

**Anthony William Funaro
Veteran**

**Wayne Clark and Mike Russert
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on May 17th, 2004, 1:00 PM
Cooperstown, New York**

Q: This is an in-home interview in Cooperstown, New York. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth, please?

AF: OK, my name is Anthony Funaro, born July 11, 1923, in Brooklyn, NY.

Q: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

AF: Well, I got as far as two years in high school. I was attending a vocational high school in Manhattan. At that time, my sister was the sole supporter of my mother and father. When she got married, she moved out and left it up to me. My father asked me to quit school to work and support my mother and father until I was drafted.

Q: So you were drafted?

AF: Yes, on January 27, 1943.

Q: Do you recall where you were and your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

AF: Yes, it was on a Sunday, a late Sunday afternoon. My friends and I were in the candy store where we usually hung out on Sunday nights. We heard it on the radio. At first, we didn't know much about Pearl Harbor. Once we learned what it was all about, we knew it was only a matter of time before we would all be drafted into the service.

Q: You were drafted into the Army. Where did you go for your induction and basic training?

AF: We went to Fort Dix and stayed there a few days until they decided where they wanted to send us. Then they transferred us by train to Texas. They had just formed a new outfit they called the Tank Destroyers, which I had never heard of. The idea was that it was a tank outfit focused on destroying other tanks. We did our basic training at Camp Bowie in Texas. We were supposed to be there for ten weeks, and after that, they transferred us to Camp Hood, which is now Fort Hood, for additional training for another ten weeks. The whole idea was to prepare us to be transferred to North Africa.

Q: What kind of specialized training did you have as a tank destroyer unit?

AF: At that time, I was a cannoneer, which means loader. My job was to load the cannon on the tank because I was a private. We did that for ten weeks, followed by an additional ten weeks of advanced training.

Q: What kind of weapon were you using?

AF: At the beginning of our basic training, we trained on a half-track with a 75-millimeter cannon. As I mentioned, I was the loader for that. We did that for about ten weeks, and then we transitioned to the M10 tanks. The difference between the regular tanks and the M10 is that the M10 doesn't have a turret on top. We participated in numerous maneuvers to see how well we performed against other tank outfits; we did very well and received high ratings. We felt ready to go to North Africa. However, they

discovered that they had lost a lot of infantrymen, so they moved us out of the tank outfit and transferred us to an infantry division at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi. We underwent another ten weeks of infantry drills, and from there, they intended to send us to Europe. By the time we finished our training, the invasion was already in progress.

Q: Were you assigned to an infantry division before you left?

AF: Yes. My original outfit was ready to leave, but I got sick with a virus. I was sent to the hospital and missed my unit going overseas. When I came out of the hospital, they transferred me to a replacement unit, and I went overseas with them to France. From France, we were sent to a replacement camp, where I was assigned to the 104th Infantry Division, known as the Night Fighters. We were put aboard freight cars, referred to as "40 and 8s." We wound up in Aachen, which was a city in Germany, and we were replacing the First Division that had done all the spearheading from the invasion all the way to Aachen. Shortly after arriving, it was just about Thanksgiving.

Q: This was 1944?

AF: Yes, that's correct. After that, we had our last hot meal for Thanksgiving because the next day we were told we would spearhead the drive to replace the exhausted company before us. We started our march toward the bridge, where another company was pinned down by the enemy. Unfortunately, the Germans anticipated our movements and targeted the bridge. The second wave of artillery hit us, and I got wounded in my leg.

Q: What happened next?

AF: I found myself on the floor and didn't initially feel anything. I didn't realize I was hit until I noticed my pants were soaked. When I looked closer, I saw it was blood. I called the medics, and when he came over, he wiped it down and said it wasn't that bad but that I should report back to the field hospital. I asked him where it was, and he told me it was directly behind me.

Q: How did you end up back with your outfit?

AF: I walked for about two to three hours trying to find the field hospital, but no one seemed to know where it was. The next thing I remember, I was back with my own unit; I must have walked in a circle. They were surprised to see me. I told them that I couldn't find the hospital. The medic told my captain not to worry; I had made it back just in time for another drive. I wasn't prepared for that. They told me I had a couple of hours to rest.

Q: You got hit with shrapnel, right?

AF: Yes, I was hit by shrapnel from artillery. The sergeant ordered us to fix bayonets because we were going into the woods, where we might encounter the enemy. I told my sergeant that I didn't know if I could handle that, considering it meant killing someone. He assured me that I would be ready when the time came. So, we took our march through the woods, and thankfully we didn't encounter anything. But we had to cross an open field to reach the next town where we were supposed to meet. The Germans anticipated we would drive to the right flank and began targeting us with artillery. Eventually, we managed to reach a house, and we felt safe for a while.

Q: Did you have any close calls while inside the house?

AF: Yes, I had a friend on my left, and another friend came in front of me and moved me over, saying, "Stop hogging the space; let me stand here." A few minutes later, I found myself on the floor. An explosion had occurred, and it was so loud that it felt like a ringing in my ears. I was confused at first, but we were ordered downstairs into the basement. I told my sergeant that I couldn't go down right now because my leg had fallen asleep. Meanwhile, the guy on my right was stretched out; I didn't realize he was killed at the time. The GI on my left had been hit in the arm, so he went down to the basement. I was trying to get it together, and when I looked down, I noticed a big hole in my ankle. I started to panic and yelled for help. The medics came over, tore my pants up and told me not to look at it because it would make me sick. When they took off my boot, I saw the huge hole in my ankle, and they bandaged me up and brought me down to the basement. I was confused about how my injury happened because I didn't think it was artillery that caused it; I thought if they had fired artillery, the whole house would have blown up. I learned that the Germans were probably close and had tossed a hand grenade at us. My jacket was full of holes, but only my ankle was injured. I asked about my friend, Jack, and they told me he didn't make it. They couldn't move us out because the Germans had surrounded us, so we were waiting for reinforcements. They called for tank support, and when the tanks arrived, they broke up the Germans and evacuated us on a Jeep to the field hospital. From there, they determined that I needed to be sent to a general hospital in England because they couldn't take care of my injury there.

Q: What happened at the general hospital?

AF: They took us via ambulance to Paris and then put us on a C-47 cargo plane to England. The doctor examined my ankle and told me that the shrapnel had damaged all the nerves in my foot. That was why my foot had dropped, and I couldn't walk on it. He explained that they would set my ankle, put it in a cast, and then apply a walking brace so I could walk on it after a week. He said they would take the cast off in about four or five months to see how it healed. If it didn't heal properly, they would transfer me back to the States for further examination. Fortunately, after four or five months, they removed the cast, and my ankle was in good shape.

Q: What happened after the recovery?

AF: After I recovered, I was assigned to an MP unit because I could no longer be sent to a combat outfit due to my ankle. I stayed with the MP unit in Germany for almost a year until they sent me home. They used a points system at that time, allowing you two points for every month you served. Since I came in on January 27, I didn't get the full two points; I only received one. Eventually, I was sent to Paris and then put on a ship back home. I left on Christmas Day and arrived in New York Harbor on New Year's Day. We were stationed at Fort Dix for a couple of days and received 30 days of furlough since there were too many men coming home simultaneously for discharges. I spent my furlough at home, and when I returned, I was officially discharged.

Q: When you were with this MP unit, was it during the occupation of Germany after the war had ended?

AF: Yes, it was during the occupation.

Q: Were you aware of any POW camps or concentration camps?

AF: We were stationed in a small town that was nowhere near any camps.

Q: Did you have any contact with the Russian forces or were you too far from them?

AF: No, we were too far from them.

Q: Did you have much contact with the German people?

AF: Yes.

Q: What were your impressions of the German people?

AF: The people in the small towns were different from those in the cities; they were more friendly toward us. They accepted us because we had no place to stay. They allowed us to occupy about two blocks of houses and we had to pay them a sum of money for relocating to another town.

Q: Did you ever make use of the GI Bill when you returned to the States?

AF: Yes. When I came home, I reported to the VA, and they assigned me to an advisor who asked what kind of school I wanted to go to. I wanted to learn a trade, but all the programs were filled. The only opening available was a sewing machine operator course, which I took for ten weeks and then got a job as a sewing machine operator. However, I learned that they worked by contract, so once a job finished, they laid you off. I told my mother I couldn't work like that; I wanted a steady job. Someone recommended I go to a placement agency in Manhattan, which helped me find a job. They found me a position at the Buren Swiss Dial Company, which made dials for wristwatches. I worked there for about 12 years until I learned of an opening at the post office for maintenance.

Q: How long did you work at the post office?

AF: I submitted an application and indicated that I was a disabled vet, which gave me an extra 10 points on my score. I passed the post office test with a score of 96, plus the 10 points made it 106. I was called right away and reported for work in Manhattan's Morgan Annex, where I worked for 27 years.

Q: Did you ever use the 5220 Club?

AF: Yes, when I first came out, I felt I needed a vacation, so I used it for a while until I found my current job.

Q: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

AF: Yes, I joined the Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

Q: You won the Purple Heart and also a Bronze Star. Where did you receive that?

AF: That was awarded in Europe.

Q: Was it around the time you were wounded?

AF: Yes, it was.

Q: Did you stay in contact with anyone from your service?

AF: I tried to, and I have a group picture of my unit, the 647th Tank Destroyer outfit, which has the names and addresses of the soldiers I trained with. I got in touch with a couple of them for a while but then lost contact.

Q: How did your time in service change or affect your life?

AF: Initially, I seemed fine, but toward the summer, I started having issues with lightning and thunder, which reminded me of being in combat. This bothered me, and I had trouble sleeping. I went to the VA and explained my difficulties. They suggested I

join a support group with others who had similar experiences. Sharing and talking about our issues helped me a lot; it was beneficial to express what I was going through. It made it easier for me to adjust to civilian life over time.

Q: Could you tell us about this picture?

AF: This picture was taken in the States before I went overseas. It was during my last furlough at Camp Meade in Maryland. I was given three days off to go home, and I took this picture in a studio. I qualified for every one of those medals. To be honest, I didn't know anything about weapons before I enlisted; I had to learn from scratch.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

AF: Yeah. I also have this newspaper article from when I was presented with my high school diploma in approximately 2001.

Q: Thank you very much for the interview.

AF: Thank you! If you sit down, I can get you in the picture. You can zoom in right here. These are the medals I earned and the patches from the units I was assigned to. The top one is the Tank Destroyer patch— it features a black cat with a tank on the mountain. This was my first unit. The next patch is from the 104th Infantry Division, known as the Timberwolves. After I was wounded and sent back to Germany, I was assigned to the 9th Air Defense Corps. You can see I also have the Combat Infantryman's Badge, which is significant.

Q: Now where was this picture taken?

AF: This was taken at Fort Hood, TX, right after we finished our last training.

Q: Can you point out yourself in the picture?

AF: I'm in the front row, but you can hardly see me. I'm marked by that little red dot.

Q: Thank you again. When did you get married?

AF: I got married in 1948, shortly after returning from the service.

Q: Thank you! You've been married for 55 years?

AF: Yes! Thank you!