

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Veterans Project (World War II)

Personal Experience

O. H. 915

GUY A. PALOCI

Interviewed

by

Dale John Voitus

on

December 8, 1982

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: GUY A. PALOCI  
INTERVIEWER: Dale John Voitus  
SUBJECT: Draft, Newport News, VA, Italian POWs,  
England, SS France, Aachen, Germany  
DATE: December 8, 1982

V: This is an interview with Guy Paloci for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Dale John Voitus at 8 North Raccoon Road, on December 8, 1982 at 7:15 p.m.

To start the interview I would like you to tell me something about your childhood and you family background.

P: I came from a family of seven. There were five boys and two girls. My father was born in Austria-Hungary, and my mother was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey. When he came over to this country, they met and got married and moved to Youngstown, Ohio. They have seven children.

V: Are most of them older than you or younger than you?

P: I was the fifth youngest.

V: What were the circumstances? What happened then? Did you go to public schools?

P: They moved from New Jersey to Youngstown, Ohio in 1910. My father worked at Youngstown Sheet & Tube as an engineer. Then my oldest brother also worked for the mill as a truck driver. My older sister graduated from

school and she did waitress work. My father died when he was 32. I was six years old. He died of pneumonia. -

V: What year was that?

P: [It was] 1926. My mother raised us until we were all grown up until the youngest one was 16. About three graduated from high school and the other four made it to the tenth grade which was me. That was the highest we made it.

V: Did you have to go to work to help your mother with the rest of the kids?

P: Money was tight; so if you made two or three dollars a week, which was very helpful. . . . When I was 16 years old and quit school, I had a milk route. I got up at 3:30 in the morning and worked until noon. I peddled the whole route for three dollars a week plus a bottle of milk a day which I brought home.

V: That helped out, I'll bet.

P: Then, of course, my other brother was a little bit older than me, Frank; he went to the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) when he was 17, and he stayed in it for at least two years.

V: That was when FDR (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) was president.

P: FDR, yes.

V: So, you left high school when you were 16 years old.

P: When I was 16.

V: You worked up until the war started?

P: Oh, yes, all kinds of jobs.

V: When did you go into the Army?

P: In March 1942 I was drafted into the Army. I was 21.

V: Your draft number came up and you had to go to Cleveland?

P: Right.

V: Is that how they worked it back then?

P: When you were drafted, they would tell you where to report. I reported to Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio.

V: Tell us about what you had to go through down there.

P: That was just for a short period of time. It was probably three weeks at the most. Then they shipped a group of us--probably about 400 or 500--to Camp Patrick in Virginia. It was really out in the wilderness. We stayed there for a couple of weeks on basic. From there, they shipped us to Newport News, Virginia where I took up the rest of my basic training which was probably a period of 8 to 12 weeks.

V: What kind of training did they give you there? Was it kind of an introduction to the Army?

P: There was a lot of drilling and schooling.

V: Did you become acquainted with weapons there too?

P: Some, grenades and rifles.

V: Was there a lot of physical training?

P: Oh, exercise every day. It was physical every morning.

V: A lot of marching and whatnot?

P: We had 20-mile marches.

V: Was this your first experience with discipline like that?

P: Yes. I was still young. I never had any discipline.

V: What was some of the background of some of the fellows you were with? Were they basically the same with similar circumstances like being drafted together?

P: Yes, we were all drafted and we were all about equal and buddy-buddy.

V: Were there a lot of guys from Ohio there or was it kind of mixed up?

P: It was all mixed from all over. One buddy from Pittsfield, Massachusetts I got acquainted with. I can't think of his name. Then I had another fellow from Kentucky. We went through basics really good with no problems.

V: Did you have some free time in Virginia?

P: Oh, yes.

V: What did you do on your spare time?

- P: We did the town on the weekends. We always went out and saw a movie or went different places.
- V: There was the opportunity for you to do that then.
- P: Yes, we had our weekend entertainment. Of course, you always had the PX, and there were always shows down there that they Army would bring in. They were a great bunch of boys, and we got along good.
- V: No problems then amongst our soldiers as far as people complaining? You see movies about problems amongst nationalities and maybe amongst religions.
- P: Well, occasionally there would be a little chip off of your shoulder. There would be a Puerto Rican and maybe a British guy who would tangle. Puerto Ricans always had a chip on their shoulders. They would take the biggest guy in the camp. They knew they couldn't make it, but they had a lot of fight in them.
- P: There were occasional squabbles, yes. As far as officers were concerned, they were all good.
- V: After you finished your basic training in Newport News, did you get stationed there for a while or did they move you out right away to somewhere else?
- P: No, I stayed there for about a year after basic training. I went to school. I went to cable splicing school down on the docks on the James River. They had docks there for all of the ships that would come in from all over the world.
- V: That is a big naval base.
- P: Very big. Right across from us over the James River was the Marine Corps. I forget the name of that one. The Marines were based right across the river from us.
- V: This cable splicing school, is that related to cables the ships would use? Steel cables?
- P: Yes, all the ships that would dock in the harbor would be in need of repair. I was the only one in my group who was the splicer. I would splice all of the cables and all of the cargo nets for the ships in Newport News, Virginia.
- V: That is important, yes.
- P: I learned that really fast, and I got along really good with my teacher.
- V: Was that a school or was it just like on-the-job train-

ing?

P: It was on-the-job plus the school. You would work as you learned.

V: How did you get selected for that?

P: My commanding officer picked me for that job. I was up for corporal at that time. Also I pulled MP (Military Police) duty down there. I had to go to the Military Police quarter and pull MP duty. I was on that for a period there of about six weeks or better where you are on four days and off four. I had to patrol the dock area and the ships that would come into Newport News from all over the world. You would go on board the ships as an MP. You checked the hatches and different things.

After I got off guard duty towards the part of the war where Italy surrendered, we had already captured a lot of Italian soldiers. They shipped them to Newport News, Virginia. I think we were one of the first ones to see prisoners of war. They would come off the ship, 400 or 500 at a time, and put them in a stockade on the dock which was like one big fence. They would just jam them in there. I was selected to guard them. I had one little rifle and 500 Italian soldiers there. Believe me, I was scared.

V: Over all, what were your impressions of them? Were they pretty used to the fact that they were captured? Did they go along pretty much with what you said?

P: Yes, they got along. They understood that they were the prisoners and we were the victors. They obeyed all of our commands.

V: How long were they there before they moved out?

P: They were there for a period of time, but we had other camps set up in the district where they would move them. They kept them out there. Some of them out of the group, maybe 40 or 50, would be sent to work assignments. At that time, I still worked for the cable splicer school. When they would come in, maybe 20 or 30 of them, I would have to put them to work. They used to make cable swings and cargo nets and lead the little wagons and take them down to the dock and put them aboard the ships.

V: How were you able to do that? Did they have someone who spoke English that you were able to command?

P: I was able to communicate even though I never spoke a word of Italian.

V: Did you get different people all the time? Or maybe some of the same people came back?

P: It was one group who would work. The same group would report every day.

V: Did you ever get a chance to talk to any of them about what their circumstances were as far as where they were from? Did you ever get to talk to them like that?

P: There was kind of a language barrier there. We couldn't get down to the fine details of what part of Italy they were from or anything for that matter of fact. They were happy that the war was over for them.

V: How did you feel about them? Did you feel sorry for them or did you feel like they got what they deserved for starting the war or what?

P: I had no ill feelings towards them.

V: After you were in Newport and finished all of your assignments there--you said you were there for about a year--what happened then? Were you shipped out somewhere else?

P: Yes. Word came through that we were all going to be shipped out.

Before I get too far ahead, I was still there for a year. A lot of things took place. They had a lot of trains that would come in there with tanks on them. They would carry our vehicles. At that time, they had the LST, I believe. We would have to get the tanks onto the ships. The LSTs would drive them down inside and we would latch them down with cables and turnbuckles so they wouldn't move around on the ship. When the bigger ships came in, we put trains. . . . We had cranes down there that would pick trains right off the track and put them right up on the tip of the biggest ship we had down there. It was a mammoth thing. Then we had to go up on the ship--our gang--and latch down all these trains with big cables and turnbuckles. The cable would weigh anywhere from 250 to 300 to 350 pounds. One man would pick up one quall of cable and carry it up the gangplank onto the deck.

V: That sounds like some hard work.

P: It was very hard work. Then we would proceed to cable the trains down and fasten them to the deck with turnbuckles to make sure that they wouldn't move during the

trip across the Atlantic. We did that for a period of time.

V: Can you think of anything else? You were kind of involved in a lot of different things while you were there for that year; guard duty, prisoner duty, your regular job, MP, teacher. They were getting their money's worth out of you, weren't they?

P: Yes, I worked because the Army said so.

V: Do you remember how much the pay was then?

P: It was round \$50 a month. I believed at that time we were purchasing war bonds. I forget exactly, but I had to contribute so much. Then the government contributed so much. It was deducted off our monthly pay. I sent one war bond home every month as long as I was in the Army. I think my net pay was around \$19 a month.

V: How was the food you got while were there? Was it good?

P: The food was very good. Of course, you had three meals a day. We were always hungry. We were just glad to eat because there was a long period of time between 7:00 a.m. and noon and from noon until 5:00 p.m.

V: You were working hard.

P: We were always hungry. You just ate everything they gave us. Of course, at one time, at that camp, there were 3,000 soldiers down there. You were elected every so often. You were on the roster to pull KP (kitchen patrol) duty. When you pulled KP duty, you got up at about 4:00 in the morning to go over to the cafeteria. You would have to help prepare and serve food for 3,000 GIs. My job one time was to wash dishes. [There] was 3,000 dishes for breakfast. Just as soon as I got done with that, it was noon, and here they came again. Then I washed 3,000 more dishes. Here come 5:00 again, and I washed 3,000 more dishes. Then I got off of KP on the dishwashing detail, and I got over with the cook.

The other lineup was that I served the food for the GIs who came in. My job was cutting pies. It was lemon pie, I believe. I had cut them all up in five pieces, I believe. I had to spoon it to each GI who came up to me. That was a nice detail because they were all happy when they saw the pie. That was the best part of my duty on KP.

V: Let's get back to after about a year in Newport. you got word that you were going to get shipped out. Where did that lead you?



P: From Newport News, Virginia, our group was transferred overseas which involved embarking on a train in Newport News. The train came right down into our camp. We got on the train and we went to New York City straight. There, we got on a ship. We headed for England.

V: Tell me a little bit about the crossing.

P: We were on the second largest ship in the world. It was called the U.S.S. France. There were thousands of us. We must have been three decks below the main deck. We all had bunks down there. The cafeteria was down there and everything. They fed us right there, and we slept right there in the bunks. Of course, a lot of us got seasick with the rolling of the ship. We did get sick. I remember it took us three days to cross, I believe. It was either three or four days; I know it was a long time. I forget where we docked in England.

Prior to docking, we had to stay away from the coastline about twenty miles because the ship couldn't get any closer. We had to jump off U.S.S. France into landing barges which were below us. We had to jump according with the wave. When the wave came up and went down, we all were more or less one at a time at the doorway. As soon as the right opportunity came, we would jump which was about twenty feet. You had to jump with the landing barge going down in the wave, not coming up to meet you. It would give you an awful blow, and it would stun you. You threw your duffel bag down first, and you watched the landing craft bob in the water. When you figured the timing was right--when the ship was going down--you jumped. A lot of them met the ship coming up. You would land on your two feet and roll over on your knees. A lot of them did get a pretty good shock because it was an awful bump jumping.

V: So that was how you got off?

P: Yes. We were jammed in there tight like sardines. There was probably 40 or 50 of us. Then, they took us all into the coastline. From there, we got off and we marched maybe eight or ten miles to our nearest camp. Of course, that big group got split. Everyone went different directions. The group I was with stayed in England. I believe it was Bath, England.

V: Oh yes, that is a shipyard.

P: I stayed there for a couple of months, I believe. I had to pull MP duty.

V: Was your job still the same; cable splicing?

P: No, that was gone. I was now an MP. I was assigned to this one camp. It wasn't too big; it was a really small camp. We used to have a guardhouse there. It was where all the soldiers who were AWOL (absent without leave). . . . The MPs would pick them up in town and bring them to the guardhouse. Part of my job was to guard the AWOLs. That went on for a couple of months.

From there, we got shipped to France. I forget the name of the town.

V: This was after D-Day, then?

P: No, D-Day hadn't arrived. D-Day didn't arrive until June. I can't remember where I was on D-Day. Anyway, we went all the way through France. We went into Belgium, and we kept going half trucking and half marching to Liege, Belgium.

V: When you got to France, what kind of unit were you with then? Was it still an MP unit?

P: We weren't assigned to anybody. We were just moving as one big outfit.

V: Was it like a replacement outfit?

P: A replacement outfit. We were a replacement outfit and a backup reserves. Then, from Liege, Belgium, we went to Aachen, Germany for about six months.

V: Were you there when the war ended? When the Germans surrendered, were you in Aachen?

P: I was in Aachen, Germany when the war was over. Before that time, General Patton had moved ahead of us, and we were on his tail. We were pretty close. I would say we were maybe a day behind Patton. We made that move up there in Germany. I can't remember the last battle, but they decided that was the last battle. We never went any further than Aachen, Germany. The period of time we stayed there we were assigned as a medical outfit, 254th general hospital. Well, it was like "M\*A\*S\*H," I guess. We took care of the wounded and the GIs who needed care. We made all of the arrangements to ship them back out of the area after they were able to go.

V: When you were going from France up to Aachen, is that the kind of job you were doing there too?

P: You were just on a move.

V: You weren't assigned to anybody?

P: [We were] on the move; marching and truck convoy.

V: Then, you were working for the hospital unit in Aachen.

P: When the war was over.

V: How long did you stay there after the war was over?

P: It probably was a couple of months, I imagine.

V: Did you have to build up enough points to come home?

P: Yes, I was lacking points. You needed 54 points, I believe. I only had 44; I was lacking 10. You needed 54 to be shipped back to the United States to get out of the Army.

I did get sick over there. I had a sore throat while I was in Aachen, Germany. They shipped me to another hospital for treatment. I was there for a couple of weeks. My outfit in the meantime picked up and moved towards Camp Lucky Strike, France to be shipped back to the staging area to be shipped to Japan. They already had their mosquito netting and all of their clothes to go to Japan. When I was in the hospital with the sore throat, I was there for two or three weeks. When I got well and was able to move, I found out that my outfit moved. I wanted to get back to my outfit because I had a lot of buddies. I went to the administrative office over there and requested to be reunited with my original outfit. The fact is that I wrote a letter to the commanding general of European staging area. I forget his name, but they have a letter to him directly stating that I wanted to go back. One day Harry's jeep came up to our camp and was seeking me for transfer by special order. I threw my duffel bag in the jeep. This driver drove me all the way down through Germany and Belgium to Camp Lucky Strike in France.

V: To catch up with your unit.

P: It was one special trip for me. I found my unit at Camp Lucky Strike, France which is a departing area or staging area for all GI troops. I didn't end up with my original outfit. We were preparing to board the ship to go to Japan. In the middle of the ocean, word came that Truman dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. Our boat turned from heading towards Japan to America, New York City.

V: That got you back to the States.

P: Yes, we didn't go to Japan.

V: After you got back to the States, did you have to serve more time or did they let your unit disband then?

P: They split them up into different groups. When we docked in New York City, our group got on a train, and we headed for Camp Aldeberry, Indiana which was our discharging from the Army. Being that I didn't accumulate enough points, I still had to stay longer. I had to pull more duty. They assigned a number of us to the general hospital down there which was an Army hospital. We were all assigned different wards. There were Army nurses and civilian nurses and civilian doctors and Army doctors. They were all pulling duty also.

My job was to take care of a ward that consisted of 30 or 40 beds. They were all wounded GIs who came over from overseas. Different things were wrong with them. My job was to bring specimens up to the laboratory and have them analyzed and bring them back down to the nurses' quarters and to be of help wherever I was needed by the nurses, the GIs, and to the doctors.

V: After you had been there for the time enough to accumulate your points, that was where you were discharged?

P: Yes, I left Camp Aldeberry, Indiana. I got my pay which was around \$300. I was there probably two to three months. I believe they gave us some car fare to go home. From there, we just took a bus from Camp Aldeberry to Youngstown, Ohio.

V: Do you remember when it was you came back?

P: I believe it was March of 1946.

V: In your movements around, did you ever have a chance to meet anyone who became famous because of the war? Did you ever see any famous generals? Sometimes people had the chance to see Bradley or Eisenhower or anybody like that.

P: We saw a lot of movie stars in France.

V: Did you? USO (United Servicemen's Organization) people?

P: Yes, USO came over.

V: You must have felt very strongly about the guys you were with since you tried to get back to your unit. You developed some pretty good and close relations with the guys.

P: Yes. When you become buddies, you stay buddies. When we went overseas and we split, Markovitch went to

Germany. We used to write letters back and forth. I got his address and he got mine. We always used to write letters. Of course, there are quite a few guys that you meet who you get pretty well acquainted with. You do strike up some real thick friendships.

V: When you were in Germany, did you have the chance to. . . . Describe what it was like there. Was the town pretty well destroyed?

P: Yes. When I was in Aachen, Germany, there just wasn't any buildings. Everything was flat on the ground. It was utterly destroyed. It was an awful sight to see.

V: What were the civilians like? Did they resent you being there?

P: Well, there weren't that many around. There were some groups. Wherever we decided to go, whatever town we went to, we were just there. Of course, they knew of us. The younger generations--the younger girls and stuff--weren't very friendly. The men weren't; they were all a little bit hostile. They never really wanted to admit defeat. We visited some German families' homes, and they would have all of these records from Hitler's regime. They would play the marching songs and stuff like that. When we would enter their house, the first thing they would do was put the record on, the Nazi march. We knew that we were not too welcome. Maybe two or three of us would roam around in a group there. There were some homes where the bombs fell which destroyed the whole house except for the one room. Civilians had stayed in the area. They would just sleep in this one room and share the bath or whatever was left of it. There would be old couples and young teenagers. Food was very hard for them to get.

V: Did you share you food with them?

P: Yes. Going to the mess hall, we would bring whatever we could bring--cookies and half a loaf of bread. We would bring it and give it to the teenagers. They would take it home. Food was very scarce.

I have just remembered who the movie star was. She was Betty Hutton. She drew a big crowd. It was an open camp. There was an open stage right out in the field. There were maybe 400 or 500 GIs who would watch her go through her act. She would sing some of the songs that were popular when we left. Of course, that would make us really homesick. But, we enjoyed it very much. She was great.

V: How did you feel about the people you had to work for? Were they easy to get along with? Did you have any problems with them?

P: No problems with them; the noncommissioned officers, or the master sergeant, the second police or the first police. There were no problems whatsoever. We got along great. We had orders or follow, and we followed them. That was all there was to it.

V: Did most of the guys feel the same way you did as far as they were your bosses so you would listen to them?

P: Yes, no problems.

V: Some people always talk about how American soldiers don't like discipline. But at that time, everybody just did what they were told because that was what they were supposed to do, right?

P: Right. There were no problems whatsoever. I never saw any problems.

V: You felt sorry for the Italians. Do you feel the same way about the Germans as far as having any deep animosity towards them? Do you remember any of you buddies who didn't feel sorry for them or felt strongly against them?

P: I believe we just didn't care too much for the Germans for all the things that they did--the camps and all the massacres and all that. We didn't feel anything too great towards them.

V: Do you have any final comments on your time spent in the Army such as what it did for you, how it affected you and whether it was good or bad for you? Let me know how you felt about your experiences.

P: To sum it up real briefly, it was the greatest time of my life. It is worth about a million dollars. There were some very good times and some bad times. I guess the good overwhelmed the bad. It was a great experience. If it ever had to come about again and come out the same circumstances, I would be willing to do it again if I was younger.

V: Okay. I want to thank you for the interview tonight.

P: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW