

# John Zanzucchi

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Interviewed by Jerrod Howe

Transcribed by Unknown

Edited by Leah Cohen

Howe: Today is July 8th and my name is Jerrod Howe. We're here at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library with Mr. John Zanzucchi, and we're here to do your oral history.

Zanzucchi: Okay.

Howe: So thank you for coming in, Sir. Appreciate it.

Zanzucchi: You're welcome.

Howe: Starting all the way at the beginning, when and where were you born?

Zanzucchi: In Wehrum, Pennsylvania, November 30, 1924. W-H-E-R-U-M is the way you spell that, Wehrum. Actually, it's a ghost town now.

Howe: Oh, wow.

Zanzucchi: I think there's only one house now. From what I hear, I don't know. [Laughs]

Howe: And what did your parents do when you were growing up?

Zanzucchi: Well, my father was a miner, and my stepfather was a foreman, sorta a tunnel-man. He built a subway here in Chicago—helped—he was a foreman on J Panorelli Company at...

Howe: Okay, and did your mother work?

Zanzucchi: Nah, on and off she worked. Doing housework, mostly. I think she worked in the laundry too, if I remember right.

Howe: Any brothers and sisters?

Zanzucchi: I have, let's see, I've got three sisters and another brother.

Howe: Alright. So what was it like growing up in Wehrum, Pennsylvania?

Zanzucchi: I don't know because I moved out of there, I guess, right away.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: So I didn't get... the first thing I remember is when we moved to Cleveland. I remember living in Cleveland, that's when I started remembering stuff.

Howe: Do you remember how young you were?

Zanzucchi: Well, I was at St. Rocco's Grammar School. I remember first and second grade there. So, yeah, we moved from there...from there, where did we go? We went to Peoria, and from Peoria we moved to Green Bay. He was doing tunnel work at that time. And then from Green Bay we moved here, to Chicago.

Howe: Wow.

Zanzucchi: That's when he worked down in the subway.

Howe: So growing up, you moved around quite a bit.

Zanzucchi: Yeah, quite a bit. Mmhm.

Howe: Where did you end up going to high school?

Zanzucchi: I went to Fenger High, down on the South Side of Chicago. And then my senior year, when we moved up here, up into Wilmette, I went to New Trier my senior year.

Howe: Okay. Bouncing around like this, was this something you got used to...or...?

Zanzucchi: Oh yeah, I got used to it, made friends. Friends, and then left them and made new friends. I had a good time. I enjoyed it. I made good friends all the way through, so...

Howe: Cool. Did you play any sports, or did you have any academic interests?

Zanzucchi: No, my folks wouldn't let me. I had to come home from school right away. So I wanted to get on the track team, but I had to get home. When I was in the service, we ran—I think our 63rd Division when I was in there—they had a one-mile relay for each battalion, and I was picked to be on one of them, and we won it. We had four of us, you know, a mile; each one ran a quarter mile.

Howe: Okay. Before the military, what did you do in your spare time, when you weren't going to school?

Zanzucchi: I worked, that was it. I was doing plastering, I worked in a florist's shop—Hlavacek's Florist, if I remember right, yeah. Then, went to school. Then, I went right from my...I was supposed to have graduated in June and I got called up in May for the service—the draft—and they said my grades were...I wanted to go in right away and they said if your grades are alright, you can come in right away, otherwise you have to wait till you graduate. So the school okayed it and I went in in May. Went to Camp Grant.

Howe: How did your family, your friends feel about being drafted?

Zanzucchi: I don't think they minded, wasn't so bad, no. My mother cried after the war was over, service was over, and I got home, and I was gonna reenlist. My mother started crying like mad. She didn't want me to go because, you know, I was in the infantry. So me and a buddy were gonna join up again. We were both top sergeants, so we figured if we reenlisted, we were both gonna be second lieutenants, they were gonna give us an upgrade. But his father did the same thing with him. I called him up; he lived in New York. We were real good buddies in the service. Me and him made sort of graduated—we were in charge of the squads at the beginning, and then I got to be a platoon sergeant, and we did everything together there. Every time we went out on patrol, one of us would pick out—say, “Yeah, we'll go out on patrol.” We'd pick the other guy to come with. He'd pick me or I'd pick him, whichever it was. Joe Covino: a hell of a nice guy. We became good friends there.

Howe: Okay. But before you were drafted, was there any idea that you might go into the military? Did you have...?

Zanzucchi: Well, we were hoping—I was hoping anyway. Yeah, I was trying. The reason I did because I had—an aunt of ours, she had a couple of sons that were in the service, and they came home and they were telling us about all the good times they were having. That was here in the States [Laughs], and that got me going. I said, “Jeez, I'd like to get in too.” So when I got drafted, I wanted to go in right away. I don't know why, but...

Howe: So you were drafted in 1941, 1942?

Zanzucchi: I think it was in '43, if I remember right.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: I'm pretty sure it was '43, May of '43.

Howe: May of '43, right. And you said you went to Camp Grant, where was that at?

Zanzucchi: That was here up in, Wisc—no Camp McCoy in Wisconsin. Camp Grant was where we went in to get all our information where we were going, and then that's where I got shipped up to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin.

Howe: That was right after high school?

Zanzucchi: Yeah, right out of high school. I didn't graduate in high school. They gave me my diploma, but when I got in, Camp Grant was the recruiting center, like—or whatever you call it—and from there, they ship you out wherever you were going. And I got shipped to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin for my basic training.

Howe: What was that like?

Zanzucchi: It was nice up there. It was way out, it was out in the boondocks. Two small towns nearby. I can't remember their names anymore, but there's nothing there, actually. I never went to either one of them because there was nothing to do except drink, and I didn't drink.

Howe: How long was your training at Camp McCoy, do you recall?

Zanzucchi: I can't remember. Probably—I think it was a good three months, I'm pretty sure, about that much. It was all the basic training, you know: marching and all that, shooting, you know, march with your rifle showing, stuff that infantry did. But not too much of that. That was when I went into the infantry down at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi.

Howe: Okay. How was your job in the infantry determined? Did you elect to become an infantryman?

Zanzucchi: Yeah, I volunteered for it because I was in a—what do you call it—down in...I forget what...I was in gas supply outfit. I was a private in the gas supply outfit, and me and the first sergeant didn't get along too well. I think he was afraid I was gonna kill him. [Laughter]

Howe: Where was this at?

Zanzucchi: I think it was in...that one I can't remember whether it was Camp Barkeley, Texas. I think it was at Camp Barkeley—that was it, in Texas. I got sent down there, gas supply outfit. I got real, real good friends there, made good buddies down there.

Howe: And this was before you elected to become an infantryman?

Zanzucchi: Then they were...but I was having a bad problem with the first sergeant there. He was a... well I won't say what he was...

Howe: Fair enough.

Zanzucchi: To me, he was. In fact, I think to the whole outfit he was. Because when they went overseas, he was afraid they were gonna... He said I talked to a bunch of the guys after the war was over, and they said he was afraid to come out at all during the day because he was afraid they were gonna kill him. They all hated him. But I was the only one that got out of the outfit. At that time, they asked for volunteers for the infantry, and I volunteered right away.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: Then I got sent to Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi. They call that camp the hell hole of the South. It got a big write-up in *Time Magazine* about what a miserable place that was. And it was. Hot, hot, humid, miserable.

Howe: So how long were you there?

Zanzucchi: We were there about six months. That's where I went AWOL for a while. [Laughs] What happened with that was, we got some more—they were just starting to build up the division there. This was a new division being built up—the 63<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. And we had some guys, this one guy that we became good friends with. He was stationed up at the Aleutian Islands and he got transferred down here to the infantry at us. And he lived in New Orleans, which was right near there, and he had a family in New Orleans, and we were all...we said, "How come we're not going overseas?" You know? We wanted to get over there, fight. Stupid...you know. But that was me and this Joe Covino, and this guy and another guy; four of us. We went AWOL one night, and we just, we were goin' to New Orleans to his house. And what we were going to do was we were going to go over there, get changed and get rid of our uniforms, and get in civilian clothes. And we were thinking we were going to go join the Merchant Marines, and when we get overseas, we were going to go AWOL from the Merchant Marine and join the infantry somewhere out there. Stupid! Never would have happened, you know. [Laughs] But we got caught by the MP's [military police] down there, they were walking around. Me and one of these guys were walking around New Orleans, and we had these hats on, and we had them in our shoulder strap. We're supposed to be wearing them all the time,

and the MP's stopped us and wanted to see our passes, and we didn't have the passes. So we got taken into the New Orleans prison there. Army prison. We did some work on trying to clean the canals there they had. They gave us big machetes to cut down the thing; water moccasins there and everything. We were guarded by this soldier. Every time we saw a water moccasin, we'd scream and the guy would come over and blast them with the rifle. So finally, we got—they sent a couple of guys and Joe Covino and me, they sent a couple of guys up from the division—63rd—to bring us back to the 63rd Division. So we got there and we got fined two thirds of our pay, which was about, what, thirty dollars a month was what our pay was. So we were getting ten dollars a month there for... But it didn't make any difference because we didn't go anywhere. Camp Van Dorn, there was nothing up there either, so... But then we—what happened was all those guys that went AWOL, they sent us home on furlough for...I think it was a thirty-day furlough, and then they were gonna ship us to some other outfit that was going to the Pacific. So when we got back to camp, the camp got—they were just about ready to ship us out. Camp got alerted that we were going overseas, so they couldn't ship us out. We had to stay with the outfit, which was great with me, with us. And that's when we went to...then we went to Camp Shanks. From there, we went to France.

Howe: Where was Camp Shanks?

Zanzucchi: That was in New York.

Howe: Okay. And that was...?

Zanzucchi: I think it was New York or New Jersey. No, Camp Shanks, that was New York.

Howe: That was essentially a staging ground?

Zanzucchi: Yeah.

Howe: Okay. Do you recall what month, what year that was?

Zanzucchi: Oh, God, no, I can't remember that.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: I think...did I send you the history of the 63rd Division? It might be told in there. Usually, they have all the details in there.

Howe: Okay. And then it said that you were on a troop transport. The U.S. [MS] Saturnia?

Zanzucchi: It was an Italian cruise ship, which was really nice because we had a state room.

Howe: Nice.

Zanzucchi: Coming back, it wasn't that good. It was just a regular troop ship.

Howe: What was it like going out to sea?

Zanzucchi: Well, I didn't mind it so much. But I always remember whenever we went to what they call the head—the bathrooms—it was all covered with puke. Everybody was getting sick. And I'd go in there trying to throw up, but I couldn't throw up. I was getting...eating all that food. I ate everything. I never missed a meal. But, you know, you get in there and you're on that ship, and it was a small cruise ship. It wasn't a real big one. So usually, if you hit some waves, the ship would go up and a lot of guys weren't used to that. I wasn't either, but I didn't get sick, I don't know why... For some reason or another, I didn't. So... but we got, at least we had regular—I don't know what you would call it—state rooms that we slept in. There were only six of us to each one, you know. In a troop ship, you're in bunk beds—six or seven up high—and you're just packed in there. Here we had nice little state rooms. It wasn't bad going over, it was good.

Howe: Nice, so then...

Zanzucchi: We landed at Le Havre, France.

Howe: Okay. And were you immediately put into theater, or was there some training before you joined the...

Zanzucchi: No, we went right in there. We went up...where was it...we went to— it was a French cavalry camp. I forget what the heck the name of it was. It was a French name. It's on that thing that I re-sent to you guys. We went there first, and then from there, each—we had the three regiments: 253rd, 254th and 255th. Each regiment was sent to a different division as reserves, and we were sent to the—our regiment was sent to the 3rd Division. And from there, that's where we got our first combat stuff and everything.

Howe: So you were with the 254th?

Zanzucchi: I was with the 254th Regiment, yeah.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: Second battalion. F Company.

Howe: Alright. And Joe Covino was with you in company?

Zanzucchi: Oh yeah, he was always with us. We were in the same outfit together. Same platoon.

Howe: So your first engagement in theater, was this the Battle of 216?

Zanzucchi: Jepsheim.

Howe: Jepsheim?

Zanzucchi: Jepsheim. That was our first battle. We were reserve, third division, at the Colmar Pocket, in the Colmar Forest. At that time, they had the Germans surrounded all the way around. They were trying to get out, escape the Colmar pocket, and that's what we were in there to capture them all, you know. That was our first battle was the battle of Jepsheim, and I thought that Jepsheim was a little...I said, "What the heck are we fighting to capture this town of Jepsheim for?" It was a hard battle, too, because first the 2nd French, they were attached too. They went in there and they got driven back, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division sent a bunch of outfits in there, they got driven back. Then, they told us it's our turn. You know, so we get in there and we captured Jepsheim, but I thought it was just a dinky little town. But it wasn't, actually, it was a railroad center. That's why they were—Germans were holding on to it. Because it was a railroad center. But we captured it, we drove them out, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division outfit, they all said they didn't think we could do it because we were just fresh, the first time we'd gone in there. But we did! We captured the place. It was in the winter; it was colder than hell. Like we said, we told them, "The only reason we got in there was we were so damn cold, and we had these houses in there. We wanted to get in there and get warm." That's what we told the 3rd Division.

Howe: Heavy fighting?

Zanzucchi: Pardon?

Howe: Was it heavy fighting?

Zanzucchi: At that time, yeah, Jepsheim was. They were guarding that—what was it—the French army couldn't get it. They got driven back and so did part of the 3rd Division, the outfit that went in there. That's the outfit that Audie Murphy was in, if you remember, if you know anything about Audie Murphy. He won every medal that they have there, from brass through Medal of Honor. Bronze star to the Medal of Honor. But I never met him, so I don't know. In fact, I never met

anybody from the 3rd Division. I was just—we were just attached to them as reserves.

Howe: Certainly. What else do you remember about Jepsheim? How long it was...?

Zanzucchi: Well, it didn't take *us* too long. We went through pretty good. We captured quite a few of the prisoners and went right up to the edge of the town. We got in there, and well, we had a captain. I shouldn't say this, but I don't know who the hell made him a captain. But the only time he went into battle—I don't know where he got it—he always went in drunk. That's the only way he would go because he was scared, I think. And while we were in there, I had made my first battlefield commission, that was, I had made sergeant, just before we got in there. As we got in there, he says, "Sergeant Zanzucchi, come with me." And we came into this, like, a little alcove, and there was two stories high, and he gets in the middle of this thing and he's waving his pistol around, and he says, "God damn you Krauts, come on out of here. This is Captain Barton speaking." When I heard him say he's Captain Barton, I says, "Oh, go to hell with you! I'm gettin' out of here." Usually there's a—if they know he's a captain, they're gonna—if there was anybody there they're gonna shoot him, and I'm right there with him. So I got back in there, went with my platoon, I left him there. He never remembered that because he never called me out on it. But he did send me out on a patrol after that, after we captured it. So...and we had on this patrol, we had combat patrol, quite a few of us with us, we had machine guns. He wanted us to go out and check a bridge to see if it was still—they hadn't blown it up or... So we got—just me and Joe Covino—he made me in charge of it, and I got Joe Covino, and we got a bunch of the guys. We had a bazooka man, we had a BAR man, we had machine guns. There were quite a few—I forget how many—about twenty of us. Decided to go from there, and we get part way, just outside of Jepsheim. Well not—we're still in Jepsheim, but outside of our perimeter. As we're creeping up—moving slowly, we weren't creeping yet. All of a sudden, we hear some German, I think it was "[German word]", something like that. Was a German password they yell at you, and you gotta...well as soon as that we all hit the ground, and we didn't answer. So we heard him yell it again and nobody answered, and there was a tank out there. A Tiger tank there. This guy was chalked from the Tiger tank, and he let out a few rounds of machine gun fire out there, didn't hit anybody. So Joe Covino comes by me. He says, "Come on, let's go around to the side over here." So me and him ran to the side where the tank was and we come into a big mound, which was great. I says, "Here all we have to do is stay down and look over the mound." And there we were on the side of

the Tiger tank, and you couldn't hit them from the front because I don't know if you know anything about them, but they're...rockets would bounce off the front, so you had to hit them from the side. So we're yelling, "Get the bazooka man up here," me and Joe, you know. And we're waiting; no bazooka man. And I was screaming, I said, "Where the hell is that guy?" Finally, we got word that he was too damn scared to come up. He was sitting down, and he wouldn't get up because he was afraid, they were gonna see him. And I said, "God damn." First chance we get to hit a Tiger tank and we couldn't get it. We were so damn mad. So we decided—all of a sudden, the tanks got us started up and started backing up, and you could see he was going back towards the bridge. So we said, "Wow, the bridge is still there." The hell with it, we don't have to go look, you know. But the only thing that me and Joe Covino couldn't figure out...usually when you have a tank up there, you have infantry around it. You know? Didn't have no infantry. All they had was the tank there. We couldn't figure out what the heck—either they didn't have enough infantry men or something. Because we were surprised. Because we were waiting to see some infantry men come jumping up and shooting too, you know. But no, it was just a tank that was there. But anyway, we went back, and we told the captain the bridge is intact, you know. So he was going to send another bunch out or wanted me to go out again, and I told him, "No, I'm not going out there." I says, "We already figured it out." I told the guys, "Forget it." And he was drunk anyways. He probably wouldn't have known that we didn't. So that's the first time. We were so mad because we could've had a Tiger tank, and that's the only tank that scared the crap out of any of us. Because they had those 88s, millimeter canons that they had, and those things were *woo*; scared the crap out of you. When you fired at a shell, all you here is *boom*, that's all. It was so fast. If it landed in front of you... in back of you: fine and dandy. But if it landed in front of you somewhere, I think it'd shoot...everything would come forward. So we were all, every time we saw a Tiger tank, we were scared to death of it. At least I was anyway.

Howe: In your questionnaire, you also talk about coming up on a German pillbox.

Zanzucchi: That was at Jepsheim.

Howe: That was still at Jepsheim?

Zanzucchi: Yeah, that's when—after I left Captain Barton there, I went back to my outfit there and they had a—it was like a pillbox. It was like, it was nothing that could shoot from, something that they could just hide in in case of a mortar or shell artillery coming in, you know? Get inside there and you're safe. But they had us

surrounded, and I come up, I says, "What's going on?" You know? They said, "We got—there's a bunch of Germans in there." It was a small pillbox; it wasn't very big. And I says, "Well, what's the matter?" He says, "Well, we got them in there, but we can't get them out." So just at that time, one of them comes out of the tent; he had a grease gun with them. That's what we called it. And he comes out, and we had the thing surrounded, like, a bunch of us. And I think he was coming out, he was gonna shoot his way out, and he saw all of us surrounding him. I guess he figured he was going to be a goner if he started, so he runs back in. He was an SS guy, and the others in there were all Wehrmacht. They were just regular soldiers. I think they were scared to death. They were ready to give up, but not him. So he dashed back in there. So we were just saying, "Well, what the heck are we going to do, you know?" So I says, "Okay, give me a white phosphorous grenade." So I got the grenade and I went up there where they have the entrance to get in there. I threw it in there and they come barreling out of there. I don't know if you know what a white phosphorous grenade is, but it shoots out, like, sharp pieces of flame, and if one hits you, it'll burn the hell out of you, you know. It's not a grenade. We used to call them white pissers. So they come running out, they surrender. And I remember I had a carbine — I used to carry an M1, but then when I made sergeant, I had a lot of running around to do and carrying that M1 was getting heavy, so I turned it over and got a carbine. And when I got up to the SS guy over there after we made them all surrender, you know, he looked at me and says "Carbine." *\*spit noise\** He spit at it. [Laughs] He was lookin' to get a bullet it looked like, but I didn't shoot him. We sent them back. But there was about—what was it—about four or five in that bunker. Him and about four or five other Wehrmacht. There were other guys, they were ready to surrender. They were happy to get out of there.

Howe: Right. And when you guys came on, prisoners of war, you just turned them over?

Zanzucchi: We turned them over to some other guys that were in the back. Not too many. A couple of guys marching back to headquarters, and then they'd turn them over to whoever was in charge over there, and then they'd come back to our company.

Howe: Do you remember what significance the Battle of Jepsheim had on the events of the war?

Zanzucchi: Well, yeah, it cut down their supply line there because that's what they...they had—it was a railroad center. So we cut off their supply line there. That helped

because we had them all trapped, and they couldn't get any more supplies from that outfit. So it was—we think that's what it did, anyway.

Howe: It was a pretty significant engagement then. And your unit—was your unit recognized for their actions?

Zanzucchi: Yeah, we had—that's where we got a presidential citation for that. And the French gave us the Croix de Guerre for that, too. So we got the two citations for that.

Howe: Very cool.

Zanzucchi: Those were unit citations.

Howe: And at this time, you were already...was it, technical sergeant?

Zanzucchi: No, I was regular sergeant, just a buck sergeant. Three stripes. I made my staff sergeant next about Siegfried Line, when we got to the Siegfried Line. Then, I got promoted to staff sergeant.

Howe: Okay. So then, after your involvement in the Colmar Pocket, were you forwarded directly to the Siegfried Line or was there something in-between?

Zanzucchi: No, we got—we were different battles, just kept on going. I didn't have any names for them. We got through Neunkirchen and Mannheim, Germany and all that. We captured...it was Mannheim and Neunkirchen, and there was a couple other ones. Stuttgart. We were going through all those, and then we finally got to the Siegfried Line. What happened there was, we had a sergeant that trained us over here. He got Ranger training when we were in the States, and he was our platoon sergeant, and he was always a gung-ho guy. I guess when we got to Siegfried's Line he must have got scared to death or something. They said he shot himself in the foot so he wouldn't have to go in there, and that's when I got promoted to staff sergeant. I was made the platoon sergeant and they promoted me. I don't know why, but they did.

Howe: Got it.

Zanzucchi: And at the Siegfried Line, because they sent him back, I was in charge of the platoon there.

Howe: All the while are you still under the 3rd Division?

Zanzucchi: No, not up here. Once we got through the Colmar Pocket, then the 63rd Division, all the outfits, all the different regiments got together. Now we were just the 63rd Division.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: Instead of being attached to some other outfit, we were our own outfit there. That was after we cleared out the Colmar Pocket there.

Howe: Before we get to the Siegfried Line and crossing the Rhine River into Germany, I have a note about an air mattress. Was there an incident?

Zanzucchi: Oh, that was towards the end of the war.

Howe: Okay. Well, then I guess we'll save that?

Zanzucchi: Okay.

Howe: All this time, you're, you know, you're fresh out of basic. You're right out of high school; nineteen, twenty years old.

Zanzucchi: Well, I was eighteen when I went in.

Howe: Okay. Did you ever feel like your life was in danger?

Zanzucchi: No, I actually didn't. I wasn't scared at all there. I thought I would be, because I remember in the States, when I was younger, I couldn't go to a funeral home and look at a dead body because I just...I'd have nightmares all night. I kept thinking, "What the hell am I going to do over there?" You know. And still, when I got in the infantry, I said, "I don't know what I'm gonna do over there." And when we got to the Colmar, we were in the Vosges Forest there. It was all clear, we were bivouacking until we went into the front lines, and there I had one body. A German's body laying there, and I just—a couple of us, we each go over there, and we'd look at it and look at it because that cured me. I could look at a dead body and not worry about... I don't know how long he was dead, but we wouldn't touch it because they told us, "Don't touch it, he might be booby trapped." You know. So none of us ever touched, we just went and looked at him for a while. It was the first time we saw a dead German; you know? But after that, I didn't feel bad at all, yeah. I saw some miserable horses—I think they were shelled, were German soldiers—towards, near the end of the war. It was towards where a shell must have landed right on this wagon. There were soldiers with a big wagon, with horses, you know, dragging it. Horses, pieces of

horses all over, and the guy, he's in pieces, too. And it smelled like hell, you know, because it was hot then. That didn't bother me anymore.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: So I was cured of that. Thank God for that anyway.

Howe: Well, war's not an easy place to be.

Zanzucchi: No, it isn't.

Howe: So was there anything significant to you and your unit, when you're crossing the Rhine River? Anything you recall?

Zanzucchi: No, because the Rhine River was already crossed. I mean we just went over, more or less, as reserves until we got up on the front lines again, you know?

Howe: And like you said, right there on the Siegfried Line. That's where you were.

Zanzucchi: Yeah, we got to the Siegfried Line. We had to break that through. Siegfried Line, we got there and me and Joe Covino, we got—had this one bunker was stopping us and we couldn't get by it. Our company was sort of cut down there. We had to stay where we were. We couldn't get moving because this bunker was firing at us and all. So Joe Covino says, "Come on, come on with me. Bring a white pisser grenade with you." The thing you stick on the end of your rifle as a grenade, but this was a phosphorous grenade. So, he got one of those dragon teeth. He aimed that thing; they had a little slit in these bunkers where they were sticking their machine guns out or their guns and firing them. And he said...you know, he shot that thing, went right through the slit in there. They come barreling out of there. They all surrendered. So after that, we called him Pillbox Joe.

Howe: Wow.

Zanzucchi: I'll always remember that. And if you saw Joe Covino...he had a baby face. You'd think he was a little sissy or something. Son of a gun, he was the best soldier you ever saw.

Howe: Sounds like he was one heck of a shot, too.

Zanzucchi: Evidently. [Laughter] He still doesn't know how he did it—or he didn't. He used to tell me that it was just a lucky shot. But that's how we got through the Siegfried Line. Then...

Howe: Can you kind of illustrate the importance of that operation—breaking through the Siegfried Line? Why was that so important?

Zanzucchi: Well, because everybody thought you never could break through it, you know? They had all these pillboxes and these dragons' teeth where you couldn't send a tank through there, because they get—I don't know if you know what a dragon—what we call—it was a big cement block that was shaped like a tooth, you know. Square at the top and then, more or less, like an angle down there. Tanks couldn't get through there, actually. So there...and they had—there's was better, and the French line. I think the French line was called the Maginot line. The Germans got around them. I don't know how the hell they captured them, but they tore that one apart. But the Siegfried Line was real good, and it was just—we had to get the control, capture the pillboxes and capture them in there or clean out the pillboxes one way or another, so we could get through there. Otherwise, they had a pretty good, you know, covered pretty well with their machine guns. But we got through there.

Howe: Okay. So once the infantry was able to combat the German infantry defense, you would move on, and then the rest of the Army would help bring the tanks through?

Zanzucchi: Oh yeah. Well, they had roads that they could bring the tanks through then, see.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: They'd blow up some of the...I guess they might...I don't know if they blew up some of the dragon teeth so the tank could go through, but I don't know how they got them through after that because we just kept on moving. We didn't check to see how the tanks got through.

Howe: Do you remember anything else about clearing out pillboxes along the Siegfried Line?

Zanzucchi: Well, that was just this part here that we were in, our outfit was in. I don't know what they did down the line there, but, I mean, there were probably the same things. They just either got—I don't know how they would do it, but we were just lucky that Joe Covino shot that grenade through that slit. Who knows how long we would have been there otherwise? But our outfit got through there pretty good, so...

Howe: So what was next for you and your unit?

Zanzucchi: Well, we got through and went to—that's when we started going after the big German cities like Mannheim, Neunkirchen and Stuttgart. Mannheim, we got into Mannheim and our company was made. I had to stay there and guard. There was a little port there where they had ships come in, and we had driven them out of there, and our company was stationed there to protect it, you know. Just to sit there. So I was—we were there for about a week. While we were there, we noticed, me and Joe Covino noticed a building across the street. I'll tell you one thing, when we got into Mannheim, the German people were industrious or something, but they had all the roads cleared in Mannheim. All the rubble that was there, they had it piled off to the side in neat piles, and the streets were all beautiful...you could go through them like nobody's business! But anyway, we saw this building across the way, and we wondered what the heck is in that building. It was locked up. So me and Joe Covino went over there, we looked at it. It was locked, so we decided we'll break the lock and see what the heck is in there, you know? It was full of cars, all kinds of cars. [Laughs] And so we said, "Hey! Boy, this is neat. We get our own car now." I got myself a little—it was a three-wheel car; a wheel in the front that you steer and then the two wheels in the back. I never saw one before, so I says, "I'm gonna take that thing." And I was driving around Mannheim with that. Not too far from our outfit, but, you know. I used that. Then about the last day that we were gonna be there, all of a sudden, the two back wheels just fell off! They just caved in. So, I said, "Well, that was good. At least I had it until we left." But that we enjoyed. We didn't have to do nothing but guard that port there and that's all; we had guard duty there and that's all we did there for that. I can't remember where...then we got into a, captured Schwabisch Hall...What would you call it? I think it was a retreat for officers. It was a real. They were sent there for, you know, like rest. It was actually a—what would you call it?

Howe: R and R?

Zanzucchi: Yeah, but, I mean, the town was actually famous for...it was—what do you call it? Like a resort town.

Howe: Hot springs?

Zanzucchi: Uh huh. Something like that, you know. But it was all officers used to go there. So we got that, and that night we had...by the time we got to night, we had driven through most of it, so we were to hold the line there. So I had...So we got into this house, this one house, I call that our command post—me and Joe Covino were in there, and that's where we had everybody sorta spread out,

guarding everything. We were in this house and started looking around in it, and it must have been a high German officer must have stayed in there because he had all his uniforms perfectly in the closets and everything and had all kinds of...he had a movie. I found a movie camera and a regular Leica camera with an F1 lens on it and everything. I grabbed that and kept that. I later found out that when I got back home in the States, I went to a camera shop, and I was telling the guy about the camera that I found that got liberated. An F1 lens on it, Leica. He says, "Oh God," he says, "I'd have given you about 700 dollars for that." And at that time, 700 dollars was a hell of a lot of money. [Laughs]

Howe: Yeah.

Zanzucchi: But anyway, I got that camera, and I had film for it and everything. And I took a lot of pictures with it. I took pictures towards the end of the war. GI's crossing a blown bridge. Just pictures, not movie; I didn't take the movie camera. Somebody else took that. And—but it got stolen from me, and I know who stole it, too. So... but...

Howe: Do you still have...

Zanzucchi: That was later on. Yeah, we were—towards the end of the war, we were in reserve. This outfit that went across this bridge, I was taking pictures of it. It was a blown bridge. Half of it was in the water, and they were able to get across it to go to the other side, and I was taking all kinds of... There were tanks sitting next to me from another outfit, a tank outfit that was with us in reserve there. Then all of a sudden, we got called and we had to go into this town; there was an airport that we were going to take over. But they told us, "Don't, leave your packs here." We always went in with our packs on and everything. But they says, "Leave them here, the supply sergeant's gonna pick them up and hold them." And well, I took the camera and I put it in the pack, and I was sitting right next to this tank outfit, and this guy that—sergeant sitting up at the top of the tank, he was watching me the whole time. [Laughs] I know he took the damn thing. Because they wouldn't have taken it in the company because I would've seen if anybody was using it. So, nobody ever...So, I know he was the one that got it. But we went into this town, and we got our packs back later on, and my camera was gone. I was so damn mad.

Howe: Do you still have any of the pictures you took?

Zanzucchi: No, they were still in the camera. I had the film in there, but I hadn't taken it out yet. Because I hadn't used it all up and I had nowhere to develop them anyways. So I figured, leave it.

Howe: Rats.

Zanzucchi: But that was that. I lost that thing.

Howe: Your son, Vince, helped us a little bit. He described that you were involved with freeing Italian prisoners.

Zanzucchi: Oh yeah. I don't know what town that was in though, but we got into this one town...this was towards the end of the war though, you know. We were just, more or less, marching from town to town. Every now and then we'd run into a little, you know, resistance, but not too much. And we came into this town, and it was an Italian slave camp, actually is what it was. It wasn't like the Jewish concentration camps. These were labor camps. But they were all undernourished. You could tell, they were all a little skinny, thin, and right next to this camp that we finally came into. And they were all Italians, and I'm Italian, so I got talking to one of them, and he was saying that they're doing slave labor, and they were—they didn't get too much to eat. They were hungry, and just next door to them was a restaurant—a German restaurant, and a German woman ran it. A big bruiser of a woman. There were Germans in there, but they didn't do nothing, you know. These were civilians, they weren't soldiers. So, I says, "Well, come on with me." You know. Went in there and he was scared to come. He says, "Once you leave, they're gonna beat us up." I said, "No, because once we leave, somebody else is coming in." So, then he was okay. I went in there with my rifle. You know, ready. I told the woman, I says, "Get some food out here," I says, "Get it to—these guys want it." I says, "Don't worry about them." I threatened her, you know. She got madder than hell. I says, "You bring that food out here or we'll come in here and, you know. I'll get my gang over here." [Laughter] Well, she got all the food and brought it to the camp. And oh man, did they eat! Then, I didn't see them after that, so then when we pulled out another outfit came in.

Howe: Got it.

Zanzucchi: And I guess they sent them back to Italy or wherever they...that's the...I didn't run into one of those concentration camps, though. But it was half and half, there were more labor camps, these were. They didn't-- Like...Jewish camps

were different. Oh God, I'm glad I never saw any of that. They would've made me sick.

Howe: Yeah. How were you treated by the German people, the locals, as you were going through?

Zanzucchi: They weren't bad. Of course, they didn't fight against, you know, the people. They took it for granted that the war was practically over. Towards the end...in fact at the end there, when we were sort of an Army of Occupation, that's what they called us, we went from a different town every week, our company. And I had to go out and they'd tell me we're going to move to that town next week. And we'd stay a week in each town, and then somebody else would move in after us and I'd have to go... I had a—one of my men could speak G-, he was a German Jew, but he spoke German real well. So, I take him with me, and we go into the next town, and we'd have to pick out four or five houses and tell the people they had to get the heck out of there for the week that we were there. Go live with somebody else in the town, and they took it pretty well. In fact, I think the last town I was in...Gelkoenigshofen [not sure?]. We went in there and we were getting these houses, and then all of a sudden, we come on to German girls. They weren't women. Well, they were older, but girls. And we told them they had to get the heck out of their house, and they were getting madder than hell. So we got them out of there and found out we didn't need their houses, so me and this—what was his name...Hank Greenberg. He says, "Well, they're beautiful, good-lookin' women." So I said, "Well, let's go over there and give them back their houses." You know. And he wanted to go with this younger girl because she hated Jews. She didn't know he was a Jew. [Laughs] She thought he was a German. He says, "I'm gonna fix that girl. I'm gonna screw the hell out of her, and then when we leave, I'm gonna tell her I'm a Jew." And I was with this other girl. She was a beautiful girl, but boy, was she tough. They have—I don't know how you'd explain it. They kept their cattle, like, in the second basement. They slept on the second floor and the cattle were all... They had a thing there where when it rained, it would collect the rainwater, and that's where they would put all the manure the animals made. And then, they'd put that in big tanks, like real big gallon tanks, and they'd take that out to the fields and spray that water on the field. That was their fertilizer. And they could pick that manure up. I tried it, and that manure weighed a ton. This girl was pickin' that thing up and throwin' it. [Laughs] But then, that's when I got called back to come. We were going back, oh there were about four of us sergeants were called that we were gonna go, takin' out of the company. We were gonna go

back home; we were going home on furlough. Then, we were going to go over to the Pacific, to Okinawa. We were gonna have our staging area to go into Japan at that time, you know. We were gonna home for thirty day furlough, and then we were gonna be sent to Okinawa, which we didn't like too much. But we got to go from there to Gelkoenigshofen [?]. That's where I was sent home, half-way across the Atlantic. The war ended over there. They threw the atom bomb down there on Japan so, that ended the war. So we just came home and got furloughs, and then discharged.

Howe: Okay. Before we talk about the end of the war and going home and, you know, getting out of the service...I think your daughter mentioned while you were overseas, you learned for the first time something interesting about your family. You got a letter?

Zanzucchi: Oh yeah. Well, that was personal. My mother and father had separated, and I never knew it. Growing up, I never knew. I was told my father was dead. I had a stepfather now, who was taking real good care of us. I admired him. He was a good man. But my mother...well there was a story. My father went to Italy. My mother was working in a— not working, but she was being raised by a bunch of nuns over there because her mother couldn't take care of her. So, she sent her to the nunnery or whatever you call it in Italy, and that's when she learned how to cook. She was the greatest cook you ever wanna meet, my mother. But anyway, my father came; he used to go back and forth to the United States and back to Italy. And he was looking for a—he wanted a wife, so they, I don't know, they told him about my mother, I guess. That's the story, I get.. So he wanted to marry her. She didn't want to marry him, though. And I guess they forced her to marry him from what I understand. They locked her up in the basement or something and said she's gotta. So I guess she did finally marry him, and they came to the States and she had—my older sister was born there, and my brother and I were born. I was the third one; I was the baby then when all this junk happened. But anyway, my father, from what I—the stories I get, my father was real jealous. He wasn't a guy that went around to dances and stuff like that. He didn't care for that, and my mother loved to dance, like, every time. They got into this coal mining town in Nanty-Glo, Pennsylvania, and they'd have dances, every now and then, and my mother wanted to go to them all. She danced, and I guess she was dancing with this one guy, Albert Tankretti. That was when my stepsister was born, that was her father. Anyway, this was later. But they started dancing, and I guess my father—I guess my mother fell for this guy, was a good lookin' son of a gun. He was, he could've been a movie star. He was falling

for her too, I guess. Anyway, my father was getting kinda jealous, I guess. And one day, my mother—this guy Albert Tankretti had parked his car up away from the house by the woods up past... My mother went up there with me to meet him, and they said my father happened to come home from work or some place, and saw them up there, and went and got his shotgun and started coming up there, and they saw him coming with it. They jumped in the car and took off, and they went to Ohio. They moved into Parma, Ohio. My mother was born in Parma, Italy, and that's where my stepsister, Josephine Tankretti, she was born there in Parma, Ohio. By Tankretti. So that's how we got—I got there. But I never... I was probably about nine months old from what I understand, so I didn't remember any of that. I was always told...I never met my— I don't even remember my father because I was too young. But I was told that he was dead, you know, and that's what I believed all my life. Then, when I got in the service, all of a sudden, on my nineteenth birthday, we had mail call, and I get this letter. It's a pretty thick letter, and I look at who it was from. Who the heck is sending me a letter this thick? It was from my—his name was Bonfilio. That's what I knew his name as, Bonfilio Zanzucchi. It's from New York. Bonfilio? I start thinking...that was my father's name! So, I open the letter and it was my sister, Mary. I never met her, and my brother Joe, who I never met him. But she was writing the letter, and she was explaining it all in the letter about all this, and I couldn't even believe it. I says, "What the hell?" You know? So what I did was, I sent the letter to my stepsister. She was living with my mother now, you know, and my stepfather. And I sent it to her and told her... "You try to figure out what we should do about this, whether you should let my mother know about it or what." You know? So I guess they did. My stepfather even knew about it. So...and she wrote to me, yeah, that they knew all about it, that it's true. In fact, so...that's how I found out I had a father, and a sister, and a brother that I never knew about. [Laughs]

Howe: Wow...

Zanzucchi: So when I went to Camp Shanks—that's, you know, to go overseas—Joe Covino lived in New York. His father lives in New York. So, at the Camp Shanks there, there was a, you know, you couldn't leave the camp because we were going overseas, but they had a— everybody knew that there was a hole in the fence. If you could get to it, get out there, as long as you got back in time for, you know, roll call in the morning, because we were there for about four or five days. So, what you do is you go over there and get out through there, and get on the bus and go to New York, and then come back the same way, you know? So he says,

“Well, I know where that is. We'll go over there, I'll drop you off there, and then I'll go to see my father.” You know. So that's what he did. He dropped me off over at my father's. I had his address when we got over there, and I rang the bell, and it was nighttime, and he wasn't home. So, I said, I'll sit here and wait for him, you know. It was in one of those New York at that time, practically every house was right up against the next one. It was like apartments. He had an apartment there, so I sat there on the stoop waiting, and see this man coming down the street. So I got up, and I started walking towards him. When I got up to him, I looked at him and I said, “I think I'm your son, and I think you're my father.” Stupid. And we looked at each other, and he started crying and, you know. So he said, “Yeah, we gotta go see my sister, Mary”, Because she was married and she was living with her mother in law. Her husband was in the navy. So he says we gotta go see Mary. My brother was in the service already. So we went over to the house and she wasn't home. So we got there and her mother-in-law let us in, and she says, “Well, Mary's...” she was a telephone operator, one of those old ones where they had to stick the things—I don't know. But anyways, that was her job. She was gonna be coming home any minute now, any time, and sure enough she was coming, so they said, “When she gets here, stay behind the door.” You know, when she opens the door, stay behind it. So that's what I did. When she walked in, she said, “Pop, what are you doing here?” She says, “Is there something wrong?” And I says, “Hi, Mary.” She turned around and looked at me, and let out a scream, and jumped in my arms. [Laughs] I'll always remember that. That's how I met my family.

Howe: That's really awesome. Where were you when you received the letter?

Zanzucchi: I was in Camp Barkeley, Texas.

Howe: Okay, alright.

Zanzucchi: I wasn't in Van Dorn yet.

Howe: Yeah.

Zanzucchi: And right from there, I went to Camp Van Dorn.

Howe: When did you meet your brother?

Zanzucchi: At...this was at this town I was telling you, where we met those two girls in Gelkoenigshofen[?]. Well, all we did was sit and play cards all day long. Our squad, you know. I had this one house that we stayed in, and it was up on the

second floor. I hear this Jeep pull up, and somebody's yelling, telling one of the guards out there, he says, "Is there a Sergeant Zanzucchi up there?" They said, "Yeah, he's upstairs." And right away I said, "That's my brother." I don't know what the heck made me think about it. When he came up, it was my brother. He was a clerk in some outfit, I don't know. Can't remember what outfit he was in, but he found out where our outfit was and he found out, you know, where our company was, and he came around going from each house trying to find out where Sergeant Zanzucchi is. That's how we found each other, and we walked around the town, talking. I still don't know what the heck we talked about to this day. That was seventy years ago, so...

Howe: Wow.

Zanzucchi: Yeah, that's how I met him. And he stood up for our wedding. He wasn't the best man, but he was one of the bridegrooms for mine and my wife's wedding.

Howe: Very cool. What else do you remember from your time in Germany?

Zanzucchi: Well...

Howe: The air mattress?

Zanzucchi: Oh. Well, that's towards the end of the war where we're just marching, more or less, from town to town. You know, spread out and all that, going into the town, sometimes there would be any little skirmish or sometimes there wouldn't be nobody there. So we were just going little, you know, slow, but just in case somebody was there. And anyway, we come to this, I found this air mattress in, I don't know whether it was Schwäbisch Hall or where, but I found this air mattress and I said, "Jeez, that's nice. I'm gonna dig my foxhole. I can lay that down in there, it'll be nice and comfortable. You know, I can blow it up..." And so, sure. I pumped all the air out of it and put it on my backpack, and it stuck way up, you know. So anyway, we're getting to this one town, I don't even know what the heck the name of it was, and we were going downhill through the town, and all of a sudden, we hear firing there. One guy falls down and we all, right away there's somebody there, you know. So I got into—this was ploughed up field—I got into one of the little plough patterns there, and got into there and shoveled a little trench in there with my shovel and got down, so in case I could see up there. But we didn't know what was there, whether it was a whole outfit, or a couple of guys, sharpshooters or what. The captain was supposed to figure that out. Captain Barton. Like a dummy, he says—a rookie that we had just got in there—says, "Go down and ask the captain what he can do, or the lieutenant."

And this poor kid goes down there and gets shot. You know, I saw him get shot. I says, "What the hell did he send him down there for, in this wide open field?" You know. Says, "Ask the lieutenant or captain what he should do." Doesn't he know what the hell to do?" He was up on the hill there safe...oh...I was so mad. I don't know if they ever transferred him out of our outfit or what happened, but I couldn't stand that son of a gun. He was so *dumb*. How the hell he made captain, I'll never know. But anyway, I got into this little trench-like, but evidently my big pack must have been sticking up because this guy was trying to hit me, whoever it was. Because you could hear the bullets hit in front of me, but I was down a little bit too low. I was throwin' dirt, you know. I mean, but he never got to me for some reason or another. I think it was about four or five shots hit in front of me there. Anybody saw that backpack, you know, figured, "Hey, I got a good shot!" But he never hit me. [Laughs] Was always short. Then, when all of a sudden, they finally got another, I think E Company came over on the flank and got rid of them—or whoever it was. And then they come by, and so we were able to get up and I took that pack, and I says...I ripped it off my pack, and I took that bed, and I slammed it away. I'm not gonna have that thing anymore.

Howe: Not worth getting' killed over. Yeah. What else do you recall?

Zanzucchi: Oh Gee...I don't know, that's so far back. It's hard to remember even the towns that we got into. Right after Jepsheim, we go...where the heck did we go right after that? I can't even remember that anymore. That's...we had once where I think we came by the...oh, we were up by the Blaise River [?], and what happened there was, we were there for—and then we were...our platoon was supposed to—they were gonna do an attack to our left. You're gonna start a big attack there. And they wanted us to put a diversionary action somewhere where we were to make them think that that's where the attack was coming from. But we had to cross this little—it was a small river. The Blaise River, I think it was called. Engineers had thrown a rope across and had a rowboat where we could pull ourselves across in a rowboat, and we got across there. There was nobody there, you know, to tell us. We were supposed to go into this town and just raise a lot of hell. You know, shoot and scream like we were attacking, and then we were supposed to go back. Fall back. We got into this town, and we started, and I got in. Me and Joe Covino, we got into this one house, and we got in there, the basement. There were a bunch of Germans down there. Sitting there. Just women and civilians. There were, you know, they heard all the shootings, so they were down in their basement. We didn't do nothing, we just told them, just

stay there, you know. We said it in English, we didn't say it in German. And we came back out and decided, 'Well, okay, now we've made enough noise, we're going back.' So we got back, and just as we were getting back, evidently they must have come by there. A machine gun was set up and I just got across. Me and Joe got across on the other side, and there were some more coming, and that's when the machine guns opened up. I don't think they hit anybody, but they started opening up, and so we got the guys over, and we had one guy who was called the Mad Russian. He was a Russian, and he carried a BAR. He wanted a BAR— Browning Automatic Rifle—and that was a heavy gun, but he didn't care. He wanted that because that's what he wanted to kill Germans, you know. Well anyway, he ran past me as he got up there—because he came up on the boat and he was getting up on the other side over there. Run past me, and he was gonna set up. I guess he was gonna set up his machine gun. But we never saw him anymore. He disappeared. We don't know what the heck happened to him or what. Never saw him. We couldn't figure out what happened to him. Whether he was blown up or...because they started shelling. They had mortar shells coming in on us and we thought, maybe he got hit by a mortar shell or something. Well, as we were walking back to our outfit on this road, I met this lieutenant and another guy. And this lieutenant was, a lieutenant that I was in the States when they had maneuver practice, you know, down there, I was his driver. In the Jeep. I was his Jeep driver and he was an umpire. He would go around saying, "You're dead, you're this and that." You know. And I was driving him around and I met him there, and I said, ah, I told him, I said "Jesus, this isn't like maneuvers, is it lieutenant?" He said "No, it sure isn't." Then all of a sudden, a mortar shell landed right in front of us and blew a big hole in his elbow. The other kid got hit. I didn't get nothing. All I got...a gun powder taste in my mouth. That was it. I looked at the lieutenant, said, "Well, you've got a million-dollar wound now." I said, "You're going home." So soon, too. The other guy, I don't know what happened to him. Some guy that was from his outfit, I guess. So I don't know. Didn't know who he was. But that's one of the close spots that I came to getting hit, and I think it was one of our shells, actually. One of ours that just fell short. Because I don't think it was from the Germans because they only were shooting the machine gun. I didn't see or hear any shells from them. It was our mortar shells that were going over there, and this was just a short round or something. Fell right in front of us. So, I guess the Lord must have been looking after me or something, because I came through okay, all the way through.

Howe: Never wounded?

Zanzucchi: Never wounded, no.

Howe: Okay. You said that the...a lot of the time you were there it was cold?

Zanzucchi: Well, they said that was one of the worst winters they'd had in fifteen years. That was when we were up in, you know, Colmar, the Vosges Mountains. When we were attached to the 3rd Division. I mean, it was cold! Freezing cold. That's why, like I said why we captured Jepsheim so quickly, because we wanted to get out of the damn cold.

Howe: Right. During your basic training, did you have any indoctrination, any acclamation to these kinds of conditions?

Zanzucchi: No, not in Louisiana, no. Because that was the hottest...Louisiana, I think, was the worst state I've ever known. Heat and humidity. In fact, my mother and father came down because I told them if I don't hurry up, they don't send me overseas, I'm gonna go AWOL. You know, and they got worried, so they came down to see me, and they stayed in—I can't remember. One town there in Mississippi, right near the camp there. And my mother was telling me, she says, she'd wash her clothes at night, you know, because they sweat during the day so much. She'd hang them out; they never dried because it was so humid down there. Never dried. And I mean, we'd go out on the, you know, maneuvers during the day, practicing infantry training. I mean, we'd come back, I mean, we were soaking wet. It was so hot down there. Then, we got to Germany, freezing cold. France and Germany: cold. But...

Howe: Did the Army supply you well enough for these conditions?

Zanzucchi: Oh, yeah. I think we were. I was...we had it pretty good. We had overcoats on. Boots. At least our outfit did. I don't know about any other outfits. We were well equipped, except that, you know, cold is cold, that's all. You're sitting out, you're laying in the frozen ground, you know. It's pretty hard to keep warm.

Howe: Getting shot at.

Zanzucchi: Yeah. Although we used to have a buddy, you know, when we had these trenches. You'd have the buddy trenches; you'd sleep a guy with you. There's two of you always in the trench, you know, when you dig it, you know, when you're digging in for the night. And always just this one little guy we had in our outfit. His name was Bugay. Always, I'd pick him to be my...heat came from his

body. You'd sit next to him, and you were nice and warm. I said, "Bugay, you're with me."

Howe: Nice. Did you ever meet up with Bugay after your time?

Zanzucchi: No. Actually, the only guy I met after the war was Hank Greenberg. He got married and he was coming through there. The first thing he told me was, don't tell her—my wife—anything about Gelkoenegshofen [?]. [Laughs]. And then I met, I have met a good buddy of mine that was in the supply outfit. He lived in Chicago. We got to be good friends back here when I... because he found out where I lived and he called me. So, we saw each other quite a bit.

Howe: Nice.

Zanzucchi: That's the only two.

Howe: So you said, from Gelkoenigshofen, that's where you found out the 63rd was going back home?

Zanzucchi: Yeah. Well, no, they didn't go back home. There was just a bunch of noncommissioned officers. Sergeants were going over back home because we were going over—we were gonna—mostly training, to train, and, you know. I guess we were gonna be put in charge of squads or platoons. Sending all noncommissioned officers there. And we were supposed to go to Okinawa after our thing. But that was only us. That wasn't the whole division.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: Rest of 'em were still there for quite a while. In fact, they had all bunch of new young kids come in after that, too. Kids I don't even know about, because I was looking at the rosters later on. People I had that came in after the war, and they were just with the unit, that's all. The 63rd Division. They didn't see any combat or anything. That was after the war was over.

Howe: Okay. So August 15th, 1945: that's when they dropped the atom bomb.

Zanzucchi: Mhm, we're halfway across the Atlantic, coming home.

Howe: You were already headed home?

Zanzucchi: We were heading home, yeah.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: Because when they picked us up, we were at the—they stationed us at Le Havre again. Up in this ridge, mountain or whatever it was, and we were camped out there till our ship, we were ready to go. Our ship was ready to take us back home, and that's when, for some reason or another, the rumor was going around that the ship that we were going on needed a lot of repair. We were scared. [Laughs] I said, “God damn, we gotta go on that ship?” And the worst thing about that was when we went to Le Havre, I had myself a Colt .45 [pistol]. You know, the issue that usually officers carry, and I wanted one real bad, and I finally got one. I traded a Luger for it, and when we got up in the mountains, up in this Le Havre, the rumor went around, if you've got weapons that aren't assigned to you, you can be court marshalled, you know, and sent to the brig or whatever. Well, I saw that, I said, “Well God, I got this Colt .45.” And I got scared to death. I said, “They're gonna search me and find it. Now I won't be able to go home!” So, I don't know, I got a piece of oil cloth, wrapped it up, dug a hole up in this area here and buried it. Got back to the station, they never even looked at us. I was so damn mad...

Howe: You never know.

Zanzucchi: Nope.

Howe: Yeah. So where did you arrive when you came back home? Where did you pull in?

Zanzucchi: I pulled in Camp Grant. That was where I was discharged from.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: I was put for about a week. I was with—me and a couple of...a lieutenant and another sergeant were sort of discharged. We were just giving the discharge papers to the recruits that were coming back and being discharged. That was our job while we were there, until we got discharged.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: So then, when I got my discharge, then I went through the same thing.

Howe: Now, you said that you'd been talking with Joe Covino in New York. Was this around the same time that you guys were considering reenlisting?

Zanzucchi: Yeah. Well, right after that.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: Because we went home, and I don't know, we didn't have a job, you know, we were wondering what the heck to do and all this and that, and he called me and said he wanted..." Why don't we reenlist? "I said, "I'm having, you know, I hate it here, you know." He said, "Me too," he said, "let's reenlist." Because we could have gotten, you know, advancement in our thing, so we were going to. Then, when I told my folks that, then, like I said, my mother started crying. "Oh, please don't go." And I said, "Okay." And I called Joe and told him that. He said, "Yeah, my father's doing the same thing." Because he didn't have a mother, I guess she passed away some time ago. But he said, "My father was crying about it too, so." But he was—he became pretty famous in New York. He was a—he always told me he was a librarian. But I didn't realize, I thought librarian, you know, stamped books as they go out. No, he was in charge of the library over there. But he was, he wrote a couple of books, and he met some of these big famous authors that were out there. I had pictures of him with them, you know. I didn't realize he was that famous. [Laughs]

Howe: Wow.

Zanzucchi: But, like I said, if you saw him, this baby face. And this guy was the best soldier you'd ever wanna meet. Not scared of anything.

Howe: So you said that you decided not to reenlist. So what'd you decide to do next?

Zanzucchi: Go to work. That's the only thing I could do. I probably could have gone to college under the GI Bill, but I don't know what...I didn't, evidently. I wasn't too crazy about school. I was good, I mean, I had—I was, you know, my IQ when I went in the service was real high. In fact, I went to an Army Specialized Training Program while I was in the service when I first got in because they picked a bunch of guys with the high IQ's. That IQ test they give you, and I was pretty high in that. And I got sent to University of Illinois under...called Army, ASTP—Army Specialized Training Program. We were gonna be for engineering. But that didn't work out because they were trying to teach a four-year college engineer course in four weeks. Four months. After a while, nobody even went to class anymore. We used to sit in our frat houses there and just play cards, all day. But all of a sudden, they closed that program down because they found out it wasn't working.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: But the only one they kept going was the language one. Because they wanted to get interpreters.

Howe: Okay. Where did you go to work?

Zanzucchi: Well, next door to me was a Hlavacek Florist. I was goin' there, workin' there for a while. Then, I went to—this guy was a neighbor, a close friend of ours. He was looking for an apprentice for plastering. He was a plasterer. So, I went and tried that out. I said, "Okay, I like it."

Howe: And that was here in Chicago?

Zanzucchi: No, it was up in Wilmette, Illinois—a suburb of Chicago. I never worked in Chicago.

Howe: Alright. And from what I remember you saying, you met someone, you got married?

Zanzucchi: Yeah, I got married in Wilmette, there. Met her at her sister's wedding. She was one of the bridesmaids. Her sitting there; me; I had my mother and my sister. We were standing at a—everybody was dancing, and at that time all these Italians...this was an Italian wedding. They used to have, you just had—all they had in their... all night long was beer and roast beef sandwiches. They didn't have no big meals or anything. And you could have roast beef sandwiches all night long. All the beer you wanted. So I was standing in the aisle, they were dancing out there, and I said to my sister, I said, "Well, I'm gonna go get myself a sandwich." And just at that moment this girl comes by and says, "I'll get you one." She was one of the bridesmaids. She says, "I'll get you one, just stay here." And she takes off. You know...I'm waiting. She ain't gonna come back here anymore. I was about ready to go, and then all of a sudden, then she comes up. She says, "Here you are." And she hands it to me. And I looked at her as she walked away. She was real happy, peppy. I told—I looked at my sister. I said, "that's the girl I'm gonna marry." Just like that. I said, "I'm gonna marry that girl. That's the girl I'm gonna marry." Next day, I got a date with her and everything, and we started goin' together and...

Howe: What's your wife's name?

Zanzucchi: Lena.

Howe: Lena.

Zanzucchi: Yeah. She passed away about five years ago.

Howe: I'm sorry.

Zanzucchi: Yeah. Everybody loved that woman. She was always...she was one of these optimists. Everything was great, always happy, loved good times. Any time we went to parties or something, she was always one of the...head of the party or something like that. Everybody would invite Lena. Don't worry about me.

Howe: Nice.

Zanzucchi: But she was the greatest thing you'd ever wanna meet. All her granddaughters...talk to her granddaughters over here. They still talk about her. They still are real sad. Oh, they miss her so much. Yep. She was one something good. Best thing that ever happened to me. Mmhm.

Howe: Do you guys live in Wilmette, or...?

Zanzucchi: Yeah.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: Yeah, we lived in Wilmette, all of us. Let's see, we lived in Wilmette until...when? We built our house in Wilmette, and then we moved and that's when we...then after that we moved to Round Lake. Not Round Lake, but...what the heck was the town we moved to? Yeah, Round Lake. We moved to Round Lake. That's where we bought a house there in Round Lake; sold the one in Wilmette.

Howe: And did you always work in construction?

Zanzucchi: No, no. In Wilmette, I became a mailman, a postman. My brother-in-law was working at it. My wife's brother-in-law was a mailman, and I was working for my brother-in-law. I was a glazer, then and I got pissed off at him. Something he did. I quit on him. Then, I went to work for another guy, glass outfit. They wanted me to—after a while they wanted me to run the office, but I didn't like the one. There were two owners; I didn't like the one owner. They were both Jewish, but he was a bastard. The other one was a hell of a nice guy. They were—oh, they wanted me bad. They were gonna pay my mortgage for me if I had it. They were gonna give me the money for it. But then, that's when I found out that I had quit my mailman's job, and I was working, you know, doing that. Then, one of the mailmen called me up. He was a superintendent, and he says, "Why don't you come back to work for the post office? They went on strike, and now they're making good money." By the time when I quit, they were making nothing, you know? Now, they're making real good money. "Oh," I says, "Well, no. I don't

know." I says, "I don't think so," I says, "I got this job here. I'm thinking about...I don't know whether I'm gonna take it or not." A couple of days later, he calls me, he says, "You better come to work. I got your old job, old route back. I got all the time that you lost all back for you, like your sick time and vacation time, all back for you." He said, "If you come to work now." So then, I was talking to my wife. Well, may as well. Pay was good at that time. Real good, actually. Mailmen make good money now. When I joined, they were making...what, sixty cents an hour?

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: At that time that wasn't too bad, but it wasn't good.

Howe: And the health benefits, pension?

Zanzucchi: Yeah, then they went on strike. That's when the post office went on strike, and now they're making good money. Now, just the starting pay is about sixteen dollars an hour, and you put a lot of overtime in too, so you make good money then. We lived good. And my wife was working. We were making good money then.

Howe: Very nice. And you have a huge family with you.

Zanzucchi: Oh yeah, I had eight kids with her. We had eight children. She was happy with every one of them. She loved 'em all.

Howe: Wow. How many sons, how many daughters?

Zanzucchi: We have five daughters and three sons. We were planning on a dozen, but then after the eighth one she says, "You know, after Jeffery's here," she says, "If we have any more," she says, "When he grows up, I'll be so old I won't be able to take good care of them." So, I said, "We better stop having them." I said, "Okay." I had a vasectomy.

Howe: Stop it at the pass.

Zanzucchi: So we quit at eight.

Howe: Any of them join the military?

Zanzucchi: No, no. Well, a world war wasn't going on. It was all these, you know, like, Korea and them going on. Well, there was only the three boys, and I wouldn't let them join. I told them, "Forget about it." You know. It was a different war

when we fought—fought these Korean wars, you never know, like a Japanese, Afghanistan, all that. The fighting over there, you don't know who the hell you're fighting. You don't know whether the civilian is gonna kill you or other... So I said, "Don't ever try to join."

Howe: Were you ever involved with any veteran's organizations? The VFW or...?

Zanzucchi: I belonged to one—American Legion, in Wilmette—for a while.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: But I didn't stay in too much. Because I was...we had formed an Italian-American society up in the North Shore. Up towards Wilmette, Winnetka, there were a lot of Italians there. So we made a society up there. I was president for a while, and treasurer for a while. For quite a while, actually. So we got that goin' and we were doing that. But nothing to do with military.

Howe: Okay.

Zanzucchi: After I joined that, I didn't do too much with the American Legion.

Howe: And keeping in touch with veterans that you served with, like Joe. How frequently would you meet with those guys?

Zanzucchi: Well, Joe Covino wasn't too much. We'd call, write a couple of letters, a few letters, and then he...we never saw each other after that. So, we didn't write any more, evidently. And then, I found out he passed away. I didn't know that. I looked up, I put his name on Google. It came up, and it gave me his history. That's how I found out all the people he was with. But he had passed away too, and a couple other guys that I know. But I don't know if any of them—many of them aren't alive now anymore, anyway. Because they're probably like me, are in their eighties and nineties now. And I'm...what, eighty-nine and a half? So I'm almost there, almost ninety already.

Howe: Doin' good.

Zanzucchi: Yeah.

Howe: Was there anything that we didn't talk about that you thought we would discuss or anything you'd like to add?

Zanzucchi: I don't know...problem is I can't remember too much, and if I don't even remember names of the towns anymore, we were in, all that. It's hard to remember that after seventy years.

Howe: Sure.

Zanzucchi: But, that's about it, I guess.

Howe: I guess—one last question I just thought of. What do you recall as being your proudest moment while serving?

Zanzucchi: My proudest was getting my battlefield promotions. Because everybody said they thought I was a fuck up. You know, and when we were in the States, they were gonna send me to the Pacific. Then, I made the first battlefield promotion, was mine. When we got overseas, I was the first one to be promoted. That made me feel good. Thinkin', you know, at first, they didn't want me there, and now all of a sudden, here I am. And then, I got promoted again to staff sergeant and tech sergeant. So, made me feel good knowing that they thought a lot about me. Especially when...one time I remember at the Siegfried Line—that's when I was made a platoon sergeant—I was staff sergeant then. I was going through dragon teeth, getting everybody set up, you know. And it comes up, and it's quite a ways away from where we...and all of a sudden, I see this, like, a little trench between two dragon's teeth, and there's a bunch of my men there. And I looked, "What the hell are you guys doing here?" And one of them says, "Oh, boy. Now we're okay, Sergeant Zanzucchi is here." That made me feel good, saying, "We're okay now, Sergeant Zanzucchi is here." Then, that's when I had them set up for a counter-attack, because I had a machine gun there and everything. I don't know how they got there. They said they just got there, they saw this trench, they went into this trench, you know. Get out of...it was down low between two dragon's teeth. I guess the Germans had made it for them to shoot in. That's...

Howe: So you felt like you were pretty well respected. Not just by the officers, but also by your men.

Zanzucchi: The men respected me; they really liked me. Because I never shirked from anything. If they asked for volunteers, me and Joe Covino, we always volunteered. For some reason or another, it was us two, mostly. I guess they liked that. They saw that we weren't gonna just send them out and hide and let us hide. We went there, we'd lead them. So, we weren't scared for some reason or another. I don't know how come I was never that scared. I always thought,

'I'm gonna come out of this.' I always figured, 'There's too many of us here, they're not gonna hit me.' That was my idea.

Howe: And you were right...and you were right. Wow.

Zanzucchi: That's about all. I can't remember too much more. The only thing is that last time that we were there, like I said, that's where I lost my camera. We were at the bridge. We were supposed to go into this town, and we were going house to house, and all of a sudden, down this one road where the house we were in, there was this big Tiger tank that's coming down there. Down the road. I figure, "Oh God." You know. There's a Tiger tank, and all we had were grenades. What the hell are they gonna do, you know? We had no bazooka no nothing, you know? But he rolled past us, didn't do nothing to us, didn't fire his cannon yet. Evidently, I don't know why he was coming down there, but that's it. Then, we got the airfield there, so.

Howe: You don't think he saw you?

Zanzucchi: Well, we were in the house.

Howe: Oh, okay.

Zanzucchi: We were hiding in the house there. Yeah, we were going from house to house. We weren't gonna go step in front of the tank, that's for sure. It was the end of the war, we say, "Hey now, we're not gonna get killed now." [Laughs]

Howe: Yeah.

Zanzucchi: Yeah, but that was our last piece of battle there.

Howe: What was it like coming home? How were you treated by your neighbors, your friends, your family?

Zanzucchi: The family. That's all. I didn't...I mean the neighbors...Nobody—no big deal, actually. Just a family, but...that's all.

Howe: Did you feel welcome?

Zanzucchi: Oh, yeah. In fact, my stepfather was real proud because I'd gone in as a rookie and here I came back home as a tech sergeant. You know, made him proud. That's why I say he raised us good. He was a good father to me.

Howe: Nice. And do you feel like your experience in the military benefitted you in civilian life?

Zanzucchi: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I was able to, oh, I don't know, take orders and give orders, you know? And I just wouldn't take any crap from anybody. Even when I was a mailman, I did my job real well. My customers—my people—always sent notices through the mail, to the postmaster how great I was and everything. Especially, I used to read all the magazines while I was delivering mail: *Time* and *Newsweek*. And they used to write that, they said, “We never could figure out how he could be reading and delivering mail, and never make a mistake.”

Howe: Nice.

Zanzucchi: I loved it. I loved being a mailman. I enjoyed it. I had twenty...well, about seventeen years I did that. I enjoyed it.

Howe: Nice. Awesome.

Zanzucchi: Yeah, that's...but I was a Wilmette mailman. It's a good post office to work for. Had a good superintendent there and he loved to play golf, and I loved to play golf, and we had a couple of guys in there who were good golfers. Every now and then, he'd come up, he says, “You're sick aren't you, Zanzucchi?” He says, “Okay, sort your mail and get it ready for the next guy. You can go home. Meet me at the golf course.” [Laughs] And he'd told these other two guys the same thing; we'd all take sick leave. He was a good superintendent.

Howe: Anything else you wanna talk about?

Zanzucchi: No, nothing. That's about it, I guess. I hope it's enough.

Howe: You know, I say this every time. They're your stories and we're very, very honored to have you here, and honored...

Zanzucchi: I have good buddies in the service, that's...I met a couple of them, there's a couple that got killed, but...had one guy, his name was Darginio; he was Italian. Good lookin' son of a gun, and always happy, always smiling, always jokin'. He was one of the first guys that was killed over there. I cried, actually, when I heard. I don't know where he got killed. And then this German boy, he spoke German real well. Finally got him as an interpreter in the battalion. Made him interpreter to, you know, question the prisoners and everything, and one day we were coming down this road. There's this body laying in the middle of the road, and it was him. He had a bullet hole right through the middle of his head. They

told us he was trying to get this sharpshooter—was up there, I guess, a sniper, and he was blocking. I guess he was preventing this guy's outfit from moving forward, so he tried to go out there and talk to him. He was talking to him in German, you know, "Please, we don't want to hurt you." Why don't you give up?" And all this. He was being real...that guy shot him. Killed him. This was towards the end of the war, too, poor kid. Germans. He was a German Jew.

Then, one time we were...this one time towards the end of the war too, we were going from town to town, and we were coming to this forest. So, the town was on the other side of this forest, and so we had one squad. My company was going to go through the town, so we had to go through this forest, so we had one squad go through, left and one squad go through the forest, and my squad was supposed to go around the other end. There was no forest there, though. But we could get to the road and come in on the side. Then, we get about half-way past the forest and we get a hurry up call to come back. Hurry up. We get back there. The squad that was going through, down the middle of the forest, they were all in a line, all leaned over, dead. Some sniper, SS sniper—they were going through here, and they had a regular Indian, you know, American Indian. He was, like, the guide, and this German, he was an SS sniper. He captured him. Then, we found later, he said, "The guy put me in the foxhole that he had and just shot those guys one right after the other. They were right in a line." And then, he said that's when they started shooting and throwing shells in on him. And he said—he pushed me down into the trench, and he stayed up there, and was still shooting. He sat through all their shots, he said, then he took off and left me there. So *he* didn't get killed, but the rest of the squad, every one of them, the whole squad. Oh, Jesus. That scared us. Because this didn't take about another week, and the war was over. That's what scared the hell out of us.

Howe: And the guide survived?

Zanzucchi: Oh, I don't know what happened to the... You mean the German that shot these guys?

Howe: No, the platoon guide.

Zanzucchi: The who?

Howe: You said the platoon had a—or the squad had a Native American guide?

Zanzucchi: Oh, yeah. Yeah. He was a scout. Because I figured he was Indian, he was a good scout, I guess. But he...yeah, the German let him live. He just took off after that, when he started shelling the place, and let him stay in his trench there that he had dug, so. But that was the worst thing that I'd ever seen was these guys...all right in a row, too. I mean, just evenly spaced practically, because that's all they were doing. They were just walking in there, you know. We were lucky that we weren't the ones that were picked to go through there.

Howe: Yeah.

Zanzucchi: So I had all the luck in the world with me, it seems like.

Howe: It sounds like it.

Zanzucchi: That's about all I can think of.

Howe: Alright. Well, we appreciate you spending time with us today, and we thank you for your service.

Zanzucchi: Thank you.

Howe: And as a token of our appreciation, this is a coin from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. It's called a challenge coin. It kind of represents...

Zanzucchi: Yeah, I've seen them. Mmhm.

Howe: There you go. Probably received a few yourself by now.

Zanzucchi: Nice. I'm going to put that in my wallet.

Howe: Yeah. We appreciate you.

Zanzucchi: Okay. Thank you.

Howe: Thank you.

[Interview ends]