

Marian Tortorella [daughter of veteran]
On behalf of
Frank J. Tortorella
Veteran

Wayne Clarke
Interviewer

New York State Military Museum
Home interview, Mt. Tremper, NY
November 16, 2009

WC: Today is the 16th of November, 2009. My name is Wayne Clarke. I'm with the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research center in Saratoga Springs, New York. We are in Mount Tremper, New York. We are interviewing Marian Tortorella, and she is going to tell us about her father's experiences from World War II and after World War II. Marian, for the record, would you please state your full name and your date and place of birth, please?

MT: My name is Marion Tortorella, and I was born in Brooklyn, New York. My date of birth is August 1, 1950.

WC: Did you attend school there?

MT: Yes.

WC: Whereabouts was your father from?

MT: My father was born in Brooklyn from an Italian immigrant family. I have to double check. He was born on the 29th. There was a little confusion, actually, about his date of birth in 1918.

WC: Did he attend school there?

MT: Yes, I'm not sure which school. He later went to art school.

WC: I assume he graduated from high school.

MT: Yes.

WC: Did he have any college before he went to art school?

MT: I don't think so.

WC: Do you recall the art school he attended?

MT: I think it was the New York City School of Art.

WC: Do you know approximately when he had entered the service?

MT: He went in around 1942, according to the letters that I have.

WC: Do you know if he was drafted or did he enlist?

MT: I couldn't tell you that. I don't know. He was a very intelligent man, very sensitive. He played the harmonica. He sang. According to my Aunt Anna, my father was hit by a car when he was three. He had a broken leg and cuts on his face. But it says he used to sing. He was the son along with four daughters. He had a brother, my Uncle Joe, who passed away at a young age. So he didn't get to really grow up in an adult life with his brother. But my father used to sing. My aunt says he used to pass my house in Brooklyn singing the song *You Belong to Me*. And he had a very good voice. He was very much into music. He even wrote music, which I discovered later. I have a song he wrote here somewhere. It's all the notes and everything. He used to take us as kids when he came to visit. He used to bring us to this place in Manhattan, where they cut records. He was very much into music. This was after the war, after my parents were separated.

WC: Do you know where your father went for his basic training at all?

MT: South Carolina. [looks through papers] He was in the 118th Infantry. The history of the 118th Infantry is here. It says Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

WC: Okay.

MT: [reads] *The 118th was an integral part of the 30th Infantry Division. They trained them until August 1942, where there was a major reorganization in the makeup of divisions from a square division to a triangular division. The 118th was detached from the 30th Infantry. They left Fort Jackson and went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and departed from the POE [Point of embarkation] of New York on 5th of August. Shipped out to Iceland.* [stops reading] My father was in Iceland. He wrote about being in Iceland.

WC: Well, that's kind of an unusual service.

MT: Let's see. [reads] *They departed Iceland on the 29th of October, 1943.* [interjects] My father's birthday. [continues reading] *Arrived in England on 6th of November, then shipped to Ireland on 6th of January. They then returned to England on May 1st, 1944, remaining there until they crossed the English Channel to France.* [stops reading]

WC: So he was part of the invasion for D-Day?

MT: I don't know if he was at D-Day. He mentioned D-Day was over in one of his letters.

WC: It sounds like he may have participated in the invasion.

MT: [reads] *And then he remained in England and remained there until they crossed the English Channel to France on December 13, 1944. They were immediately assigned to defend a bridge across the Meuse river at Givet, France, during the German Ardennes counteroffensive.* [stops reading] Now, at that point, according to his letter on January 7, it said somewhere in Belgium. He talks about...if you'd like, I'll read the letter to you.

WC: Sure. However you want to do it is fine.

MT: [looks through papers] This letter was very touching to me. Seems like the first page is not here. I have to look for it. I xeroxed quite a few letters of his. I do have the original. And this was in a little tiny [gestures small square box]. Would you like to see what the original looks like?

WC: Oh, that's all right.

MT: It says somewhere in Belgium. [shows copy of letter]

WC: Okay.

MT: This letter is very, very neat. According to what we had just read, on December 13, 1944, they crossed the English Channel. Then he was guarding a bridge supposedly. At that point, this is January 7th, so he said, somewhere in Belgium. So from there, he went to Belgium. Pat is my aunt, my mother's sister. She was an interesting lady. Would you like to see a photo of her?

WC: You can show me that after and we can include it.

MT: Yeah, it's. It's on the table. She loved my dad.

WC: [speaks to someone off camera] Do you want to hand that to her?

MT: This, I believe this was a Halloween costume. [shows photograph] But she was one of my mother's older sisters. These were letters she saved, the letters I'm going to read. She loved my dad. And she always talked about what a beautiful person he was and how when he came back, he was not the same. My father was just unfortunately very damaged, mentally. This letter says [reads] *January 7, 1945, somewhere in Belgium.*
Dear Pat, I'm at long last able to write to you and be able to give you a better account of myself. I was knocking about in replacement camps for a while. Now I am assigned to the

2nd Division, a combat outfit, in General [Courtney] Hodges, 1st Army. Up until now, it's been child's play. I realized for the first time, as difficult as it seemed at times, now I am about to realize fully the test a soldier meets on the battlefield. I am face to face with the serious side of Army life. And truthfully, it isn't a cheerful prospect. I've written Jessie, [interjects] that's my mom, [reads] of my change, but hesitated to give her the full details. I dread it, but I may face it. Giving her the details would do her more harm, I believe. She knows or will know of my change, which in itself tells all. I can see now the greater loss is not on the battle lines, but at home. Pat, I am by no means distressed. As for myself, I can only do my best and hope for the best. For one thing, I am in company headquarters in the communications section because of my past experience with the switchboard and radio. Now that's on my side. Although I am still in an infantry regiment and one in particular that has a great record in recent battles. As yet I have not played any part as far as battles are concerned. But we are susceptible to any enemy artillery fire. At the moment it is all quiet, but generally the incessant boom boom of our field guns is heard and then an occasional thump of a return from our honorable Joe. As for Jerry, dot-dash [interjects] I don't know who Jerry is. [reads] I am getting the low down from battle worn men of this dot-dash, my new company. My morale is good. When that time comes to do battle, I'll be there, I hope. I hope to be there when the battle is done and gone. I've got some unfinished business with a very lovely mess, your sister, Jessie. I just got to finish what I started, shouldn't I? I am as comfortable as I care to be for now. I am quartered in the company headquarters building. My first night I slept quite well, thank you, in a hayloft. How many city boys can boast of that? Now I decorate the floor. Some old mattresses I just got discovered hidden in the attic under me and me meshed between my sleeping bag and two blankets. That is the tee-dot-o-dot. [interjects] I don't know what that means. [reads] At any rate, for meals we do well. Hot meals such as pork chops, ham, etc. We had flapjacks this morning, bacon sided oatmeal and coffee. We get our sugar regularly and coffee. We also get our cigarettes rationed daily along with candy and gum. No charge. I am grateful for that because I was released by my old outfit just before payday and haven't seen pay dirt for this month. As for that, money isn't at all necessary here with the exception of gambling. There's no such thing as revels here. There is no town that I know of. If there was, it would certainly be off limits. It's strictly business now. I can't complain. I had a hand in what makes the world go round while I was in England. [unclear] 13.27 I had [gestures quotes] beaucoup. Now for the task of getting this war over with, dot-dash, I don't feel in the least, dash, that because I'm in it, it will suddenly erase, hell no. From here, say in appearances, dash them dumb bastards have plenty of fight left. They must dope their coffee or something. There's that doodle bug, the menace to unsuspecting civilians. They sputter by harmlessly overhead, but when that propulsion is spent, there's hell to pay, somewhere. It didn't take me long to realize my

change of status. While at the replacement camp or rifle camp, I was straddling the shit trench, latrine to you, when a fighter plane shot overhead about fifteen feet before I came to realize the markings were that of our enemy. It went on as quickly as it came. I came to a more respectable position. Standing and holding onto my still unbuttoned pants, I followed the path of flight of the plane. It was gaining altitude at the same time. Ack ack bursts. Dogs were barking. One battery hit it and out came the pilot to parachute to Earth. It was my first contact with the enemy. As quickly as it was, I was nonetheless more than a little unsteady after all. A guy can't even dash in peace anymore! [interjects] He had a good sense of humor. [reads] The moral is, I suppose, don't ever get caught with your pants down. If the enemy comes, you can't run. "I won't." If her husband comes, you can't, dash. [laughs] There was no celebrating for me New Year's Eve. On that night I slept in that hayloft. All is well with me. Will write and keep you informed. I'll do my all. Your future, bro-in-law. As ever, my best to Joe and Patricia, Frank. [stops reading]

I researched the 1st Army, 2nd Division. I came across this little tidbit which sort of confirms this [holds up letter she just read]. This was on the Internet.

www.breadonwaters.com, US 2nd Infantry Division, World War II. It says here [reads] On New Year's Day, eleven hostile planes strafed and bombed the division area. Several were shot down by the 462nd Anti Aircraft Battalion gunners who had been waging a hot fight against the aerial invaders. The pilot of one plane was captured. [interjects] This makes me wonder if this person was the one that parachuted out while my father was at the latrine. It's hard to know. It was the same time period. [looks through papers] And then here's something where they talk about... this goes deeper into that time period. I took this from the Internet as well. It says. [reads] Bastogne was not out of danger. However, on December 29, troops from the 101st Airborne Division left Bastogne to fight the Germans. At this time the weather had cleared up, which allowed Allied air supply support for the first time. At the same time, General Hodge's 2nd Armored Division, [interjects] that was my father's division, repelled the second Panzer Division short of the Meuse river. [interjects] And he was supposed to have been around that area. [reads] At [unclear] 18.10, the Allies launched a counteroffensive two days before the New Year. The counter events involved the US 3rd Army striking to the north, while the US 1st Army pushed to the south. [interjects] Originally, I think he was in the 3rd Army and then was switched to the 1st Army. [reads] They were supposed to meet at the village of Houffalize to trap all German forces. The Germans did not go easily, however, and the Americans had a rough time. Day after day, soldiers wallowed through the snow. Newspapers were put under their clothes as added insulation. January 8th, Hitler ordered his troops to withdraw from the tip of the Bulge. This indicated that he had realized his offensive had

failed. By January 16, the 3rd and 1st Army had joined in [the town of] Houffalize.
[interjects] Is that the right pronunciation?

WC: I'm not exactly sure.

MT: [reads] *The Allies now controlled the original front. On January 23, St. Vith was retaken. Finally, on January 28, the Battle of the Bulge was officially over.*

WC: I think that one name might have been Hohle Fels. I'm not sure.

MT: Okay. It also says, [reads] *On January 1st, Hitler launched a plan called the Great [unclear] [Operation Bodenplatte]. The goal of this plan was to eliminate Allied air power. At eight am German fighter airplanes swarmed over Belgium, [interjects] which was where my dad was, [reads] Holland and northern France. For more than two hours, allied airfields were bombarded. By ten am, two hundred six aircraft at many bases lay in ruin. Hitler's plan had a great deal of damage to Allied aircraft. However, the price he paid for this was devastating. The German Luftwaffe lost three hundred planes and two hundred fifty Luftwaffe pilots.*

HF: Isn't it possible with what she has of her father's record that as much clear statement can be made about where he traveled? Would Jim Gandy do that?

WC: What you can do through the Freedom of Information act, you can contact the National Records Center, which is in St. Louis. You can get copies of his actual military records that are probably a lot more detailed than his discharge paper, etc. His file would contain all his medical records, etc. The unfortunate thing is a lot of those records were destroyed in the 1970s because of a fire. But, you know, there's still a good chance you might be able to get them.

MT: Yeah. When my father got home after the war, he was disabled. I have a letter.

HF: I don't want you to do too much without the tape going right. You were off, right?

WC: No, I was on tape. That's fine. That was my assistant, Hattie Finch.

MT: After all of this, that German offensive, he was in the middle of it, obviously, and didn't come out of it.

WC: Was he wounded at all? I mean, physically?

MT: I do have a letter from the Red Cross that he wrote. This was an earlier letter from Fort Jackson. [shows letter]

WC: During his basic training period?

MT: Yeah, before they left.

WC: Okay.

MT: You know, it's a long letter. It's a very long letter. [looks through papers] I want to read the one from...this is an interesting letter. [shows letter] This was September 1942. Now, he must have been overseas because they cut out____

WC: A lot of it would be censored. They would black it out or blot it out.

MT: He says [reads] *Our new campsite is in something-land*. [stops reading] It looks like a G. So I think he was in England at that time.

WC: If you want to read that letter, that's fine. Whatever you want to do.

MT: Okay. This is dated September 25th. They left in August, didn't they?

WC: Yes, I believe so.

MT: It says [reads] *Hello, Pat. How is every little thing? Yep, it's me. I finally decided to get down to business and answer your letter, for I've put it off too long. I take it all's well at home with Joe working his hands to the bone as usual and Patricia still crabbing over a glass of milk.* [interjects] That's my cousin. She was a baby at the time. She's also an artist. She, Patricia, was inspired by my dad. [reads] *Well, you are in pretty good shape then. I don't mean that. I for one am pretty good shape too. "So to speak." Perhaps I could say Jessie too is in good shape.* [interjects] My mom. [reads] *As I gaze at Jessie's picture in her new red dress and also from her reports that she has lost a few pounds.* [interjects] I guess the men over there were always thinking of their women. [reads] *It seems we are all doing fine. And as far as I'm concerned, I hope the world were in better shape so I can be back for good, as you put it. To be honest with you, Pat, everything is pretty good here in my new camp. Now let's see, my biggest requirements or essentials are eating, sleeping, resting. Well, now how about work? Well, let's put that in last. For that, it's rightful place here. We never work, but we do keep in good shape. Sleep, we have an oversupply on that. And as for eating, it ain't exactly home cooking.* [looks through papers] Okay, I think I have...I seem to be missing a couple of pages there. I'm sorry, I can't find that one, but I'll continue reading here. Oh, I see. I went and I copied on the back. Okay, it says [reads] *It ain't exactly home cooking but it's damn good. And the seconds-line always finds me amongst the chowhounds. I just took time out for chow which was stew, rice, string beans and applesauce and plenty of it. Another interruption. I just took time out from our Big Super Construction Co. Inc. For we have a big job under progress. The cementing of our mess hall floor. I was detached to keep supplying the mortar mixer with cement. It seems we have run out of cement. I have run out of a job*

and here I is taking a break. Since we arrived here we have been given the place of a well needed face lifting and are still at it. It stands to reason that results are beginning to show up for the work put into it. When our company commander is satisfied we can then sit back and really take a break and I don't believe it's far off. The infantry has its good points. And [not sure of the word] something of all the griping and rushing done. It keeps us fairly busy. As a result, time, which is fleeting, is going on its merry way unmolested, which is exactly how I want it. It's only fair that I say we have much time to ourselves. And even when there is work to do, gold bricking, as the Army slang puts it, is almost resorted to in the way of taking a break. [interjects] He likes to write. He wrote a lot. [reads] Such as I'm now doing. We are making the best of what we have and doing mighty well at it. Our new camp is in [censored] land. I mean that. [interjects] And then there's this space. You can't see what he's saying [reads] Here can only be had from [censored] that stop in [censored] at enormous prices. I for one don't touch the stuff. Don't miss it. I hardly ever drink except when the occasion demands it. Whatever we can get here from our company latrine is beer. One can a night, two on Sundays and holidays. Not to exclude cigarettes at fifty-two cents a carton. [interjects] Can you imagine? Now it's eight dollars and something for a pack of cigarettes. [reads] Candy and toilet articles, etc. Which is more than we can say about other soldiers. Such as the [censored] we are not far from town and so visited about once a week. I can't say it has much to offer. Even then I would be exaggerating. But it's a change of scenery and it affords us a chance to shop for other essentials. [interjects] And then there's a lot cut out. So I don't know what he says. He says [flips letter over] [reads] He's enrolled in classes to instruct us on the language spoken here. I have yet to receive any further instructions on it. I feel that it might help me. [interjects] Do you want me to keep reading?

WC: Whatever you want to do or you feel is important.

MT: Let's see if there's anything on this page that says anything. That's the start of the war, that's interesting. [reads] As for my getting into a scrap year as I did in the States. Well, I just have to wait until I reach those saps who started this war. If I ever do. For I get along okay with the boys in this company. There is one soldier in particular whom I particularly like. He is a corporal and reminds me very much of Paul. Built the same way and looks alike. He has reason to believe his wife in Fort Mill, North Carolina has already made him a father. But he will not know until he gets word from her. Another boy who I owe much, for making this more interesting all around, more or less an adventure is Floyd Raymond [?]. A Kansas University graduate and a regular yellow from Kansas. He is always bragging about the Kansas City steaks. So Pat, give it a try and give me the dope on it. He will refund your money, cook says, if you remain unsatisfied after you dig your teeth into a thick, juicy steak. Just a thought gets my stomach turning. How I long

for a home cooked meal. Boy, oh, well. What the h-dash. The day will come. Well, Pat, that's the dope on the situation. So far so good. Hoping you are taking good care of my cherry pie, Jessie. Give her my love and my best to all at home. That's for now. Take care of yourself. As ever, Frank. [stops reading] I have a lot of letters.

WC: Very nice. You have some photos there. You want to hold up too?

MT: Yes, let's do that. This says...I don't know who these are. [shows photograph of five GIs]

WC: I can zoom right in on them. Is he in that photo?

MT: No, these are just buddies. I'll show you.

WC: All right. I've got their names underneath there.

MT: [looks through papers]. This is my father somewhere with a horse he talks about from one of his photos. [shows photograph of Frank with a horse] Horses that the fellows rode on. He was going to take a try.

WC: Okay.

MT: I don't know. This looks like they're in battle, their guns there. [shows photograph of men in a field with guns]

WC: Okay.

MT: Well, here's the one where there are horses. He told my mom how the fellas went for rides on the ponies. [shows photograph of five ponies on a hill]

WC: Okay.

MT: [looks through papers] Let's get dad here. Here's one with my father with a girl that he calls a shippa [?]. What is a shippa? Red hair? [shows photograph of three GI's with a little girl]

WC: Gosh, I. I don't know.

MT: This is my dad here. [points to her father, on the right] These are some of his buddies. [shows photograph of five GIs] This one has always touched me. I'll read it and then. Because some of it's cut off I'll show it to you. It says, [reads] *Darling, it was a sleepless night I had that made for the likes of this. Matter of fact, I had just tumbled out of bed right into this pose. My thoughts, "why did I ever leave that warm bed?" I could or would at least dream of you, my love.* [stops reading] [shows and points photograph and letter] There it is like it is tear stained. It really touched me, this one. [picks up

another paper] This one says May 1944. He was in England then. It says, [reads] *Dearest one, yours truly, at door of Bath Abbey. The camera was poorly focused or else I did it. Thinking of you, of course. Don't I always? You bet. Because I love you, Frank.* [shows photograph of Frank in front of a big wooden door]

WC: Okay.

MT: I have more in my computer that I wasn't able to print out. Here's another one of him alone. Just the one of him alone. [shows photograph of Frank sitting] The one that really gets me. Which you had with the writing underneath. This is my Uncle Andrew. [shows two side by side photographs] He's here and here. My Uncle Andrew was in the Navy in the Seabees. He was in the same hospital as my dad, which was Northport Hospital. When my father came back from the war. My father was shell shocked. My father did a painting of Uncle Andrew, which is here. [shows painting of Andrew] Uncle Andrew is the one that had the partial, pretty much lobotomy. He never married. The whole story with him, my mother's brother. While he was in Northport Hospital, he did this painting. [shows painting of a Navy ship on the water] Navy ship, obviously. Since we're doing paintings, we might as well go into some of his art. This is a soldier. I don't know who. [shows painting of a soldier]

WC: Okay. Do you know when that was painted? Is it dated or anything?

MT: It looks pretty old. I would say this was painted in the 1950s. He was writing Orella at that time. That painting up there says Orella. I would say that was in the 1950s.

WC: So he was using Orella as a nickname from his last name?

MT: He took Tortorella and slashed it, theatrically, you know.

WC: Right.

MT: This drawing is. [shows a drawing of Patton] I don't know when he did this, but I think this is really a good drawing of Patton. It's done in pencil.

WC: Yeah. That is very nice.

MT: This is Abraham Lincoln. [shows painting] Here is, I believe it's George Washington. [shows painting] It says eighty six. This is an acrylic, this one.

WC: He did that painting in 1986?

MT: Yeah. The date is down here. This is when he was living in California. I think that was the happiest time of his life. I'll give you a little history of after he left the war and came home. He was in and out of the hospital for this nervous disorder. If I can find the

letter he wrote, you'll understand. When he was in the Red Cross Hospital, if I can find it. [looks through papers] I thought I printed it out. At that point...oh, here's another picture that's kind of nice of my father with his buddies. [shows a photograph of Frank and one with two buddies]] I don't know where this was taken. This is the Red Cross letter. It says January 6, 1945. But this is impossible to be January 6, because he was in Belgium in January. So he was probably confused. It says, [reads] *Dear Pat, I am at the Red Cross, a stone's throw from my ward. I generally walk over and do nothing more except write letters. I do nothing more because of my back ailment and my headaches. It's the cold fact that I am not well. I've notified Jessie of my condition, something I was hesitant about. But I tried to impress her with the consolation that I withheld it from her up until I was on the road to recovery. I tried making her understand that I am much improved. The truth is, I don't feel I've improved at all. My headaches hamper my thinking, as for now, I write at a snail's pace. My back at the base of the spine is weakened so much so I do everything in slow motion. Pat, there is no denying I am not well, nor have I been in the past, something which I never admitted to anyone. Now I feel I did wrong. However, Pat, I am doing my all toward regaining my health. The doctor attributes my headaches and backaches to my nerves, and so I am being treated for nervous disorder. For one thing, I've been away far too long and subjected to the most difficult conditions in combination that will break a man's spirit in time. I never complained, nor am I now. I merely stated. I am trying hard to forget the past, looking to the future toward regaining something of my old self. Meanwhile, my condition is the better, if anything. One thing I can't forget is the fact that I've been overseas for thirty months. I can't help but ache with longing for Jessie, mom, dad and all the others who have done everything possible to make my Army days less cheerless. I've been away too long. There I go again. I didn't realize it at first. I just did the best I could to make the most of circumstances. Now I am too aware of it. It's becoming an obsession. I think I better write [gestures quote] finis to this letter. I put in for partial pay, not having been paid in three months. [interjects] So this tells me that this letter was probably written...remember in the other letter he said he hadn't received his pay yet. That was a month ago. So more than likely this is around March in England in the Red Cross. [reads] The question is what to do with it when I receive it being confined to a hospital. A sixty four dollar question. Don't you worry your head, Pat. I'm confident soon I may be on the improve. Right now I am feeling well physically and mentally. All the best. Your future brother in law, Frank, as ever. [stops reading]* So he started being treated for a nervous disorder, shell shock. I understand he had a lot of shock treatments while he was in and out of the hospital. When he came home from war, he and my mother married in October of that year. They told her not to marry him.

WC: Now this was October of 1945?

HF: Who told her not to marry him?

MT: According to my aunt, my father's sister, the doctor said they shouldn't get married because he was not himself. And my mother was also very nervous. They didn't think my mother would have been able to handle my father's condition. My aunt, my father's sister Rose, also told me that her mother, my grandmother, said she wished God had taken my father rather than him go home the way he was. He wasn't himself. He even said something about getting back to his old self because he knew he wasn't his old self, who he really was.

HF: Are you able to make any comparison between what were his subjects in his letters while he was overseas as compared to what he would have written to someone before he went to the war? Because as a third party listener, I hear a lot in what he writes as reassurance for others, not stating what he's feeling or how overwhelmed or painful.

MT: Well, see, in the older letters he talks about himself and what he's doing and blah, blah, blah. Then there's a later letter, which I don't have here, that talks mostly about... doesn't even mention himself. He just talked about my cousin, my mother, my mother's condition, her nervous condition. Doesn't even mention himself. So there was a change in personality, he cut himself off. I don't know, it's hard to put into words. I just can tell by the way he wrote here. Even his handwriting. This is a letter written November 27, 1944. It's a V-mail. It says, [reads] *Hello, Pat. It's true what they say about France, the French, but you can't prove it.* [interjects] I don't understand that. *It's true what they say about the French, but you can't prove it by me. Love, Frank.* [interjects] Whatever that means.

[reads] *How did you enjoy Thanksgiving Day? I, for one, took off to town, our first chance. First off, my buddy and I bought a bag of apples. One item there's plenty of here. One day while on a hike, an elderly woman approached our moving column and when I came up to her she thrust an apple right into my waiting palm. They will go all out for you if they can. And it seems those with the least are always the most obliging. Oh, well, after looking the town over, the woman too, pecking at the apples, we did the next best thing. Hit a bar, Carmine La Spina and I for a drink. We managed to get rum along with what they sell for beer. Phooey on the beer, [laughs] it makes you want to go, you know where. Then having acquired a ride off to the dance, you do a jig with a mademoiselle. I couldn't get on at all. One gal was counting for me one, two, three, four. Wonder if I'm still an American citizen. I'd like to return someday. You're future brother in law. Love, Frank.* [looks through papers] These are England. There are a lot of different letters here. Here's another painting that I think he did while he was sick. Because it's kind of weird, you know? [shows painting of a man] And it's not finished. It's [done in] pencil. It's a soldier. This is Winston Churchill. [shows painting]

WC: Okay. Was that done when he got back to the States?

MT: Yeah, this was definitely done later. This is a watercolor. He came back and went to art school. I have tons of art. It would take hours to go through his art. But when he came back, what it was like, the cost of war as far as being with my dad. Because I had long periods of separation from him. This is a tragic, very tragic story. Which it's sort of hard to talk about for me because it's so tragic. I came out with the story. I finally was able to talk about it after I had breast cancer in 1995. It was after my father had died in 1993.

The woman said, tell a story. I was going to a breast cancer support group in Benedictine Hospital up here in Kingston. I was living here part time and in the city. She said, tell a secret. Something you've held in for a lot of years that you don't tell anyone. So I decided to tell finally what I was holding in, that I could remember like yesterday, was being...my father used to do paintings and things and make the frames. I was always there watching him paint. I remember his little porcelain shells with all the colors and the paintbrushes with the furry tips. He asked me to get him a hammer. I went to get him a hammer. He was bending over, and I hit him with the hammer on the back. Now, I didn't know he was shot there on his butt. He got up and started kicking me up and down the hall. My mother grabbed me. See, that was a problem with him. He was so nervous that he could fly off at any second. My mother grabbed me and rushed me into her bedroom. She was rocking me, and she closed the door. And I heard a commotion later. I opened the door, and I saw my father and he was all wrapped in white. They had him all in white. [gestures like a straight jacket] All these men took him away. I remember going to visit him. My father's sisters took me. He was there. It was big buildings and there were men walking around. It was the North Port Veterans Hospital. I remember seeing my father and I couldn't say anything. My aunt said, what's the matter? The cat bit your tongue? And yet I had this communication, that special communication with my father. He smiled and said, no, she doesn't have to talk if she doesn't want to. But my father, many years later, after he'd been out of the hospital. He came out of the hospital when I was about thirteen in 1963, for good. My Aunt Rose took him in, signed him out and took him in. They just kept him there after that. He came to visit now and then. I remember him being there when I had my first Holy Communion. He came. Someone took him. But I said to my dad, when I was visiting him when I was in my twenties in California. I said, dad, do you remember the time you kicked me through the house and he looked at me. How do you remember that? You were just three years old. I said, I remember like it was yesterday because it just never left. From what I get from my aunts, especially my Aunt Pat. My mother wouldn't talk about him; it was too painful for her. She just couldn't talk about him. My brother just hid away in the room with the door shut. He didn't deal with it. He was angry. His father was gone. My sister, she was a baby. I used to take care of

her because my mother worked. So I was her babysitter eternal. We had no mother or father at home. But I remember my father saying, how do you remember that? I remembered it like it was yesterday. It was really hard. I held it in. My father never spoke about the war. Years later, my real connection with my father was when he had disappeared. Now is it okay to talk about personal stuff?

WC: Sure

MT: He had disappeared and my grandmother thought he was dead. The VA contacted my grandmother and said, Frank Tortorella hasn't had his checks for two years. We don't know where he is. We don't know what's happened to him. That was in the late 1960s, early 1970s. Then all of a sudden he turned up. He showed up out of the blue. He was in my office. I was working as a bookkeeper at the time. The new studio was a commercial art studio for advertising. He had belts wrapped around his paintings. He was a total bum, all dirty and smelly, and living on the street. He was homeless. Apparently. He was sleeping on the steps of St. Thomas, which was just blocks from me. He called my grandmother. That was how he found out where I was working. So I took him in. I was living with a friend. I was terrified of my father and I was actually ashamed of him. I was just scared because I didn't understand. It took years and years and years to really go through the healing. I visited my father in my twenties and thirties, watched him paint, because I found out that I was also musically inclined. He was a musician. There was that connection, the art. I believe that was the healing. I think art is a very important thing for healing and expression for pain. My father never quite got past that, although in California, I think he had his happiest times because he finally had an apartment and a little moped. He rode up and down the hills and he painted. I visited. I spent a lot of time out there. But when he came to visit me at the new studio, this was in the early 1970s, I had to prove who he was so that he could get his checks back. But he was old. Oh, it was terrible. I mean, he was all [unclear] 100.34 He was in shelters. He told me he went on the food lines but he wouldn't talk about the war. He would not. All he would say was he thought he was over there too long and if he had come back sooner, he wouldn't have gotten sick. That's all he said. He never talked about what happened. Any description of what he experienced, nothing. He never shared that.

WC: Okay, I'm going to stop right here because I have to change tapes.

MT: So anyway, I had to prove who my father was and to try to somehow get him adjusted. At this point, I was an adult, no longer a child living at home. Growing up without my father was very difficult because I loved my dad. I was the artist, I think I was more connected in that way. I remember when I was sixteen years old, he took me...this was after he was out of the hospital and living with my Aunt Rose. He took me

to the Brooklyn Public Library to see a documentary on Stonehenge. He was very cultured, very intelligent. My Aunt Rose said how smart my father was. Very well mannered when he was younger and very smart. My Aunt Pat said she thought my father, of all the men that the sisters found, my mother had the cream of the crop. He was the best; he was a great man. Everyone spoke well of him. But then he had this flip side after the war. He would completely snap. There was a time when he lived in California. My sister was out in California and he was pissed off at the electric company. Something happened with the bill. My father would not deal with it. He lived in that apartment with no electricity for six months. My sister said he had candles everywhere with wax dripping. [laughs] But in California, I think he finally resolved it and got electricity. He had a parakeet, and I remember all the plants. He was painting, and I took him to get his canvases.

WC: Was he selling? Making a living selling?

MT: [shakes head no] Never. He was terrified of people. He was with him[self]. [gestures hugging herself] Didn't get involved with groups. I guess he was afraid of getting put away again. When I brought it up to him, I think I mentioned this, I told him about what he had done to me. He said, how do you remember that? He just couldn't believe that I remembered it. He said, they put me away for ten years after that. And I guess that's when my Aunt Rose took him. As far as selling his paintings, no, he never showed them. When he showed up at my job, I guess it was quite ironic that I was working in a studio of commercial art, which he was studying. These are more expressionistic, but I have pads and poster boards when he was going to school for commercial art that he was doing. Those are more realistic. But my boss [asked], who's that man? Because I went into the back and he [asked], who's that man you were talking to up in the front? I was shaking. I was literally shaking. I said, that's my dad. He was injured in the war. I asked, is it okay if I take a break. He said, take the rest of the day if you need to. So I went out with my dad. He told me he'd been homeless and he was sleeping on the steps of St. Thomas Church steps. He talked about the organ in the church and how much he loved the organ and things like that. I took him to the Social Security office, got him reestablished with checks. Then he moved into the YMCA in Brooklyn. When I left my job in the mid-1970s, I went to Canada for a little while, Vancouver area. My father went west and he went to Southern California, not far from where my mother was. I think he moved to Glendale, and was staying in the YMCA at Glendale. Then he got an apartment in Covina and then West Covina. He walked to Kentucky Fried Chicken and that's when he started becoming more himself in painting. Painting, painting, painting. I think what kept his sanity was his painting and he had his checks and he had his money, so he was able to survive. My sister visited him. I went. I spend my winters in California just to be

near him. It was hard because I was torn. I wanted to see him better. I wished I had brought him upstate so he could have been in Woodstock and met, not crazies, but bohemians, the artists. He might have fit in. It might have given him more of a community feeling. I never got to do that. He died before I realized that might have been a good place up here for him. Because they were all for peace and there were a lot of veterans up here and they did a whole memorial thing in Woodstock on Memorial Day. Ironically, my father died on Memorial day. It was May 30, which was the original Memorial Day.

WC: What year did he die?

MT: He died in 1993. I saw him a week before he died. At that time, he was in Milford, Massachusetts, in a nursing home. My brother became his conservator. I fought my brother. I wanted the conservatorship because my brother hadn't seen my father in a lot of years and didn't want to talk to my father. It affected my brother differently. He was mad at my father. In my brother's eyes, he was violent; he abandoned us or whatever. He just didn't speak to my father. Then after my father died, he flew out to California. No. When my father had the stroke. That's right, he had the stroke. He put him in the Veterans Hospital in Long Beach. When I flew out to Long beach, maybe a month or two later, it was horrible conditions. I was really angry at the conditions of the hospital there. I started fighting my brother in court because I didn't want my father back in a veteran's hospital because of what he experienced. I just didn't want that for him. I went in there, it was horrible. He was laying there all twisted, couldn't talk, and you couldn't hardly understand him. His hand was like this. [gestures a claw] And his fingernails grew into the palm of his hand. It was disgusting. Nobody was taking care of it. I went crazy. I just started screaming and hollering, what's the matter with you? Is this how you treat your men that served in the war that gave their life for the country? His fingernails were growing into the palm of his hand. He was diabetic. His hand was all blown up, it was yellow and it smelled. It was horrible. I was very upset. This was in the late 1980s. I drove from my friend's house back and forth, back and forth, fifty miles each way. I was staying with a friend and fighting my brother in court so that I would have the conservatorship and not my brother. It was difficult. I ended up giving in to my brother because I couldn't afford it. My brother was a corporate guy, and I couldn't fight him. So I let him take my father provided he removed him from that hospital and that ward. Because he declared him incompetent, they put my father back into this ward that you don't...I wish I had a camera. It wasn't the place you wanted to be. He was in a sheet, laying on a bed. It was horrible. You could see the plastic blue stripes of the plastic mattress with one sheet on him, practically naked, laying there in his feces with his fingernails growing through his palm. I was appalled. I got them to order a whirlpool

thing for his hand. I snuck in aloe vera and echinacea and all the herbs, and poured it on his hand. We had to make a special appointment to have his hands clipped because there was a waiting list of several months before they could have a podiatrist clip his nails in the VA hospital. I mean, you had to wait. Meanwhile, my father probably, at that time, had over one hundred thousand dollars in the bank that was being held because my brother put the conservership on it so nobody could touch his money to get a private doctor. And you couldn't bring a private doctor in, you had to bring him [my father] out. It was a nightmare trying to resolve that situation. My brother and I were kind of at war. And right now we don't speak.

HF: How about your sister?

MT: My sister and I speak. She was kind of helpful to my dad because she lived there, so she was able to see him. I called her. We hadn't heard from my father and I couldn't reach by phone and I said, Fran, go check on dad because something's wrong. He had that stroke, and I don't know how long he was laying in that bed. Nobody was there. But he did have a good run for a number of years in California, painting. It was when he didn't have his license. He had a license for a moped. He lost his license. I remember I took him for the test and I wasn't going to cheat and try to pass the test for him. He lost his driving license. He wasn't good with government forms.

WC: He had to take a written test periodically out there.

MT: He didn't renew his license on time, so he had to take the written test over and he flunked. Then he couldn't do his moped. That was his way to get his canvases and go to his stores. He was comfortable on his moped. I think that was kind of when he started to go down, when he lost the ability to get around. Because he was sort of coming back and having some sense of joy. But at home, growing up without him was a nightmare. It was hard because my mother had to work. I wrote a poem. I don't know if you'd like to hear the poem I wrote.

WC: Sure. I write poems, too.

MT: It's called. One day my mommy came to me. I typed it in 1976, so maybe I wrote it around that time. I was in my mid-twenties. [reads] *One day my mommy came to me to tell me her pardon of what she had done. She told me of things I didn't believe, in the life she had to leave. She told me my daddy got sick in the war and for a long time I wouldn't see him anymore. She told me of his beauty, a smart, genius mind, how he couldn't harm a flower, but that's all left behind. She told me she was sorry I had to be alone, but she had to work very hard so we could have a home. She told me when I was young that someday I would see that she never had the time to show how much she really loved me.*

She wanted to make me understand the problems she had, but she herself tried to understand it would only make me sad. Someday, my child, there will be no more war, and we will then know what we were fighting for. [stops reading] So that kind of...she wasn't there. That was my way of expressing not having my mother at home and not having my father at all, other than when he finally came out, the little visits now and then. And of course, I was ashamed of him on some level and I was terrified. I was literally frightened, you know. That fear of the violence because of whatever triggered him. According to the family, that wasn't him. That he was no way like that at all. You could kind of see in his letters, if you read them all, because I have them all here, the different V[mail] letters. I only read you some, because there's only so much time you have. But I could see, I could understand that he wasn't like that. Well, I'd like to believe that he wasn't like that. I mean, you have to have faith. You have to understand also that when you take somebody who's an artist, sensitive, and you put them in the Battle of the Bulge. What we know about the Battle of the Bulge and what happened in the Ardennes and the Meuse River and all of that, and how they were bombarded for, what, about a month. They were in snow with no supplies or anything. The ones that survived don't talk about it. I speak to people about their dads that were in World War II. They never talked about it. They just don't talk about it. This is another one I wrote 1972, shortly after my father resurfaced when he showed up at the art studio. It's not funny, but my boss, who was an art director who studied art, looked...I finally showed him some of my father's paintings. He said to me, this isn't a bowl of fruit; your father is a really good painter. You asked me if he had sold his stuff. He said, you should bring him to 59th street to the galleries. He's a real artist. I never did. I just never did.

This poem is called Reality, and this is a different style. This is more like a Beep poem. Reality [reads] *Can't quite see the outlet to drawing pictures of blue and dark storms the night through, full of sorrow and grief of what I see for tomorrow. And the painter's sign of peace goes far beyond reality so the only one left to see is the painter's eye. For he knows and he sees the peace to which he will draw to find release beyond reef's meadow where the moon's shadow was found many times before his light first found sorrow. I can't quite come to know the sorrows to which find tomorrow. And you found the light of truth to which hate hastened your sorrow and found my door empty and bleeding with the picture of a one man bent in shadows. Full of rich beauty and rich life where they were hung on walls of an empty room full of bottles and burnt wax. Gifted to paint beyond dreams just found only yesterday. Still the time clock beats and sounding alarms breathe as the morning air whispers to wake me from my sleep and tell me there's someone at my door. And somehow I can't quite grip the phone. Ring another bell for it is not my calling time. The door eats away and the calling I know was that of the painter telling me to hear*

one more story and he would be gone. But the stories I've heard were beyond reality to which only the painter knew. The sorrow bent behind the flag and the disaster of beauty which was long evaporated into smoke filled air and cannonballs distress. And I find myself captured with this far beyond reality. And I could see you and watch you every day creating new songs of beauty and holding a man's hand to paint. Cover walls too daring and too beautiful to capture. And I find myself lost, oblivious to this because I would not repeat for a single solitary sound the words which made my laughter seem real and my reality seem golden. As the sun sets on many people's walls who only look but do not feel what was originally intended. As I myself do not know what life is, so the painter, he thought by drawing pictures by night, might find what I too am looking for. Reality, that I wrote. That was my dad. Did you see this one? This picture? I think you might have seen this.

WC: Yes. we do have that one.

MT: Let me see if there were any more photos that we didn't look at.

WC: What are those photographs that are sitting there by your hand?

MT: This was my Aunt Pat.

WC: Oh, yes, okay. We did get that one.

MT: Who my father was writing these letters to. Oh, this is from Clinton. He sent this to my mother in honor of...I guess they send this when a veteran dies. [shows certificate] It says, [reads] *The United States of America honors the memory of Frank J. Tortorella. This certificate is awarded by a grateful nation in recognition of devoted and selfless consecration to service of our country and the Armed Forces of the United States.* *William J. Clinton, President of the United States.*

WC: Very nice.

MT: I don't have his discharge papers.

WC: Okay.

MT: There was one letter where he's trying to console. Oh, here he has come and gone. Okay, here's a letter. [reads] *July 7th. Hello, Pat. I don't like your pulling my leg about my making Private first class. As for your thinking that I may major or something by now. Well, I'm not quite ready to take that step yet. Just a few months away. So there. Yes, Pat, D-Day has come and gone. Now all we need is that final victory. Your sis Jesse wrote me telling me she's lost Paul's address. [interjects] That was a friend of theirs. [reads] Then two days passed and Paul asked for Jesse's address. He's lost hers. From here, it is quite*

a coincidence. Each is wondering too why the other isn't writing. So I've written to each and hope it gets ironed out. As for Paul, Pat, from his letter of today, he hints that he's headed for battle. Wonder what the chances are. He could be wrong. A real pal, Paul. He's great. He is my choice for best man, Pat. Agreed? You are my choice for sister in law. Now, so you think nothing's too good for me? Tell it to these English prima donnas. [unclear]. 1.26.52 *But don't let that worry you. I'm just out for some fun, which I'm entitled to, I think. But don't let on to Jessie. She knows I frequent the dances. I still think she is great. Unsurpassed. A real woman without the usual feminine ills. She is not scheming. She is plainly herself. Which makes Jessie outstanding. I do love and miss her. Her letters and pictures are a comfort. I'm fine and dandy as ever, Frank.* [ends reading]

This was July 7, so he was probably in England at that time. There was one when he was in France. He was sent to France. Oh, here it is. This was in December. This was just before the action, I guess. This is a V-mail. It's in France. December 12, 1944. He was still with the 118th Infantry. I guess that's when he was by the River Meuse. He was sent there and from there he went to the 2nd Division of the 1st Army [with] General Hodges. [reads] *Hello, Pat. While I smoke another cigarette, something which I can't very well afford to do, I thought it worth my while and yours to write you a little V-mail letter.* Chances are you already know I am in France. Now that you know, then my next step will be toward convincing you I am no more in danger of getting hurt than I have been before. So let's dispense with the "know it all". It's peaceful, dash in France, dash, more or less. [interjects] I don't think it was so peaceful then. He was just putting her on, I think. [reads] *So let's not get panicky. And above all, if Jesse shows any signs, you see to it that she doesn't worry when no cause exists. Did that come out of me? This cold of mine must be doing me some good. I've been to the dances on a Thursday and take in a movie on a Saturday. Two nights. I'm generally out otherwise. I'm wise to remain in camp. Oh, yes. I've been invited to have Christmas dinner out. More [unsure of words]* [interjects, something or other.] *A Merry Christmas to all, as ever, Frank.* [stops reading] I mean, that's a real cover, I think. Because that was December 12, 1944, the beginning of the real heavy stuff. He was a good, you know, let's keep it____[gestures keep it down low].

WC: Low key and not worry the people back home here.

MT: He sounds very normal, right? He sounds very rational and very beautiful. This one is when he went to the Roman baths. I think I showed you the picture.

WC: Yes.

MT: Would you like to hear it?

WC: Sure.

MT: It's another V-mail. It says he's in the Company K and 18th Infantry. June 25, 1944, England. He was having a good time there, I think. [reads] *Dear Pat, how are you? Well! And Joe. And of course, Patricia. Does Patricia continue to go to dancing school? How is she progressing otherwise? How are your chickens and etc. And spuds?* [interjects] What's a spud?

WC: A potato.

MT: She had a garden, etc. [reads] *How about adding corn to that garden? Then make some corn whiskey and send it on. No, we can't get enough. England's been at war a long time now. Besides, I don't go for to pitch a drunk every time I hit the bar. But every once in a while a guy feels low enough to warrant more than just wetting a tonsil. It's then we have to rely on beer and poor imitation at that. Last Saturday was one of those nights. I visited a town called Bath, famous for its Roman baths. The remains of which were dug up and reconstructed for guys like me to see and marvel. It is a natural hot spring that fills the bath. Now it's a goldfish pond. A friend took my picture of the Bath and Bath Abbey, I believe, the oldest in England.* [interjects] We saw those and I have some more in the computer which I'm going to make a disc. *Also the oldest house in England. A most unusual town built in a bowl like hollow. Pitched a drunk there once or twice. Jesse writes as faithful as ever. I'm fine and the sun is doing its dirty work, getting a tan. Shoo, shoo. Baby. I'm behaving. Love, Frankie.* [ends reading] I don't know what to say.

WC: I think you pretty well covered his experience and the heartaches and what he and what you went through as a family.

MT: Yeah, it was pretty tough. It was hard because we never got to do things together as a family. Because my mother worked and my father wasn't there, I had to babysit my sister. We just never went anywhere together.

WC: When did your mom pass on?

MT: She passed on in 2005 in California.

HF: Had she come to some, I don't think the word reconciliation, but closure about any of this?

WC: Were they on speaking terms?

MT: No, because she had a friend that was a friend. It ended up, she took care of a man that she had in her life after my father was put away. I guess she needed a companion of sorts. She never remarried. I think that he [Frank] was violent with her as well. I mean, as a child I saw him. It's very difficult. [pauses to speak] He hit her real hard, put it that way. He had no control. I don't know what medicines they may have given him or like I said,

they gave him shock treatments. I don't know to what degree his mind was damaged. But my grandmother, his own mother, said she wished God had taken him rather than him being that way. So obviously he was not him. My mother, although she loved him...this is a picture of my mother here. [shows photo of mother and father hugging, he in uniform]

WC: Okay.

MT: I guess he was on leave. She didn't want to talk about him. She couldn't. It was just too painful for her. I remember when I was a child and I have the picture somewhere. I took my father's photograph. I am such a romanticist and I said, look at daddy. I put it up against her and made her kiss it. [laughs] I still have that picture somewhere. It has her lipstick marks on his mouth. So I kind of lived in this fantasy world of them being together. Of course, I never married. I could never commit. I mean, it was like psychology. Your father is the man. So where was the man? He was not there. He was in a fantasy somewhere. The reality of who the person is took a toll. We argued all the time as kids because there was no discipline. So we grew up arguing. My brother and I...forget about it. When my mother passed not too long ago, he took my mother's will. It disappeared. Of course, others have seen it. I never saw a penny of my mother's money. And that money was from my father. So I got stuck. So my brother and I are not talking now because of that and I was going through a recurrence of breast cancer. I wasn't going to fight him, so I kind of lost out on that. I was hoping. I wanted to buy a house. I wanted to come up here and buy my own [place, using] the little chunk as a downpayment when my brother sold that. So I'm not talking to my brother. Strange things happen when you don't have that love. We didn't have that love because we were torn apart. This is what happens. What I do have is the appreciation of my father's paintings, like that one. My brother didn't want any of his art, which astounds me. He didn't want my father's art. And to me...it's not buying me a house. But that painting there, I love that painting there. [points to a painting, of a little girl, hanging on the wall] I don't know if that's me when I was a little girl. I don't know. It's possible, because of the dark hair. It's his impression. I don't know.

HF: That's a great painting.

MT: And that [points to another painting]. So much art that my brother had. He gave that to me. He didn't want it. He was so mad at my father, and he did not want any of his paintings. I took them all.

HF: Would it be possible, or would you be at all interested in being able to look at his medical records? What diagnosis they made, what treatment they attempted?

MT: Yeah.

WC: We are not able to do that. Being a family member, you would have to request that. You could get that information. What I could do is send you...I'm going to turn this off now.

MT: Okay.

WC: Thank you for the interview.

MT: You're welcome.