldiers beaten or mistreated?
RNC: I was mistreated. I slept on a shelf. After a while you got smart, for self-preservation, not that you'd screw your buddy or anything. You'd come in off this detail and if you plopped down on this – it was a warehouse – as you plopped down on the floor [unclear], because everybody was on floors; you'd have to crawl over everybody. So, you plopped down on the floor and then during the night if some guy wanted 50 guys or 25 guys, they'd open the door, "Raus, raus," And you just came in and you'd be out again. So, one time I climbed over everybody and I got up on a shelf. There was a

shelf in this warehouse. I got into it. So, I slept there. Now, you've got to understand. I'm cold and I'm sleeping and I got up and the next morning, I didn't get up fast enough. "Raus, raus," and he whacked me with that rifle butt and caught me right on the bottom of the spine. Man, that hurt, I never forgot that. But I survived that. I think it was so cold that I couldn't hardly really appreciate the bruise that he gave me. But walking from place to place, you know, I got this overcoat on and it's a funny thing. The overcoat is warm and yet it's not warm because now it's accumulated rain and snow melted into the dirt and I couldn't walk with it anymore. This was towards the end. And I took it off and I thought I'd be able to throw it at least 3 or 4 feet. It barely made the ditch. I thought I'd get it up on the embankment. I can still see that embankment. But then I went a little ways more and I collapsed. Now, what we have is a wagon, one of these big vegetable wagons, a flat piece with two big wheels if you can imagine that. And we had picked that up, we – I would say the group – and anybody that collapsed, they'd put him on there, because if you didn't, there was a German at the back of the line and anybody that would faint or otherwise, he would shoot him. So, we got this wagon. They saw this wagon and they had permission, I suppose, just to take the wagon for that reason alone. They picked me up and they put me on that wagon. In retrospect, I know what happened. Then I remembered somebody saying, "His eyes are furry. Okay, buddy, come on, get up, we've got somebody else to put on there." So, in effect, somebody saved my life because I just went as far as I could and the next thing I know, I don't know how, I found myself on that pushcart. Otherwise, they couldn't take any more prisoners just to have a truck to treat you nice. That's when I was put into 9B in [unclear] and I stayed there for maybe 5, 6 days. You could see at night time, the lines were getting closer. The Americans were coming or somebody was coming. Who did come was the American tanks. I don't know what outfit it was or anything like that. We had woken up in the morning and somebody said, "The guards are gone." And a lot of the guards had one arm. I suppose, they didn't get discharged. They became part of the home front, take care of the prisoners or whatever maintenance had to be done, to keep the civilians in line or whatever. But they were gone. They had jumped on bicycles I understand; I didn't see. And they took off out the back gate. The front gate was locked, but that didn't bother the tank. The tank just didn't even [unclear] or nothing, just rolled right over.

I: Do you know who liberated you?
RNC: I don't really know. It was one of Patton's, I suppose, they break off into groups. The tank that came through, whoever it was, had cans of C-rations. They must have encountered other prison camps and saw how these guys were not fed**.** We scrambled, well everybody did. I scrambled like an animal just to get a can because they threw it off theirs. They went right through. Of course, they were on the attack, I suppose. They were not going to stop. There were other troops behind. But I got this can and I had me a wooden spoon. I traded a slice of bread for that spoon, which is a hard thing. But I found myself that I was wolfing a piece of bread down. You'd take one bite, but you'd take two before you'd got your hand away. So, I figured if I could get a knife, I could cut little small pieces and I traded that with some, I think they were Polish, but anyway they were one of those Slavic guys. They were also captured, but they were on the other side of the fence. And I traded the knife for the bread. So, with that I made a spoon and with the spoon I took about two mouthfuls of that C-ration and it went right down and it

came right up again. I remember vomiting, regurgitating, just to the point where I couldn't get up. I was out on the floor. Just weak. Mother's milk was the expression, or something like that and when the follow-up groups came, there were a couple of us there they put right in the ambulance and I got flown to England and I stayed there for 54 days. That's about the gist of it. I know with the spoon – one time they opened the box cars and the German cars went up on top and they had soup, big buckets of soup. And what are you going to put it in – dishes, no, but you had a helmet, so you used a helmet. But you had to also use that helmet when you had diarrhea, but what could you do? I got some snow, I scooped it out with. Watched everybody – I wasn't the only one with that brilliant idea. But you had your soup and I had a spoon. I get flashbacks once in a while of things like that. I know I can't see like when my grandchildren, my granddaughter, she ate the insides and she left all the crusts as all children do, in America, anyway. My wife cooks, I clear off the table, but I couldn't throw that bread away. Leave it for the birds or something like that. But I just couldn't do that.

I: When did you return home?
RNC: When? Sometime around May, I think.

I: Were you in hospitals up until then?
RNC: Yes, I was taken right into Halloran Hospital from St. Albans. We landed – came home on the plane. I later found out that I was at the… [unclear] only the worst cases came back that way. I came back by plane to St. Albans. I landed in whatever field that is over there and I was taken to Halloran Hospital on Staten Island and I stayed there. They try to fatten you up, so to speak. Food was pretty good. By that time, I was in half decent shape. I got up to around 110 pounds. You had unlimited privileges for the kitchen and after a while, we got a pass to go home. And it came back, at maybe 12 midnight or something like that, you could go into the kitchen and eat [unclear] they had a different kind of [unclear]… They didn't care what you ate. But, I'm here to talk about it, that's the best part of it, you know.

I: How do you think your military service affected your life?
RNC: Oh, it did. I didn't become so wasteful. I remember as a child, my mother or father would say – at that time there was a war with the Chinese or Japanese were fighting and she'd say, "There's some child over there in China. Finish your spinach." Everybody goes through that, but when you have a follow up with it like that where you're actually deprived as a young adult, we don't waste. That's just about it. Just don't waste anything and that's the main thing.

I: Did you bring any pictures or anything?
RNC: No. I didn't really have any pictures.

I: Well, thank you very much for your interview.
RNC: Thank you, fellas, for the trouble.