Joseph A. Bucci
Veteran

Milke Russert
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Interviewers

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Q: Can you give me your full name and your date of birth please?
JB: Joseph, middle initial a, and last name is Bucci. That's b, as in boy, u-c-c-i. And I was born September 30, 1919.

Q: Where were you born?
JB: In Schenectady, New York.

Q: Okay. What was your furthest that you went in school before you entered the service?
JB: Education?

Q: Yes sir.
JB: I was a high school graduate.

Q: Where you drafted, or did you enlist?
JB: I was drafted.

Q: Now you ended up in Officer Candidates?
JB: Yes, I went to Officer Candidate School.

Q: You drafted in the army, and did you go for basic training first?
JB: When I was drafted, we went to, I think it was Fort Dix, New Jersey. And from there my first camp was Fort Jackson, South Carolina. When I got there, they started to send the individuals to different places. I found myself—not that I was asked or anything—I found myself in an infantry division, the medical battalion of the infantry division.

Q: So, at Fort Jackson, did you receive medical training there?

JB: I received some medical training there and I done some basic training there also.

Q: Okay. How long were you at Fort Jackson, approximately?
JB: I don't know, let's say a year. A year.

Q: Okay, now where did you go for your officer training?
JB: My officer training, I went to Camp Berkely, Texas.

Q: Now, were you a college graduate or did you have any college at all?
JB: No, no college, just high school graduate.

Q: Now what was your training like there in Texas?
JB: Well, in Texas it was mostly the administrative end of the medical department. In other words, what brought all of this about was in fact that the army was running short of doctors to furnish medical treatment, take care of the injured and that type of thing. That seemed to stem from the fact that when doctors were called to service, instead of performing the function of treatment, they needed people to do administrative work. Doctors came in with a commission. They didn't come in as privates like citizens they came in as first lieutenants. Some of them came in as captains depending on their status in life, what their specialties were. And so, the army wound up with a lot of doctors doing administrative work rather than medical work. They realized at one point that they had to relieve the doctors from this administrative burden and put them to do the treatment of people that were ill, and hire others to do the administrative work in the medical department or the medical corps. And that's what started these officer training schools. They had people apply to go to Officer Candidate School, a committee or whatever would review the applications, and they would approve or disapprove some. For the ones that they approved they'd issue special orders. They'd go to the school, and they were known as ninety-day wonders for ninety days. And when you got through, if you graduated, you got your commission as a second lieutenant, and then orders were issued for you to go to wherever you were assigned. That's what started these schools. And so, in my case, as I say I as drafted as a private, and then I went up to battalion headquarters and I worked over there doing administrative work and got promoted to corporal and sergeant and master sergeant until I applied for officer training school. Then I was approved and sent to Camp Berkely. And when I graduated from school, my first assignment was Camp Atterbury in Indiana. It was near Indianapolis, Indiana, about twenty miles south, where I was sent to Camp Atterbury in Indiana. That was my first assignment. And when I got there the commanding officer of this hospital—and it was a large hospital, a general hospital, and they seemed to specialize in soldiers that got disfigured, primarily a lot of braces and prostheses—the commanding officer was a full colonel from Altoona, Pennsylvania. And in my assignment when I got there, I was made personnel officer of this general hospital. The personnel officer prior to me was a doctor so he was relieved now, and he was going to go treat soldiers and whatever.

Q: Now, what kind of work did you do as a personnel officer?

JB: A personnel officer was all administrative things pertaining to the officers assigned to the hospital, such as leave if they want, they went on furlough. I had to record furlough time, whether or not they were going to get paid or not paid when the payrolls were made, whether there were any problems—disciplinary problems—to report to the commanding officer. In other words, like a go-between of the administrative procedures with the officers, just as with enlisted personnel. But I was dealing strictly with the officers.

Q: Now, did you have enlisted men working under you, or with you?
JB: We had some, and at that time there were a lot of civilians that worked on the post at Camp Atterbury. And those people had jobs, what they called civil service jobs. They hired a lot of those people that were working at the camp because they couldn't afford to fill all of the positions that had to be filled with soldiers because then they wouldn't have enough for the fighting that had to go on. So, there were civilians, but I didn't have anything to do with them; my job was strictly with the army personnel at the hospital, in the category of the officers.

Q: How long were you at the hospital?
JB: Oh gosh . . . boy, it's been so long ago it's hard for me to remember, but I'd say a couple of years. And then word was getting out that the war was over, or it was winding down and that they were going to close the hospital. And when that happened—that they were going to close the hospital—of course the civilian people started looking for other jobs before the hospital closed. I worked very closely with the personnel officer of the post. Now, Camp Atterbury was known as an army post and there was a commanding officer of the post that had nothing to do with the hospital where I worked, but he was a commanding officer. And then there was a personnel officer there that took care of the civilian people that worked at the post headquarters and also the other places on the post. And I worked closely with him. When I learned that they were thinking about closing the post, then I became concerned with myself because I had no real reason to return to Schenectady because I never cared much for the city, and I had no job to go back to. And so, I said, well what I think I'll do is talk to—I think it was Krog, Captain Krog—I said I think I'll talk to him about getting a job on the post as a civilian, which was like working for the War Department. And so, I talked to him, and he said, "Well, when they close the hospital, we'll see what we can do." When they closed the hospital, I got a job at the post headquarters as a civilian, and I stayed there.

Q: Now did you ever go overseas?

JB: Yes, I went overseas. The division I belonged to was blessed in that regard. I say blessed, it just seemed to be always first and never got engaged in anything too involved. Now, when the Battle of the Bulge happened in Europe, they were

looking for reinforcements from the United States, so our division was one of the first divisions that was sent over. Now, most divisions would go on troop ships, and they would go in like in an armada of ships. And what I mean by that is, if your division was stationed at Fort Dix let's say, and you were leaving to go to France. So, you would load on the ships—and they had certain things to do and so forth that I'm not too familiar with—and then you would leave, say, at a certain hour, maybe early in the morning. And when you got up in the morning, like the first night for me, I got up and went on deck and I couldn't believe the number of ships that had tacked on to us. There must have been about twenty-five, thirty ships. I said, where in the world did these ships come from? Well, it was like a convoy. And as the convoy passed a certain area other ships would tack on who were also going to France or close to France, and they were going to convoy for protection. The German U-Boats were patrolling the ocean waters and stuff, and that was one of the reasons that we would do that. So, most of the troops or divisions and soldiers that were going to Europe would go to France, and France had what they called a staging area. I think it was near an area called Le Havre; a tremendous staging area. It was just like a plain area of land, and there were just thousands of tents. And when you arrived there, you were assigned certain tents and that's where you slept and that's where you lived. And they had kitchens for food and stuff like that, but you remained in the staging area. There were I don't know how many soldiers in the staging area. Then, as these field commanders needed replacements or they needed something, they would contact the staging area and the staging area, if they had to send, say, a company of troops to a certain place to relive certain people then they would go from the staging area to wherever they had to go. So, it was like a pool of soldiers there, and they would send them wherever they were needed. And so, I did go to France.

Q: Now, were you involved in the Bulge? Was your division involved in the Bulge?
JB: No. No, we weren't involved. But we did go close to the front in one instance, and I can't recall what it was. We went close to the front, we were only there for a couple of days, there weren't any casualties. There wasn't any big battle of any kind, and then we were relieved by another unit—I never did know who they were or why—and we went back to the staging area.

Q: Now, did you have a hospital set up there?
JB: No, we didn't, because we were an infantry division.

Q: You went in as an infantryman then?
JB: No, we were a medical battalion attached to the infantry division. You see, the army—and I never did quite understand it fully—but briefly, the army had tables of organization they called for, you know, units. So, you looked at a table of organization for a division, you would have these little squares, you know, like, maybe you would have division headquarters, then a line, and another square.

And then under the division, you would have maybe four or five battalions. Then under each battalion maybe was made up of four or five companies. And then from there, maybe you had a medical battalion that was attached to this entire division. And then the battalion would be broken down so each company would have so many medical people from the medical battalion.

Q: Now what did you do when you reached France then with your division?
JB: Well, when we reached France, if you are not in combat or anything, you just stayed in your tent or whatever and maybe the company commander would call a meeting to pass some time away and do things like that. But you really had no engagement with anything or anyone.

Q: Well, as a medical unit, did you set up?
JB: As a medical unit we had in the morning what you would call, after they took attendance to be sure that no one skipped during the night, you'd have medical call. Like, if you didn't feel good, you'd go to the medical tent and have them take care of you. So, we did have that every morning.

Q: Now, did you have any duties during this time?
JB: No, we did have any duties to speak of other than things like I just mentioned, the medical calls in the mornings. If you didn't feel good you went to the medical setup and tell them what your problem was and so forth. But there was no training or drilling or anything of that nature going on at the staging area.

Q: Okay. Did you move as the front moved at all? Or did you just stay in the same area?
JB: Well, to make a long story short, we weren't there too long, and they shipped us back to the United States.

Q: Was that before the war ended?
JB: Well, let me see . . . no, I think the war ended and we were one of the first divisions back. We came back and immediately they formed troop trains and they put our division on the troop trains and we went from the East Coast all the way to Camp Pendleton, California. And there they waterproofed all the vehicles because when the division moves, they even take their vehicle, at least our division, we took our vehicles with us. General MacArthur who was in the Pacific at that time, who was the commanding general, that war was coming pretty much to a close, and in fact we had troops near Yokohama, Japan, one division, that was the army of occupation. I think the war was pretty much over in the Pacific. The fact that they were there all by themselves, they wanted more troops in there to stabilize the situation. And so, we were one of the first divisions that went to Japan as an army of occupation. There was no war going on or nothing when we got there; it was over in the Pacific. But we did go as an army of occupation.

Q: Did you set up a hospital or anything while you were there?
JB: No, no, we didn't.

Q: What did you do when you got there? What particular things did you do?
JB: Well, we would get in jeeps, and we would travel around different cities and stuff to be sure everything was calm, everything was in order. Now, we were medical people, and medical people don't usually get involved with firearms. We didn't have any guns on our, you know, we didn't carry any pistols or rifles because we were medical people. But we got into these jeeps, and we rode around the countryside to be sure that we didn't see anything out of the ordinary to report back so that somebody else could investigate, and didn't see anybody who was sick or something that we could help and things of that nature.

Q: Now, were your vehicles marked with red crosses?
JB: Yes.

Q: And did you wear armbands or helmets with a mark on them?
JB: We had armbands. But as things turned out, we got into Japan, and . . . I don't know, I wasn't there too long that I became eligible to be discharged because at that time they would discharge you depending on the that points that you had accumulated, and I can't remember how you accumulated the points. You got some points for this and this and that and this and that. When you reached so much you were eligible for discharge.

Q: So, you had about five years in the service at that point?
JB: Yeah, I went in in '41 and I got out in '46. And I only was drafted for one year, but I was drafted in April and the following April I had my year finished. But in December, they bombed Peal Harbor, and everything went out the window. And so, for a one-year draft, I was in for five years. I got out in '46. But, to finish my story about Japan: so, I was only there a couple of three months, and I was eligible for discharge because of the points accumulation. So, the next thing I knew was that I was coming back. I came back to the States, and I got discharged from Camp Atterbury—that's where they sent me—and I got my honorable discharge from Camp Atterbury after being there just a few months.

Q: Now, what rank were you when you were discharged?
JB: I was a captain when I got discharged. So, I went from a buck private to a captain in the years that I was there. And like I say, I was fortunate in one respect that I went in early. The army was expanding and there were a lot of opportunities for people in the right place to advance because the army had to expand, and in order to expand you're bringing all these people that had no experience at all. You had to have sergeants and lieutenants and captains to be sure that everything was going alright.

Q: Now, did you have the option to stay in the service, or you didn't want to stay?
JB: As I recall, I think there was some talk about that at the time that the papers were being finalized. But I decided that I wanted to get out, I was in long enough. But I did get out as a captain in what they call the Army Medical Corps, AMC, or the administrative part of the medical department.

Q: Now, your job as a civilian, was that similar to what you were doing?
JB: It was administrative work for civilians, not Army. But I was under the civil service end because they hired quite a few of those back in those days.

Q: Now you ended up working with the VA?
JB: Yes, when I left the army, I went to work for the war department at Camp Atterbury, then word got around that they were going to close Camp Atterbury. I tried to keep a little bit ahead of the situation, so I said to myself, now where am I going to go? And I knew that in Indianapolis they had an exceptionally large regional office for the Veterans Administration, which is part of the War Department for Veterans Administration. It was a large regional office. In fact, I still get correspondence from them today. They send me correspondence whenever there is something going on. They send it to me from Indianapolis. And so, I put in for a transfer to the regional office of the Veterans Administration in Indianapolis. And I got approved, and I got transferred, so I went from Camp Atterbury to the Veterans Administration. So when they closed the camp, it didn't affect me, I already was working there; I worked in the Veterans Administration Office. And then, it wasn't too long before I got word that they were going to close the regional office or not close it, but they were going to shrink it because they didn't need all the people that they had. And I said to myself, now I'm new here. I was relatively one of the new workers and I said if they are going to cut the workforce, I'll probably be one of the first to go. So I said, what am I going to do? So, I started buying The Indianapolis Star, which is the morning paper, and I started looking into want ads, for employment. First, I had to decide, you know, I didn't have any skills like a lawyer or a doctor. I said, what am I going to do? I got to make a decision here. I decided that the two best industries that I could come up with that seemed to be stable were insurance and banking. I said, I should either look for a job in a big bank because they'll always be open, or insurance, because people need insurance for automobiles and homes and things of that nature. I decided on insurance. And so, I found an ad in the paper one morning. One of the largest multiple line insurance companies in the United States, next to Hartford and Travelers, was United States Fidelity and Guaranty Company, known as USF&G. They had an ad in the paper; they wanted an adjuster. So, I answered the ad, and I went down to the office. I had an interview, and I got hired as an adjuster. That was in 1952, and I worked with them until I retired in 1985.

Q: You told some stories before about . . . was it in Europe that you had to cook in your helmet?
JB: Yeah. Well, no, it even happened here because when I was at Camp Fort Jackson every now and then they would go on what they called bivouac. They'd go out, they'd had certain sections of the forest near Murfreesboro, Tennesse—and another place, I can't think of the city—which was a good area for maneuvers, like in a wooded area. I went on several of those when I first got inducted into the army. It was on these bivouac periods and maneuvers that a lot of this took place, where you'd be gone maybe for a week and after two, three days maybe you needed to shave. There was no hot water, so you'd build a little fire, and you put water in your helmet and hold your helmet over the fire and the water got warm, or hot and stuff. Then you leave it there and take your helmet to where you had your mirror hanging on a tree and you shaved with the hot water. That's what we did.

Q: After you left the service, did you ever use the GI Bill?
JB: No, I didn't use the GI Bill. And that's one of the things that we had done in the Veterans Administration Office when I worked for them, when I got transferred from Camp Atterbury to the VA in Indianapolis. One of the things we've done is that we would determine, like, if a soldier wanted to go to college under the GI Bill, we would determine how much eligibility time he was entitled to, and the government would pay for that, toward his time in college. And then we'd have to make out vouchers for money to be transferred and things of that nature. But that's one of the things we've done under the bill. But I never used it. I never used it.

Q: You went right to work, so you never used the 52-20 Club?
JB: No.

Q: Did you join any veterans' organizations?
JB: No, like I say, I still get the correspondence from the VA, and they send me a lot of things that are going on and stuff like that.

Q: You never joined the American Legion or the . . .
JB: No, I never joined the American legion, no.

Q: Did you stay in contact with anyone that was in service with you?
JB: Two individuals in Indianapolis. One passed away and the other is still alive.

Q: You stay in contact with them still?
JB: Yes, in fact, I got a Christmas card ready to mail tomorrow for him. Yes. We keep in touch.

Q: How do you think your time in the service had an effect on your life?

JB: Well, the only thing I can think of, the first thing, is that I think I was extremely fortunate, and I thank the Lord so much because everything seemed to fall in place for me when I was drafted. And I say to myself, to be drafted into a large army like America, and to go in as a buck private and come out as a captain, I was very fortunate. And my assignments that I received in the hospitals and in different places have always been very effective. I don't want to say effective, I can't think of the word right now, but they were very good. I was fortunate that everything always turned out well for me and that I was able to advance when I had the opportunity, and I took advantage of it, and everything turned out just fine. But for that to happen all the time it's very unusual. It just so happened that I went in at the right time. Because the longer you waited, not you waited but the longer it took for you to be drafted, the opportunities weren't there because the army was getting larger, and people were graduating from officer candidate schools; they had them for infantrymen, they had them for engineers, they had them for all branches of the service. And as they were graduating, the opportunities were diminishing. So, going early did have its advantages.

Q: All right. Well, thank you very much for your interview.
JB: Well, I don't know if I answered your questions.

Q: Yes, you did.
JB: But, like I say, in my case it all started from, I think I mentioned, volunteering. When I got my letter drafted, you know how it started, greetings and all that stuff. Well, there was a fellow that used to be in our group, and he always used to preach. He said, "For God's sake if you ever go in the army don't ever volunteer for anything, because if they want somebody to volunteer for an opening it can't be good, otherwise it'd be filled. There's got to be a problem with it." So, he said, "Never volunteer for anything." And that always stayed with me. Then this one morning when we had roll call and after the roll call the captain said, "Is there anybody here that has had experience with a typewriter and is able to type?" And it took me about five or ten seconds to realize that yes, I was one of those, because in high school I took a business course, and six weeks was typing. I knew how to handle a typewriter; I wasn't a speed merchant, but I typed fairly decent, and I was fairly quick. So, when he said that I said to myself, geez, I better not volunteer. because I remembered what that fellow said, but then I said to myself well, this can't be too bad. I mean, a typewriter, that means it's got to be in an office someplace. And what's better than being in an office instead of going on hikes and KP duty and that stuff? So, I said I'll take a shot. And I raised my hand. The only hand was mine, the only one. And so, after we were dismissed, he came over and talked to me. We went inside and we talked. The job was in the battalion headquarters as a company clerk for the company I belonged to. And each company had a company clerk and battalion headquarters. You had your own desk, your own telephone and stuff. You took care of all the administrative stuff that pertained to your particular company. And if a member of your company was

going on furlough for two weeks, you had to keep a record, you had to correct the payroll if it was necessary to do that. And if he was absent, you'd mark him AWOL. I mean, you had to do all that stuff for your company. Each company clerk took care of his company. It was a nice job because you never went on hikes; whenever there was a hike scheduled, you had to go up to headquarters and do your work. And so, I never got on KP duty, which was in a kitchen to wash pots and pans. I got out of all of that, and I just went up to the company headquarters and worked there. The promotions came automatic. After so long, you got promoted from a private first class to a corporeal, and then you went from a corporeal to a sergeant—you know, those three stripes—and then I got promoted from a sergeant to a staff sergeant. I was getting stripes all the way down to my wrist. Then, I decided to go to Officer Candidate School. They took our division, and they shipped us to Yuma, Arizona, for what they called desert training. Now, I started to think, I said, now desert training, to me that doesn't sound too good. And why would they want to send us to Yuma, Arizona and train in the sand? Because you couldn't sleep at night very well because there were sidewinding snakes that would go sideways, they were poisonous. They would tell you in the morning, never put your hand in your boot or your foot, always shake your boots because there could be snakes in there and do the same thing with your clothing; shake everything. So, I said, this can't be a good omen when we're going to desert training. At that time, Rommel [Erwin Rommel] was in Africa with the Germans, and he was running wild over there with his tanks. And so, I said to myself, I can't hang around here now. I got to do something. So, right away, I think the next day, I filled in an application to go to Officer Candidate School. And a short time later, why, I went. But like I say, everything was so nice. It worked perfectly for me. To be honest with you, I enjoyed the time I was there; I learned a lot and met a lot of nice people, learned a lot about the organization of the army and the way it's set up and so forth. And so, everything turned out pretty well.

Q: Well, thank you very much.
JB: But it all started from raising my hand for the typewriter, and had I not raised my hand, who knows what would have happened. Certainly not the way it did. But just because I raised my hand, and I went against the advice of my friend, and when I heard typewriter I said, that's got to be a good job inside, and I said, let me take a chance. And so, that's the story.