Anthony Joseph Buccieri
Veteran

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Q: Could you give me your full name, your date of birth and place of birth, please?
AB: Anthony Joseph Buccieri, born October the 6th, 1924 in Troy, New York.

Q: What was your pre-war, your pre-military service education?
AB: When I was in high school, I went to a lot of schools in Connecticut as a youngster. My father remarried after my mother passed away and we moved up to Marlboro and I went from a city kid to a country boy, farm boy. In school we used to work part-time at the local diner as a dishwasher and things like that. I was very active in the Boy Scouts and received the rank of Eagle Scout. When the word came out that Pearl Harbor was bombed, I was in a diner working at night and at the time we didn't really realize it, being seventeen. Even though I always enjoyed history and things of that sort in school, I was just working on the farm, scouting — that was the only real recreation I had — and playing ball at the school field: soccer, basketball, whatever, track.

Q: Did you enlist or were you drafted?
AB: I enlisted right after Pearl Harbor. I asked my father — I said, "I'm going to join the Navy; I don't want to be in the Army." And he said, "Well, it's up to you. I'd rather not see you go, but..." So I went up to Poughkeepsie. At that time, that's where they were recruiting. They signed me up and said, "You'll get orders later on." I went back to school in September, while I was in school as a junior, I received my orders to report to New York City for the Navy station down there. On September 21st, I was in the Navy, on my way to Newport, Rhode Island — Quonset Point. It took just 21 days of boot camp, and out we went. I think it's one of the only groups that only went through the minimum amount of training possible — 21 days. Then I went to Advanced Diesel Engineering School in Richmond, Virginia, for about eight weeks. I was assigned to a ship — the USS Tuscaloosa — and chased it up and down the coast, finally caught up to it, and went aboard around midnight. My assignment on the ship, believe it or not, was not diesel engineering, but steam boilers. It was like putting a butcher to become a shoemaker. But that's the way it was, and I spent the rest of the time in the boiler room.
Q: What was Tuscaloosa?

AB: It was a heavy cruiser. The cruiser was involved with President Roosevelt at the time; he had been aboard the ship. It was like a cruise ship for him. We also escorted Churchill several times across the Atlantic when there were meetings between Roosevelt and Churchill. The rest of the time, we were moving from one station to another, participating in invasions and related operations.

Q: What invasions were you involved with?
AB: We went into North Africa; that started it off. Then we patrolled the North Atlantic and went to Murmansk, Russia, with some of the convoys. We went into what we called the Arctic Circle, about 15 miles from the magnetic North Pole. At the time, we didn't realize it was a secret mission. We were working with part of the British Home Fleet and proceeded down to find that it was a prelude to the invasion of Normandy, getting everything ready. We established a weather station up in Spitsbergen — that little island up there. From there, we came back to the States, refurbished, and were sent back to the British Isles. There, we prepared for the invasion of Normandy. Once that was completed, we were shipped down to the Mediterranean. We went to Sicily for about a month. Then came the invasion of Southern France — the Riviera section, Southern France. After that, we left, came back to the States, stopped in Hawaii to finish getting supplies and other things we needed. We headed for Iwo Jima, and after that, Okinawa. We then went down to the Philippines. Shortly after, we patrolled the North Korean Sea and ended up in Shanghai, China.

Q: Could we go back to Normandy? Did your ship uh provide fire?
AB: Oh yes. We had a local admiral—he was from the Deyo family, which is located in New Paltz. If you go into New Paltz, there are a lot of Deyos up there. Rear Admiral Deyo was in charge of a particular group of ships for the firing and fire support at Utah Beach.

Q: Did you ever get above deck to watch any of the firing?
AB: No, I could hear it all, and that's worse than seeing it, because we were about 14 feet below the waterline. People don't realize, when they look at a ship, they only see what's above—but so much of the ship is actually underwater. I was on what's called the A watch, which is the primary watch when you're in a combat zone. There's always a relief crew that comes in. We went down around 5: 00 in the morning and didn't come back up until midnight. If you had to use the bathroom or anything, there was a bucket of water in the corner with lime in it—that's what you used. Very convenient. During the invasion, I thank God, because while other ships were being hit by the German air force and floating mines—mines that weren't anchored, just drifting—our ship never received a single hit. One of our brand-new destroyers had just come out, hit one of those mines, and went straight down. We were very fortunate. Many of the ships around us were getting hit one way or another.

Q: How about at Iwo Jima and Okinawa? Did you provide fire support?

AB: Yes, we were a fire support ship. Our 8-inch guns were calibrated, and outside of the Missouri, I think we had the most perfect rifling in our guns compared to most other ships. We could fire almost 35 miles with near pinpoint accuracy. That was the distance. It was proven many times. We supported all the islands. At Iwo Jima, when you hit the beach, a big black cloud would rise because of the black sand there. We had spotters, known as fire controlman. They would tell us where the designated targets were, and that's what the batteries would fire at.

Q: Were you above deck at all at Iwo Jima or Okinawa?
AB: Yeah, we went up for a breathing spell, more or less. Like I said, the primary crew was allowed to come up. Once you get down into the boiler room, on the steel deck, there's a hatch that's maybe about 3 feet square. Once they dog that down, you can't get out. Even if you try to open it from the inside, there's someone up top turning and sealing it from above. That was, more or less, in case the ship took a hit below the waterline—so the flooding would be contained just to that specific compartment. That's why everything had to be sealed airtight.

Q: Did you see any of the Kamikaze attacks at Okinawa?
AB: Yes. We saw it. In fact, I happened to be on deck when there was an aerial attack by the Kamikazes. Our gunners hit one plane, but unfortunately, the pilot steered it into the fantail—that's the rear end of the ship—and it hit the 40 mm gun crew stationed there, wiping them out. But again, we were fortunate; our ship itself never took a direct hit.

Q: Were you near Okinawa at the time of the typhoon?
AB: No, we just missed that. Halsey was going north toward Japan at the time, I think. We were with the fleet—depending on which admiral was in command, it became either the Fifth Fleet or the Seventh Fleet. We transitioned from the Fifth Fleet to the Seventh Fleet; we were still the same fleet, just under different commanders.

Q: Were you also involved in the Philippine liberation?
AB: Yes. We went in pretty much after the landings had taken place, but we still went in. There was a lot of smaller-scale resistance that had to be dealt with. We did manage to get into Manila, just for a few hours. I was able to go ashore, and we went down to Corregidor, where General Wainwright had surrendered. I saw the conditions there—the guns they had were already antiquated to begin with. There wasn't much defense. We also went to the other side of the island—or peninsula, so to speak—mainly to support any remaining resistance across the various islands. That was about it.

Q: Q: I noticed you were also involved in the China–India–Burma theater?
AB: Yes, we were. We came down from the north—at that time, we didn't even really know where Korea was. You hear about it a lot today, but back then, it wasn't well-known. We came down along the Korean Peninsula and helped land some Marines there to liberate small areas

around the region. There was no real gunfire from our ship, but the Marines we landed handled what needed to be done. Then we ended up in Shanghai, China. We were there for a couple of months, more or less as part of a support group. Although the war was over by then, we still maintained a certain level of security and continued patrolling. We picked up roughly 500 troops—Army and Army Air Corps—and brought them back to the States. That's how I became involved in the China–Burma–India theater.

Q: Did you stay on the same ship?
A: Oh yes. From the time I went aboard, I stayed on the same ship until December—I can't remember the exact date. It was about a week before Christmas when we arrived in San Francisco, at Treasure Island. They transferred those of us who were ready to be discharged. They put us on what I would call a "cattle train"—I think cattle were treated better than we were. It took us over five days to travel across the country back to New York. Then they sent us to Lido Beach, which was a Navy separation center. We arrived there on Christmas Eve. They told us no one could go home yet because they needed to process our separation paperwork. After a few hours, they finally decided we could go home—but we had to be back by midnight on Christmas night. So everybody scrambled to catch trains, hitchhike, or find whatever way possible to get home. Eventually, on December 27th, they gave us our final discharge papers—which honestly, they could have handed out on the 24th.

Q: Do you know what happened to your ship?
AB: Eventually, several years later, they made one or two additional trips to the Caroline Islands in the South Pacific to pick up more troops. Every available ship was being used to bring back personnel. Our ship's crew was reduced from 1,200 to about 700 or 800 to make room for the returning men. The ship was eventually scrapped. For all I know, some of its steel may have been used to make razor blades. One of the ironworks that supplies the Gillette razor company acquired the steel when the ship was decommissioned. They preserved parts of the ship: the mast, a 5-inch gun, and the ship's bell. These items are now displayed in the Veterans Memorial Park, located in the central area of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and the bell is housed in the City Hall. I saw them during our last ship reunion, which was held in September or October of last year. I was present at that final reunion as well.

Q: How many times did you cross the equator?
AB: Several times. I can't tell you exactly how many times,

Q: Tell us about your first time across.
AB: They restricted some of the usual initiation ceremonies due to being in a combat zone. Still, we went through a few preliminary rituals. I remember becoming a "pollywog," among other things. I believe I still have a Neptune certificate card in my scrapbook. As I mentioned, many traditions were cut short because we were constantly on alert. One memorable thing is that

some guys celebrate two birthdays that year, while others had none—due to crossing the International Date Line.

Q: So, you left the service in 1945? Did you go into the reserves afterwards?
AB: I went into the reserves a little while after leaving active service, encouraged by my cousin—we were so close in age, only a couple of months apart, people often said we could be twins. He told me, "Yeah, join the reserves," and so on. So I did. Ironically, he got out while I stayed and was eventually called back in. About five years later, I was on active duty again. After that, I left active duty and began working for a national company, but I was recalled. In fact, I received my orders in August and reported back to the Navy in September—almost exactly the same time of year as when I first reported during World War II. It seemed like a coincidence, but that was in 1950.

Q: What kind of ship did you serve on during that time?
AB: I was assigned to a destroyer, which is about half the size of a cruiser. About six months later, while we were patrolling the East Coast—including places like Havana, Cuba, and Bermuda—they decided to decommission four destroyers. Two were given to the Greek Navy and two to the Italian Navy. The Greek ships were transferred in Boston. When the Italian Navy came aboard our ship, we had 212 men on board, but only 25 of us remained after the handover. Since I could speak and understand some Italian—or so I thought—I was among those who stayed. The Italian crew joined us, and we worked with them for the next six months. Unfortunately, I soon realized that while I thought I knew Italian, the various dialects—from northern Italy to the south and Sicily—made communication difficult. It was like trying to understand someone from Tennessee, Texas, and New England; even though they're all speaking English, the accents and vocabulary differ. The same goes for Italian—the dialects vary greatly in meaning and expression.

Q: So you spent approximately half a year on board with the Italian Navy?
AB: We had to, in fact, being in the boiler room, we had to transfer all the equipment and everything else and explain it to the Italian people that were taking over the boiler room section. In fact, a couple of incidents happened. We had one that sounded like an explosion. This other sailor and I made one dive for the entrance to the boiler room, which is actually a hatch in the deck—you just slide right down the ladder. We found steam pouring out of the hatch. The first thing we did, we shut the fires off in the boiler and I opened up some valves. We found out they had started the fires in the boilers but never opened up the discharge valves. That caused the back pressure for the safety valves to go off. Those things reach about 450 pounds pressure or more, and it sounds like a cannon going off. That happened twice. We told them, tried to explain it to them in Italian—you do not ever start a fire without opening the proper valves. Then we had another one, almost a close explosion with an air compressor. He said he was a torpedo man. I said, we don't have any torpedoes on the ship anymore, they took them off. But he wanted to test

the air pressure. He started up the air compressor, which gives out 3,000 pounds of air pressure, and the thing blew the side of the compressor off from building up pressure. The discharge valve up on deck was closed. So that's a couple experiences I had with the Italian Navy. And on the feeding of them, it seemed that the men of the Italian Navy took about an hour and a half to feed their crew. With the American Navy, 30 minutes and we had everybody fed. The food was always cold. They had a steam table there, but they never turned the steam on. They just put the trays in and fed the men. By the time they got fed, the food got cold. So we explained how to do it and what to do. For a whole week, they followed it. The next day they took over, right back to the same routine—cold food and a long time to feed them. Then when they asked me to go on a shakedown cruise, I said, my time is up. I'm going back to the receiving station. And I got off of that. I came to find out later on that they did blow up a boiler. Well, not in the sense that it exploded, but they burned out some tubes. And the ship had to come back to the Navy yard to be refitted. But I got off in time.

Q: What was your next ship assignment?
AB: I went on a destroyer escort, which is even smaller. So, I kept going down in size. And it registers a little under 200 feet long. And my experience on that was—let me get out of here. That's the way I felt.

Q: What was it like going from handling the engines on a heavy cruiser to being on a destroyer escort?
AB: Well, let's put it this way: it's like going from a Lincoln Town Car to a little Volkswagen. That's really the best way to describe it. With the big Lincoln, you've got all the commodities, all the built-in stuff. And then you get down to that little Volkswagen—sure, it's got four wheels and a motor and everything else, but it's not all there. That's the kind of feeling you get when you're out in the ocean. A destroyer escort bounces around three times as much as a heavy cruiser, which is over 10,000 tons, compared to a couple thousand tons for the escort.

Q: How long did you stay in the Navy in the '50s?
AB: 18 months.

Q: Did you ever use the GI bill when you left the service?
AB: The only thing I used from the GI Bill was, more or less, to buy a home. I did go back to school when I came out of the service the first time, after World War II. The reason I went back was that I was recommended for officer's training after a couple of years in the Navy. When I filled out the application, I went up to the executive officer's office and said, "Wait a minute, there's one question here I can't answer properly." It asked, "Do you have a high school diploma?" I said, "No, I don't. I didn't quit school—I got my orders to report for active duty." They said it didn't matter. "If you don't have that piece of paper, you can't go."

So when I came back, I made an effort to return to school. I sat in classes with kids about four years younger than me and completed the two years of required credits for graduation.
I graduated with the class that was actually two years behind my original class. But I did get my diploma. And when I got my first good job, they asked, "Do you have a high school diploma? Can you pass these math and other tests?" Fortunately, I could—so that diploma meant a lot.
As for using the GI Bill itself, I didn't pursue it beyond that. In fact, I got married right after I graduated—in July. After that, it was about working and providing for the family.

Q: Have you kept in any contact with anyone that you served with?
AB: Oh, yes. We've had ship reunions—they've had them since World War II. But I wasn't able to attend until about 15 or 16 years ago. With my line of work in heavy construction, the timing of the ship reunions always happened to be during the busiest time of the year. So I never got to go. But when I retired, I was finally able to attend. We've been to places like Chicago, Cincinnati, Denver, Colorado, Omaha, Nebraska. They've had them in Boston, and a place in Pennsylvania. Those are the ones I was able to attend. The last one, which was just last year, was also our final reunion. Most of the men in our group were much older than I was.
Some of them had been in the Navy four or five years before the war even started, and they couldn't leave. That put them in their mid-80s to 90s. Travel was getting more difficult, and many of them were sick or unable to attend. But we've managed to stay in touch. In fact, there's a fellow out on the other end of Sullivan County, in Eldred. I just spoke with him on the phone the other night. And there are a couple of guys down in Florida we keep in contact with.
So, yes, we do manage to stay in touch here and there. Of course, over the years, many have passed away— some of those were the ones we were closest to, more like buddies.

Q: Are you active in any veterans' organizations?
AB: Yes, I am. I happen to be the commander of both the Catholic War Veterans and the China Burma India (CBI) group at the same time. And you might ask, why? Because I didn't really want the CBI. They said, "Would you do this?" and "You could do that." I said, "I can't give you 100% of my time." They said, "That's all it takes." So that's how I ended up with two commands. I've also been commander in the VFW—I served seven years and received six white hats. And with the American Legion, let's see... one, two, three, four—yeah. I'm also very active with the Veterans Hospital at Castle Point here. I'm on the Director's Advisory Board, same as Bob Cahill—you just mentioned him. We had quite a lengthy meeting yesterday. I've received calls from state and local elected representatives. Because I've been so involved with veterans, they call me and ask what they can do for certain people who reach out to them. What I do is give them some direction—where to go, who to talk to. When the person comes in, I make the introduction, and then I step back. I leave it up to them. I figure you talk to them directly.
I'm not going to be the go-between—but I'll get you the contacts.

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

AB: That's a good question. I think over the years, I haven't forgotten what I've been through. Helping another fellow veteran—especially one in dire need—means a lot to me. If I can help one person at a time and accomplish something, that gives me a sense of satisfaction. That's how I feel. I've been mentioned in newspapers and articles, things like that. But what really matters is what I can get done for someone else. Right now, I'm even working with the Lions Club.
I've been collecting eyeglasses for various Lions Club groups. It's about working with other organizations. If I can do it, and I have the time, I'll do it. I'm also looking ahead—thinking about the future—for the younger fellows going into the service, and those who are just now joining.

Q: Do you have some things to show us?
AB: This is—we were called the Black Warrior. And later I found out that in Tuscaloosa, there's a river called the Black Warrior River.
There was supposedly an old Indian chief there, said to be 7 feet tall, dark complexion. The whole theme centers around the Black Warrior, and the name "Tuscaloosa" was originally a Native American name—of course, modified over time.
Incidentally, when we were in Normandy, our code word was Patrick.
When we got to Southern France, the code name became Pasquali.
This is my ship in Shanghai—on the Huangpu River.
You can see there's a destroyer alongside, though it's hard to make out.
This is part of the Italian Navy I was telling you about.
That's when Mayor LaGuardia was still the mayor of New York City.
This one is fascinating—these are tracer bullets. Every third bullet going up was a tracer.
This was the anti-aircraft firepower at Normandy.
Here are some private photos.
This one was from the 25th anniversary of the Normandy invasion—they wrote a big article about it.
And this is a clipping from a local newspaper—Tuscaloosa coverage.
Here's our crew arriving in Philadelphia.
And we were featured in Reader's Digest about the Normandy invasion.
There's also a letter from Eisenhower that was printed and sent to us when he was aboard ship.
These are some pictures I took in China—young people. I gave them K rations.
Little girls carrying double-yoke water buckets.
I also have Chinese currency, which I use when talking to schoolchildren—to show them the size and style of Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and French money.
This is a French banknote from years ago.
And here are some ration cards and related items.
This is a Christmas menu from our ship.
They gave us the Christmas dinner about a month late because they couldn't prepare it on the actual day.

Just a few other articles—
These two fellows here: one later became my brother-in-law. The three of us used to go out together.
This is the Tuscaloosa Merry-Go-Round, a commemorative picture showing all the places we served in the Atlantic.
And this is the most recent item from our ship's reunion.
They gave each of us a write-up. This one is supposed to be me at about 18 or 19.
This was taken at the State Assembly in Albany.
This one is from September 1944.
And yes—that's my Shellback card.
I have the complete history from the ship's commissioning to decommissioning—it's from an encyclopedia, covering the entire story.
This was during the invasion at Utah Beach. This area here was our fire zone just off the beach.
There were specific channels marked for where you could and couldn't go.
These are photos of some of our crew at the time.
Here's our basketball team—we used to play on deck. If the ball went overboard, that was it.
These are pictures of Hawaii from long ago. Remember Hawaii Five-0? This is the king's palace.
Back then, it was all empty around it—today, all those fields are filled with buildings.
More stories—Chinese again, Italian Navy.
This was at Diesel School. Where am I in that photo? Right here—I had just turned 18.
Believe it or not, those two people in the back just jumped into the photo—we never found out who they were.
But the three of us in front were in Hawaii at the time.
You know how at carnivals they take your picture randomly?
And in China, we brought back silk dragon patches that were sewn on the cuffs of our jackets—very fine craftsmanship.
This was a post-war parade in Newburgh, our hometown.
It was very different back then.
And this is my wife—
I think this was just before we got married.
Yep, that's it.

Q: Could I take a look at the front page of that paper—the one about being in the boiler room?
AB: Yes. These were our placemats from different cities we visited. This one was from Chicago—oh, the 50th anniversary. I think this one was Cincinnati. Yes, this was Cincinnati.
Those people were right here in Newburgh.
I used to meet them at the Lincoln Tunnel. I'd take the subway from the Navy Yard to the tunnel, meet them at a specific time in the evening, and go home.
At 5: 00 in the morning, I'd meet them again at the diner and come home.

So that basically gave me free transportation—aside from the subway fare, which was only a nickel or a dime at the time.

Q: Well, thank you. I'll bet your family was glad once the Korean War ended.
AB: Oh yes, definitely. Things went back to normal. I got into the line of work that I eventually retired from—after 33 years.

Q: Did you stay in the Navy reserve?
AB: No, I still had several months to go. But once the dateline came by, I was given my discharge— which was almost six months later.

Q: Well, thank you, sir. Thank you very much.