

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Veterans Project

37th Division

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LEONARD PALERMO

Interviewed

by

Jeffrey Suchanek

on

October 11, 1980

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: LEONARD PALERMO
INTERVIEWER: Jeffrey Scott Suchanek
SUBJECT: Role of ambulance drivers, Bouganville and
Philippines, training of medics, treatment
DATE: October 11, 1980

S: This is an interview with Leonard Palermo for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on the 37th Division Veterans, by Jeffrey Scott Suchanek on October 11, 1980 at 1:15 p.m.

Okay Len, tell us something about your background, when and where you were born.

P: I was born here in Youngstown, Briar Hill, on September 4, 1919. I was from a family of eleven. There were nine boys and two girls. I went to school at Tod and the junior high, and I left there in ninth grade. I worked driving a truck for my brother-in-law.

I got my questionnaire for the army in 1941. I filled it out and I marked down where it says dependents; I figured I was giving my check to my mother, so I marked her down as a dependent. They sent me a card a week later and I went down there. I told them I give her the money and she gives me the things I need. He said, "That's not a dependent. You're just helping." So I went home and sat on the porch and two of my friends were coming down the street. They said, "We're going down to volunteer for the service. Want to come?" In the meantime I asked down there, "How soon do you think I am going to be drafted?" I had already filled in my questionnaire. He said, "Maybe at the end of the year." I picked my butt up and I went down with them and I volunteered.

- S: Okay, what can you tell us about your neighborhood when you grew up?
- P: It was a tough neighborhood. We played basketball on the street corner with a light. We had the park playground there. It was Smoky, railroad, and Sheet & Tube down there. My father worked for the railroad. My brothers worked at the mill, Sheet & Tube.
- S: Was it a highly nationalized type of neighborhood? Did you have an Italian section?
- P: Yes, mostly Italians. Our parents knew each other and the other parents that were there. In fact, they lived in the old country. The same bunch, they came over the same year.
- S: You said your dad worked for the railroad. Can you remember him talking about the railroad at all?
- P: He always wanted us to follow in his footsteps to work with the railroad because he said the nights were made to sleep and not to work. He said whoever invented that midnight work should be taken care of. We didn't pay any attention because most of our friends worked at the mills. That is why my brothers went in. Of course, I was young at the time and I caddied at the Squaw Creek Country Club every day. My brother-in-law, he was driving a truck and he got a job at McDonald Steel Mill. He asked me if I wanted to drive his truck. I did. I had a chance to go in the mill at Sheet & Tube, but I figured I would stay out and do better on the outside. I worked driving that truck.
- S: What can you remember about the Depression? Can you remember your parents talking about the Depression?
- P: Oh yes! My father was the only one that worked. We got along well because he had a steady job. There wasn't much, but all the boys were laid off.
- S: Can you remember any experiences from the Depression? Was your electricity turned off?
- P: The older brothers used to get the pants and they cut up the seat and the back pockets and sold them.
- S: Do you remember any soup lines?
- P: No. We never went in the soup lines. Like I said, my father was working. I remember the soup lines. I remember the neighbors used to go down to the track.

It was only a five minute walk and they used to wait for the train to pull by and drop off the chunks of coal and they would pick it up. They used to carry it home. We weren't allowed down there because they would have fired my dad if I would have been caught. I can remember a neighbor, I won't mention her name, but her son was caught and they took her to jail overnight.

S: For that?

P: Yes.

S: Was that a common practice?

P: I guess, yes. My father used to get a little check that he used to give me. He did pretty good. We never had any relief; we didn't go to the soup line; we never had cheese given to us.

S: So you made out pretty well during the Depression?

P: Yes.

S: You said you enlisted in the army. What was the main reason you did that?

P: My friends were going and I figured I would get it over with soon and we would be together. I did ask for the infantry. Fortunately, I was with the medics, which I was glad of later on.

S: Explain to us how you managed to get in the 112th medical battalion.

P: In Cleveland, we were inducted there, they asked us which branch we wanted in and I told them the infantry. In fact, we all did. They didn't have enough time to finish everything and we got on the train that night and headed for Camp Shelby. On the train they were interviewing us. We still stuck to our guns; we wanted to go to the infantry for a year and get it over with, so did Danny Pecchio, Vince Maluse, Moderelli. About thirty more of us when we got through were drafted and volunteered.

S: Were there a lot of boys from your neighborhood that went?

P: Yes. I didn't know it at the time. Then we arrived at Camp Shelby and we all got out on the side of the train and they began calling names. They would say the P's were in one place and the A's in another, depending on how you spell your last name. When they came to the P's, they told me to go in that section. They came to Pecchio, they told me to go there. They told Paluse to go there. He

was another volunteer with us. After that was all over we found out this bunch was going to the medics, and this bunch was going to the 145th infantry. In the meantime, we had about seven or eight more boys from Briar Hill: Vince Doria, Dom DiLosso, Joe McGlure, a couple of kids from the east side. All in all, there were about fifteen of us that went into the medics. A handful went to the infantry, Pecchio and all those guys. That is how we got into the medics. While we were doing our training and going to lectures, we kept asking the captain, "We asked for the infantry and they stuck us in the medics and we would like to transfer there." He said, "It is hard to do." So we stayed and had training. We used to go to lectures.

S: Did you get different training than the infantry got?

P: Yes. We never handled any guns or ammunition, just medical books, and a lot of blood pressure stuff, the main arteries, and all that. They would lecture, some of them, for forty-five minutes and then you would get a five minute break and go back in for different parts of the body. While that was going on we kept asking the captain and he said he couldn't do anything about it. When the war did break out, he called us all and said, "Fellows, you want to transfer to the infantry since you aren't satisfied here?" It was nice in the medics. We had an ambulance. When they had parades, we always would be in the parade with the ambulance while the infantry would walk.

S: You got to ride instead of walk.

P: There was always two to an ambulance, a driver and an assistant driver.

The weather was good down there. We slept in tents. Three in a tent for medics. When we used to go down and visit the infantry, there were eight. There was a bunk on top. We had it nice.

S: What was your impression of Camp Shelby when you got off the train? Can you remember?

P: I never left home before and that was my first time. I was homesick and scared. After a few months down there, it was all right. We always kept saying, "Well, it is just a year." We would get it over with and go home. It didn't happen that way. In the camp theater that night, they turned the movie off and told us to go back to the company, Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor.

- S: Was that expected, that the United States could get into the war?
- P: No.
- S: Did it shock you?
- P: Yes. I wondered what the heck was going on. They put on all the lights they had; it was a big tent and everything went dead. Then we heard to go back to our company. When we got there, they got us; we had to pack and we would go along the Gulf of Mexico and Biloxi and along the coast there. We stayed there for about a week or two; then everything was calm and they told us we had to pack and get ready to move to Uniontown Gap. I guess we were scheduled to go to Europe. We were going to Uniontown Gap. I think one of the transports was sabotaged. That was cancelled out, so instead of Uniontown Gap we went all the way to California. At Oakland, California the first thing you knew we were heading to the Pacific.
- S: What was your reaction to going to the Pacific? Would you have rather gone in a European theater?
- P: There was all that extra riding from the Mississippi all the way back to Pennsylvania at Uniontown Gap. When that happened and we had to get on the train and go all the way down to San Francisco there, we stayed about two weeks. Then we got shipped out overseas. We didn't know where we were going. We had a big cargo. We were on His Majesty's ship, the Uruguay, and I guess we were supposed to head for the Fiji Islands, but we didn't know it. So part of us went to New Zealand, and half of us to Fiji Islands. Ten days later our convoy reloaded again and we went there. We stayed there about a year. I don't think the infantry had much guns; they were just waiting for their equipment to come over. We did a lot of training there. We were supposed to rejoin the 169th infantry. They were being attached to us.
- S: That's the company B of the 112th medical battalion?
- P: Yes.
- S: Were you given any specialized training that you had not received before? What kind of training did they give you? Was it mostly first aid?
- P: First aid and ambulance. We stayed there, I don't know how long it was, until we rejoined the division again.

They were on Guadal Canal. They saw a little action there, among the airstrip and all that. We joined them later. The war was practically over. The 112th medics of Company B didn't see any action. We stayed about two or three weeks, loaded up to get on the boat, and we went to Loganville. We were into the beachhead and they pushed us back so far and then the infantry came on with their 7th division. After, they stayed with us for about three weeks then they left. We had everything set up. The Japs were waiting for us to go through the island and up after them. They had changed their strategy and we just sat there and we got in and set up the preliminary. They sent planes over to the Japanese area and they sprayed it. They took it for about seven or eight months and I guess they were getting hungry, and starving, so they came after us. That is when hell broke loose. It was rumored they were killing ten Japs to one American. It went on for two or three weeks like that. Of course, you always hear the rumors that the Japs had broke through the lines. We were up against the river mostly. The medics were always behind. They used to scare us.

S: Did you ever see any?

P: Oh yes!

S: Alive?

P: Alive. We saw a lot of them dead. We used to use a bulldozer to dig a hole and shove the bodies in. Then we had a colored battalion come in. We had to show them the area, where they would set up. They were going to take over because we were getting ready to leave for the Philippines. Their medics got mixed up somewhere or another and they were delayed. So they called our company up and twenty of us were to go with them. So we went to the Numa Trail, I think they called it. We were walking. First they told us to color our faces up, and we said, "What's the difference?" We were with the colored. A few Japanese prisoners they were bringing in were walking by the other soldiers and when they came to us whites, they would bow. We said, "Well, we had better color up." We stayed overnight and we had three patients. I think one we had to carry and two were walking. In the meantime, their medics finally got caught up with them and they were coming in and we left with the few patients and we went out.

S: Were you still driving an ambulance at this time?

P: Yes.

S: What kind of vehicle was that, a Jeep?

- P: No, a regular ambulance. I don't know what make it was. - It had a big cross on it.
- S: The truck type?
- P: Yes.
- S: Your job was what?
- P: They used to get the patients at the aid station and we used to go up and get them and bring them back. We would take the dead ones to the cemetery and drive the rest of them. In fact, we could walk them in from the field and then we would put them in the ambulance and take them to the hospital and all that stuff.
- S: How many men could an ambulance hold?
- P: If they were walking or sitting you could put three on each side, but if they were literally in a squad, well, there were patients of four. Two on a box. The seats didn't fold up then. We stayed on Loganville over a year and then we were able to leave when that colored regiment came in. We were ready to leave for the Philippines.
- When we got there, of course, you know the medics are always the last to get out to go on the battlefield. So they used to make us load up first and we used to always go below the line, waterline level. We were always in the hole where it was hot. Of course, it was good when we got out because we would be the last ones out and they would clear the way for us to get there. On the beach in the Philippines we would work our way through, behind the infantry. The first cavalry was there with us. That was Douglas MacArthur's outfit. He was shoving us off to the side.
- S: Did that bother you, the division?
- P: Yes. It was like a race. We would get up so far, and then all at once he would call us off on the side to mark field.
- S: Why do you think he did that?
- P: That was when he was just a general. That was his outfit. Then he did tell the Philippines that, "I shall return." That was the first cavalry he had there. He would shuffle us off to the side.
- S: Do you think he discriminated against the 37th because you were National Guard and not regular army?

- P: I don't know about that. I know he favored them. He wanted them to get in there first. While he was shuffling us off, I was dispatched to do the infantry and went to their aid station. There was something going on. They had a little, wooden drawer on the panel that you pull out and I was right in the B mail home when the call came through and a soldier came to us and said they needed an ambulance up the road. I asked him, "Is everything clear?" He said, "Yes. Go ahead and ride up there." We did and as we were coming to a bend, we turned and they opened fire on us and one bullet went through the windshield between the driver and myself. Then they hit the tire. We had a flat and were stranded there. In the meantime there were more wounded soldiers. We stayed there about an hour. They called our company in the meantime and told them to send a couple more ambulances. We don't know what happened to the driver and the one that was up there. We couldn't see them.
- S: You had no radio?
- P: No, no radio. After laying there for an hour, the driver says, "Well, I'm going to raise the brake and put her in neutral and I'll stick my hand in and coast it backwards. We get around this bend, we will be all right." So we did. In the meantime, there were already two ambulances there. Our staff sergeant and the dispatcher were there. The dispatcher was one of my best friends. He lived about a block away from me at home. He was a little worried. We got back and he was glad to see us. Nothing had happened, just the ambulance was knocked down. We went back to the area and got back on the road and started up to Manila. We were just a day behind the first cavalry. Our boys saw a lot of action.
- S: Describe an aid station.
- P: An aid station they had set up with the infantry, near the headquarters. They would send their medical man and the preliminary squad out. They would also have the Philipinos help carry things. They were a lot of help to us. They did most of the carrying in. If their ambulance wasn't there then they would call the company and we would go up there and pick them up.
- S: Was this the same kind of setup that you encountered on Loganville?
- P: Yes. These are dead and that; these are the walking patients. When they walked in, the walking patients, to the aid station, we would put them in the ambulance. They would have to walk. They were out in the field.

- S: When they were at the aid station who made the decision on who was to go back immediately in an ambulance and who could wait a little bit? Was there a priority system?
- P: Once they got to the aid station they would call the ambulance. We had twenty to our company and would take them right back. They have a doctor there. They would be stabilized already. We would take them back to our area and our doctor would check them out.
- S: Were you ever told something like, "Step on it for this guy, he might not make it." Were you ever told anything like that?
- P: No. We did pick up one boy in the field. He was hit right on the door. He was so bad that we just picked the door and all up and took him in the ambulance to the hospital.
- S: What particular hazards did all ambulance drivers encounter that maybe the infantry would not? Were you ever strafed or bombed, or would you be singled out by the enemy?
- P: A lot of the boys say they were shot at by snipers. That incident I told you about was the only time that I was close to it. Like I said, that bullet came between both of us. It hit the windshield and it hit the tire. The medics had it nice. The line medics out there, that is different. They used to go right out there with the boys. They would sleep with them and everything. There used to be an attachment to their aid station. Like I said, we had our stretchers. We would open them up and we could sleep on them at night, but the infantry had to sleep on the ground. If we were close, we would stay in a company area and then when they wanted anybody, they would call for an ambulance and they would dispatch us out. Mostly you would be right there when the ambulance would be at the aid station, so when that one would leave they would call for another one.
- S: Was there ever a time when there were so many wounded and you were the only ambulance there that they had to make a decision, "Well, this guy can wait. This guy has to go right now."
- P: You would take the worst ones first, but the ambulances were there most of the time.
- S: What was the attitude of the men at the aid station, and maybe even back at the hospital, like the doctors and the medics? By the time you got to the Philippines now, I imagine most of these gentlemen had seen plenty of

casualties and plenty of combat themselves. Did you feel that they treated the wounded like--Here's another one. Did they take a real interest in each and every patient?

P: Yes. They took a real interest in them.

S: Do you remember any instances?

P: I was where part of a hand was hanging and they had to amputate it. By then, I used to get sick to my stomach to see that. A lot of them died on the table.

S: When you arrived at the hospital, did you help unload the patients?

P: No, they would always have somebody there. When we went to an aid station to pick them up we would load them up, but then we would take them to the hospital and their fellows would unload them.

S: What kind of equipment was in the ambulance? Was there someone in there with these wounded while they were being transported in the ambulance?

P: Well, you always have two, a driver and an assistant driver. Of course, after you had the stretchers in, the assistant driver had to sit in the front. They were really taken care of first at the aid station.

S: Was there any kind of equipment in the ambulance itself?

P: No, just the first aid kit we carried, but I seldom used it. At least I didn't have to. We had to go one time to pick up four patients. Actually, they were dead ones.

S: Would you take it easier if you knew that they were gone?

P: We drove the same way on the road. If they were gone, there was nothing you could do. You felt sorry and all that. The boys that were shot, they wanted to get back to this hospital in a hurry.

S: Was there a lot of complaining from the men? Would they ask for morphine?

P: No, but they always claimed that the medics weren't there. We were there.

S: How far away, generally, was the aid station from the hospital? How far did you have to drive? Can you remember the furthest you ever had to drive?

- P: Well, on different sections I would say maybe twenty minutes or a half hour.
- S: And these patients would keep that long?
- P: Like I said, they would always have an ambulance stationed up there. They would come in and another load would come. Every time one would come in, they would dispatch another one out. The aid men and the doctor up front would take care of them pretty good.
- S: Did you ever have contact with any of the medics themselves, or the doctors?
- P: Yes.
- S: Did they seem discouraged?
- P: No. They just felt that we had it better than they had, which was true.
- S: Did you ever have an occasion to transport Philippino citizens or Japanese wounded? Were you aware that there was any priority system, like if you had American soldiers wounded and maybe some Japanese soldiers and some civilians, which order they would take those?
- P: I did see the Japanese. They were in the hospital tents when we were taking our patients in. They would keep under guard because they didn't want anyone to kill them because they wanted some information from them. Actually, when they would get a prisoner they would send the MP's back to make sure that they weren't killed.
- S: You never transported any wounded Japanese?
- P: No.
- S: Do you know if that was done?
- P: Yes, they had to. The MP Jeep would even take them back to the hospital if they needed treatment or they would take them to headquarters.
- S: Were you aware that you lost many wounded on the trip back? Were you aware that many men died, or was the ratio fairly good?
- P: It was fairly good because, like I said, maybe other ambulance drivers had different experiences than I did. That one that we picked up, that we had to leave on the door, we had to take him in. He was given first aid over there, but it was a close call.

- S: Let me ask you this, now you had been given training like you said, first aid and whatever, different parts of the body, and you were there from the beginning of the war until the end, what advances in the treatment were there that the wounded men got? Maybe there was newer equipment from the beginning of the war until the end, could you see better technology coming as a result?
- P: Yes. You had a surgical team attached to your company. Others took a patient in and these surgical workers would take them right there close. They had more equipment than we had. They had blood plasma and we never had any of that.
- S: It has been said that although war is a terrible thing, it seems to be a catalyst for technological breakthroughs and that. You felt that maybe soldiers wounded later in the war got better treatment and faster?
- P: Yes. Like I said, in Loganville they attached a surgical team with us.
- S: These were professional doctors?
- P: Yes. Doctors and the aid men, too, were pretty good. The patients were taken care of fast. At the beginning, we didn't have them. We had to take them all the way back.
- S: There were surgeons at the aid station?
- P: No, just doctors. Up at Loganville, there used to be a surgical team attached to our place. They were a bunch from Oklahoma.
- S: Can you remember the attack on Hill 700 in Loganville? Were there a lot of casualties? Were you really busy?
- P: Yes. Like I said, that is where they killed ten Japs to one American.
- S: Were you close enough to see any of the fighting?
- P: No. All we did was hear all that.
- S: Could you tell by different reports you got the progress of the battle as it was going on?
- P: They would tell us at night whether they would call the tanks up. They would make sure they were in back to set up a preliminary for the night. You would always hear the news that they were coming through to get to us.

S: Did you ever have a rifle?

P: Just a 45. We went to the firing range maybe two or three times and that was it. In fact, when we went overseas we had nothing. We didn't get a gun until Guadal Canal. We didn't see any action there, but they issued us a rifle and a piece with eight rounds.

S: Did you transport a lot of people in these steamy jungles that were malaria cases?

P: No. Like I say, maybe the other fellows that drove did that.

S: Were you assigned to the 37th division? Were you assigned to a particular company?

P: No.

S: Were the aid stations set up so that they would take casualties from certain places?

P: Our twenty ambulances were to take care of the 169th. Whatever company was in battle, they used to send two or three companies that were still on reserve. We used to take care of that whole 169th, our company. It was the D Company that took care of the 145th. Being in the Philippines, they were a lot of help to us. They would carry the patients in.

S: These were kids that you used?

P: They were eighteen, nineteen, and up. When we got to Manila I finally saw a friend of our's that was with the regular army. When they took over Manila he was in the battalion that March. He asked us for candy. He had a burlap sack and he cut two holes in it and put his legs in and tied it around his waist for pants. He was glad to see us. His name was Oggy Batiste.

S: Oggy Batiste?

P: Yes, and all he wanted was candy. We asked him, "How did you survive through all this?" He said, "I'll tell you, when they used to throw the garbage out for the pigs, they used to have a standing guard there and the Japanese guard would be there until the pigs finished eating. Just when they finished everything up, the pigs would leave the garbage and take off. They used to chase the pigs away and they used to eat the remains of the garbage that was left.

- S: Did you see any of the prisoners that came out of Manila besides him?
- P: We saw a lot of them, but that is the one we knew and he got in contact with us.
- S: Did they look bad?
- P: Yes. They looked like bones. He said if it wasn't for the garbage they used to feed pigs they probably would have never made it. They had no clothes. They had a burlap sack and cut two holes in it.
- S: Did you see any of the places where the Japanese committed the atrocities against the civilian population?
- P: No. I guess the infantry could see all of that.
- S: What was left of Manila after this?
- P: It was pretty well tore down.
- S: There wasn't too much left?
- P: No. A few buildings were up, but they were bombarded.
- It was good that we happened to see this fellow that was in a regular army. All he wanted was candy. He was really skinny. He lived quite a while when he got back.
- S: Where would you say that you transported the most casualties, Loganville, the Philippines?
- P: I would say Loganville. When we were going up to Manila, they started this rotation and that. In the meantime, we were given replacements, who was going here and there. The captain kept us older fellows away from combat as much as he could so we were rotated. I got off the ambulance then and I worked in the aid station a little bit.
- S: What did you do there?
- P: I would assist the doctor if he asked for different things.
- S: Such as?
- P: Hand him the plasma and that. They would do all of it.
- S: You were just there to assist?
- P: Yes. After that was over the island was secured. They were supposed to get ready to go to Japan. They were

going to take three divisions to the beachhead. Ours would be on reserve. They dropped the H-bomb.

S: You were still in the Philippines when the bomb was dropped?

P: Yes. In fact, we had to stay there two months because the cart took all the transports with it and we had to wait for them to come back to take us all.

S: Of all the casualties that you saw when you transported, where would you say the majority of the wounds were at?

P: A lot of them were in the stomach and legs, but that was about all I did.

S: But they were already fairly taken care of at the aid station by that time?

P: The reason why I say Loganville had more was because I was driving the ambulance at that time. On the way to Manila, I got stateside company then. The fellows that didn't have a chance to drive were just dying to drive. They would go on and stay up in an area and work, digging your garbage pits and your latrines and that. I said, "You fellows want to go ahead, go ahead."

S: After the battle was over, who were the men assigned to do the burial work as far as the Japanese were concerned?

P: I don't think they bothered with the Japanese like they did our boys. I guess they had some kind of an outfit to take care of it. I know I went down there a couple of times and they had a big cemetery there.

S: They just scooped out a big hole or a big pit with a bulldozer?

P: With the Japs, yes. But ours, they would dig individual holes and we would put them in a mattress cover. In fact, when they had boys that would die, they used to put them in a mattress cover and take them to the cemetery because we had no caskets there.

S: Those were just temporary graves?

P: We would mark them.

S: Okay, Len, you were saying about the man who was shot.

- P: We were called to pick up a few patients, and on the way up we were hit by snipers. One bullet went through the windshield and hit a fellow in the back of the neck.
- S: He was a wounded man?
- P: He was killed right there. Then they hit our tire and blew it out.
- S: How about souvenirs, Japanese souvenirs?
- P: I had a flag. I had a pilot jacket. We carried them around for a while. Then we got disgusted with it and threw it away. That was the worst thing anybody could go after, was souvenirs. They had them booby trapped and all.
- S: Was that right? Were there instances of things being booby trapped like that?
- P: Oh yes. There used to be a fellow in our company that would go to the Japanese, the dead ones.
- S: Did you ever run across any Imperial Marines?
- P: No.
- S: What kind of stories circulated in your outfit about what the Japanese did? What kind of fighters were they?
- P: They were good if they ganged together. They didn't have any guns to fight back with. You would be tortured by them, I know that. Once I went after a patient and his shoes were taken off of him and his dog tags and his wrists were sewed around and slit; his skin was peeled over.
- S: They did that? What about Guadal Canal? Did you hear any stories come out of Guadal Canal about atrocities, what they would do with our wounded?
- P: Like I said, we were there later because we rejoined our division.
- S: Were there any signs up about what they had done?
- P: No. We only stayed there, I think it was a week or two on Guadal Canal. Danny and them, they saw action before us. When we got off the U.S.S. Coolidge, it blew up in our own mines after everyone had unloaded.
- S: Did you see that?

- P: No.
- S: It was shortly after?
- P: After we got off the boat. The Coolidge was nice. The Uruguay was, I don't know. Like I said, they used to shove us in a hole and we used to see the sweating on the wall, on the side, the water, like it was going to come in any minute. Our rides were always on the bottom. They say it was good when we got off the boat because we would be way behind the infantry.
- S: Did you take the trucks right on these ships with you or were they on another transport?
- P: They were on another one. They came later.
- S: Were you assigned the same truck or did you just take what was available?
- P: No. They would service them and then they would tell you which ones were ready.
- S: Do you have any idea how often these vehicles were serviced?
- P: In combat they used to let them go, but in the States you used to have to wash them and check the oil and all that.
- S: Were they reliable vehicles?
- P: Yes. They had front-wheel drive included. Those things used to go pull right through that muck.
- S: The terrain was muddy?
- P: Yes.
- S: Where was that, on Loganville?
- P: Loganville. We had a fellow there who was a little older than us; we were about twenty-three years of age, the majority of us. Some of us were about thirty-three, thirty-four. They had bulldozers and were knocking trees down and making a road. You ran out there and stopped the bulldozers and said, "Wait a while." He would stop and pick up the controls. "Okay, come on." They sent him home. I don't know whether he was joking, but he got to go home. He was from Ventworth, Florida.
- S: What was the reaction of the people to the soldiers at Camp Shelby, and say Hattiesburg, Mississippi?

- P: First, they didn't think much of us. They used to have signs up, "Dogs and soldiers not allowed." After the war broke out then they sort of surpassed us.
- S: They treated you well do you think?
- P: Yes.
- S: Did you have any problems in the town itself?
- P: We very seldom went out, our bunch, but we used to take weekends to New Orleans and that. We kept to ourselves. They invited us for corn bread on a Sunday. We decided to go but we got in the truck and one of our buddies, the guy who turned the key on to start the motor up, he jumped out. I said, "Well, I might as well get out too, with him."
- S: So you didn't go?
- P: I never went. They would take me to church to sing songs and that. We would get some corn bread after.
- S: Was there any animosity that you were a Yankee?
- P: The first six or seven months they used to stay away from us. The first three months we were down there we weren't even allowed out ourselves.
- S: That was during basic training then?
- P: Yes. After the war broke out they were out there cheering us, Biloxi, Mississippi and those areas around the Gulf.
- S: How about mail, did you write home a lot?
- P: A little.
- S: Did you get mail a lot, say on Loganville or the Philippines?
- P: Off and on. It would come good and then . . . I guess a lot of the other mail we never did get. All of the packages that I got all got there. When we got back to the company area we were ready to move to Indiantown Gap. Instead of going with the company and driving the ambulance with my old division, I went on furlough and I came home. Then I went back to Indiantown Gap instead of going to the city; they were all there.
- S: What kind of treatment did you get aboard the Navy ships?
- P: It was all right.

S: Were you packed in like sardines?

P: I know I was down in the hole there. With your bunks there, there wasn't much space between you. They were four and five [bunks] high.

S: What ship did you go to Loganville in, do you remember? Was that a liner or was it a transport?

P: It was a transport ship. The first one was the Majesty's ship, the Uruguay. It went to New Zealand and the Fiji Islands. From the Fiji Islands we took the Coolidge. That was a good one. It was like a big motel.

S: Did it still have elegant things in it?

P: The way it was built and that, they had it all torn apart. After we unloaded we were going to pull up and get our own line. We never had any trouble with the generators going to combat area. I was hopping onto another. Coming home, the generator went out four or five times.

S: Did you witness any dogfights?

P: A couple of them, yes. We had one that did hit a cow.

We used to meet the 147th and they were attached to the 37th division and they sent us to train with them, to stay with them and give them first aid. We had two doctors too, with us.

S: Do you remember their names?

P: Montgomery was one of them. Lou Perillo, from New York. He was really good to us this Montgomery. He told me, "Now, when we go home, your first child I'm going to come and deliver free. But you have to promise to call him Edward." He was Edward. I said, "Okay."

S: Did you have any contact with the doctors themselves? Did you sit around and shoot the breeze with them?

P: Just our's. In the shower, you know, with our officers. One incident that happened was I dropped my soap and I was bending over to pick it up and there was a captain in there with Montgomery, Esposito. He sighed and I was bending over and he said, "Oh, Leonard, don't do that, Esposito is over here."

S: Was he your captain the whole time you were over there?

- P: Practically the whole time. From until just before we left Loganville. We got a Captain Dixon. I don't know where he was from. We still had Captain Perillo. He and Montgomery got promoted to the headquarters.
- S: On these navy ships, especially the transports, were you treated any differently than maybe the sailors on the ships? Were you given the same chow they were? Were you treated a little special?
- P: No, I don't think so. We used to have KP duty and that on there. I don't remember if we had the same chow they had or not.
- S: Did you ever listen to Tokyo Rose?
- P: Oh yes.
- S: What was your impression of that?
- P: She had good music. That was one good thing.
- S: Glenn Miller's band?
- P: They were already in San Francisco and all that. In fact, a couple of those Japanese prisoners, they claimed that they were in San Francisco.
- S: Did you talk to these Japanese prisoners or have any contact with them at all? What was your impression of them?
- P: The guys used to tease them. They said Americans eat spam or something like that. I didn't have too much contact with them, but the infantry, they did. They would get a prisoner and he would be under guard.
- S: Did you have any stories where Japanese wounded or prisoners would were in fact, murdered, because of the anger or frustration of the infantry?
- P: No. If you went in the back there, they had American money printed on the wall, the United States. I did have some, but I don't know what happened. The kids, when they were growing up, they got rid of it.
- S: That the Japanese had printed up?
- P: The Japanese had printed the money. I think they had five dollar bills, and twenties. The Philipinos, you gave them something and they wanted to give you the shirt off their back.

S: Did a lot of them claim to be guerrilla fighters?

P: Not the ones we were near.

S: Did you see any guerrilla fighters?

P: No.

S: How about Fijian troops, did you have any contact with Fijians?

P: They had some dance, but we just sat and watched. In fact, the way they dance, they get the girls in the center and the fellows on the side. They just take short steps in a circle.

S: What about supplies? Did you ever get the impression that maybe the civic theater was the back door and all the first rate stuff went to Europe?

P: Well, I'll tell you, we hadn't seen a fresh egg in I don't know how long, at least two and a half years. Finally, we ended up with one apiece in our company. In the meantime, one of our friends had a dog and it was having pups. He took his egg and gave it to the mother to eat. Most of the stuff we ate was dehydrated. We used to eat potatoes and that.

S: Was that like K rations or whatever?

P: Well, the K rations we used only if we were going into combat. They wouldn't want to set up the kitchen. The medics had it good. We would set up our kitchen.

S: How far away from the front lines were you at Loganville?

P: I'd say two or three miles from Hill 700. Where our 169th was, we were closer than that. Pecchio and those guys used to come down for coffee grains from us. We used to give it to them.

S: You knew who Danny was at this time?

P: I knew all of those boys. There were about twenty of us from the same neighborhood.

S: Did you ever transport somebody that you knew?

P: No. I knew Joe was killed. He was a lieutenant. He was with the 145th. He transferred out and went to officers training and became a second lieutenant. Then he was stuck with the 169th infantry. I went to his burial. I didn't take him in, but I knew where he was being buried.

- S: What about bombing attacks, did you ever come under any bombing attacks?
- P: Just one or two. Compared to Europe, nothing came after us, at least not where I was at.
- S: How about artillery shells?
- P: Once in a while.
- S: What was your impression of that? Were you scared?
- P: Oh yes. We saw a few of them go off and we would see shrapnel fly around, but it didn't happen too often.
- S: You were at New Zealand, was that correct?
- P: Yes, ten days.
- S: What was your reception like when you got there?
- P: It was at night and everything was a black out. The people were all right there. Of course, they couldn't understand why I was Italian and he was a Jew and how we were together. They couldn't understand that. They all thought we had chauffers and maids at home.
- S: Do you know if they were afraid of being invaded?
- P: Oh yes.
- S: What kind of food did they serve you over there? Don't they have a lot of sheep?
- P: Yes, lamb and mutton.
- S: You don't like mutton?
- P: Well, when I'm hungry I like anything.
- S: Where did you stay in New Zealand?
- P: In the barracks there. They gave us straw to fill our mattresses up with. Everybody carried their mattress covers. They used that in case you got hit or died; then they would throw you in it. They took us out in a field with straw and we had to stuff them up. I think it was only about a week until they unloaded the boats for Fiji Islands; then we went there. They couldn't take care of all of us at one time.

- S: In between battles, or action, what did you do? What was your function?
- P: Well, you went to a movie every night whether you had seen it or not. You played catch, you know, ball. We did a lot of gambling, a lot of poker.
- S: Craps?
- P: Craps, cards. That was it a lot of the time.
- S: You weren't helping, say, unloading transports or anything like that?
- P: No, we didn't have to do that.
- S: You really had it good.
- P: We told the captain we wanted to transfer out and he kept telling us, "No, you can't do it." Finally, the war did break out and he called us all in. He said, "Fellows, you ready to go to the infantry?" We said, "We decided to stay now."
- S: Well, can you think of anything that I haven't asked, an experience that you had, something that might have happened in Manila?
- P: While I was over there, Danny, did I tell you his father died while he was there?
- S: Yes, you mentioned that.
- P: My mother passed away too while I was there. I was on Loganville at the time. Of course, they notified the Red Cross, but it took quite a while. They told the priest and he came up and he told me. My brother was on Georgia I think, and he had not known about it. Of course, when I used to pick up my letters, she would write to me that ma and pa are doing fine, everybody was okay, my sisters too.
- S: You had no indication?
- P: No. The fellows knew about it, like Danny Pecchio and his bunch from the infantry, they are all from the same neighborhood. They used to come down and when I would be in a bunch with them, they wouldn't say anything. As soon as I left my tent, they would all get in a huddle and start whispering. Finally, I was told by the priest and I wrote to my brother. He was on Georgia. He thought

I was flipping my lid. He ran to his captain and said, "Look here, I got a letter from my brother telling me my mom died and here is a letter from home saying everybody is okay." The same date.

S: When you were in these places, Loganville and the Philippines, were you aware of other campaigns that were going on?

P: Yes, we were, but like I said, we used to get news maybe once a month. We did at least.

S: Was that mainly by radio? Would you know more about what was going on at another action through Tokyo Rose?

P: They would tell us everything really good. She would say that the girls are at home. She would sing, "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree," things like that. She used to tell us they had San Francisco, the coast. She was full of baloney.

S: Is that how you kept abreast?

P: Yes. They used to give us a little pamphlet. They would tell us how we were doing and all that.

S: Did you go to any USO shows?

P: They never had any when I was in the service.

S: Really?

P: When I came out, that's when I first heard of the WACS (Women's Air Corps) and the WAVES and that. The first one we saw, a WAVE or a WAC, was when we went to the States coming back. We discharged seven to ten days later.

S: You didn't see Bob Hope or Randolph Scott?

P: Oh yes. I saw Bob Hope, Francis Langford, Joey Brown, Jack Benny, Artie Shaw's Orchestra. I remember we took a picture of Carol Ann because she had to bend over.

S: How about torpedo juice, do you know what that is, or Raisin Jack?

P: All I know is that the Fijians used to put their hands in there and that it was roots. They squeeze them and they would put their hands in like that; then after a while they put the juice down and they would get a girl. She would come to you on her knees with a coconut cup. It

used to draw your mouth together. It used to run out of mine. I couldn't stand that. Then on Clarkville, we went to the warehouse. I tasted that a little bit. They could have killed out a lot of us. All they had to do was uncork it and stick a needle in there with some kind of poison and those guys would grab their drink. I used to always say, "I have to get back home. I'm not going to monkey around with the soldiers or anything." We had one guy that got so damn drunk that when he was laying there that the flies were in thousands on him. He never budged. He was so drunk that we had to pick him up and throw him in the ambulance. We were moving out. If those Japs had any sense, they could have killed a lot of our boys. It was just an ordinary cork.

S: I think they did anyway.

Were these cemeteries for Americans? Did they contain quite a few of our guys or were they small? Did we suffer a lot?

P: The reason why I went down to see them buried was because of a lieutenant. He lived four or five, maybe ten blocks away from me. I didn't know him at home, but before we went in the service, we all got together.

S: If you had to do it all over again, would you go into the infantry or would you stay in the medics?

P: I'd go into the medics, not the line medics, the company.

S: Did you talk to any of the line medics?

P: There were other companies in our battalion that were strictly litter bearers.

S: Anybody from this area that you knew?

P: No, just Pecchio and those few guys. When they got on the P's after they called me and told me to go in that line, they went to Pecchio and Paluse, two of our best friends, and told them to go there. Then they told us we were going to the medics and they were going to the infantry. Of course, this Captain Ferillo, he was captain of the National Guards. They tried to come to the medics. We wanted to go, but they have to be sharpshooting. While we were down there, they had to have a fellow down there shooting a machine gun.

S: Can you think of anything you haven't described, maybe what a field hospital was like?

- P: All that we did was drop the few patients off there, like I said.
- S: I know what I wanted to ask you. These wounded men, were they tagged?
- P: Yes, they were tagged.
- S: Did they write anything on them?
- P: Well, it was either that they were wounded or a walking patient. They wanted to make sure that you could walk them so much, then carry them.
- S: They had specific instructions like that?
- P: Yes. When we took the three patients who were colored, they had tags on them.
- S: Where were they hit? Do you remember?
- P: One in the shoulder and one in the hip. Just grazed them, but they wanted to be carried, so we walked them out. In the meantime, the medics came. That is a long time ago.
- S: Can you think of anybody or anything that left an impression on you? Did the war help you do you think? Was it a good experience?
- P: Yes.
- S: Did you like army life?
- P: When I first went in there, I once signed for the Fresh Air Camp in Youngstown, and I got off of the streetcar at the time and when it was ready to pull out I said, "I'm going back home." I had never left Youngstown until then. It was hard up until then. I had in my head that it was one year and you go home. When the war broke out, I had a different attitude. It was a long stay though.
- S: Did you ever dream you would be gone forty-two months?
- P: Heck, no. Once we started, they were hopping us from island to island. We used to say, "We're getting around more on the boat than we are on the land. We should have joined the navy."
- S: I would like to thank you for this interview. You have given us a lot of good information that could not be obtained elsewhere.

- P: I could give you more, but I can't remember. The infantry, those fellows can really tell you a lot. When you have got Pecchio, you have the best.
- S: I think a lot of times, though, that people don't realize that guys that do get hit, they don't just magically appear in the hospital, that somebody has to go there and bring them back.
- P: They are always hollering for the medics. I guess they figure you are never coming.
- S: How many men were in your outfit?
- P: In our company?
- S: Yes.
- P: I would say we had about one hundred.
- S: Were they all ambulance drivers?
- P: You had your ambulance drivers, your cooks.
- S: How did one get to be a line medic?
- P: I guess when you first get in, like I did. We didn't want to go to the medics. They just put us there.
- S: You had no say-so about it?
- P: No. They did say if you volunteer you can pick your branch of the service you wanted. It was rush, rush, rush. They didn't even finish us in Cleveland and they put us on the train headed for Mississippi and they finished us there. I did sign for the infantry. So did the rest of the fellows with us. I think there was only one that signed for the medics, but he never got it. He was in the infantry and the rest of us all got in the medics. There were ten of us that were four or five streets away from each other that were in the same company too. We never got bombed or shelled; it would have been the whole neighborhood.
- S: You were all that close?
- P: We were all in the same company. You take Paluse and Pecchio from our neighborhood, they were the only two there, but there were ten, fifteen, maybe twenty of us.
- S: Most of the guys that you knew, do you still keep in touch? Are a lot of them still in the area?

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P: Yes. We tried to get them to join the 37th, but they just don't want to get in.

S: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW