

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL A. CATERA

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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HILLSBOROUGH, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Jessica Catera: This begins an interview with Michael A. Catera on March 5, 2005, in Hillsborough, New Jersey, with Jessica Catera ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: ... and Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

SH: Mr. Catera, thank you so much for taking time to talk with us today. To begin the interview could you tell me where and when you were born?

Michael Catera: I was born on September 26, 1915 in Long Island City, New York.

SH: To begin, tell us about your father and his background?

MC: My father was born in Italy in the town of Putignano, in Bari, and he was born February 11, 1887 and he came to this country around 1898.

SH: He was about ten years old.

MC: Yes, maybe, he was no more than twelve. Well, anyway he came to this country and he went to Staten Island, New York and

SH: Did he come alone or did he come with family members?

MC: He came alone.

SH: I noticed on the pre-interview survey he was a stone mason.

MC: Yes.

SH: Was he recruited to work on a specific job?

MC: No, he was a brick layer and a stone mason in Italy. So, they came to this country and he was working. He got some jobs in the churches, that is where he used to work.

SH: Did you see some of the work that he did?

MC: Oh, sure.

SH: Where were some of the monuments?

MC: Some of the work he did in Long Island City. He worked on housing, big housing complexes. He also traveled with his bag, he used to travel by bus and train to Upstate New York to get some work at that time. The work was kind of scarce. Then later on, he got some jobs in New York City area, Queens area, and I saw the work he had done in one of the churches in Flushing, New York, a church called St. Andrew of Avelina. He'd done a lot of stone mason work there, beautiful job and he used to do a lot of jobs in brick laying, and stuff like that. In

fact, when we bought a house, he built a stoop for us. Then in 1912, I think, he married my mom in Rosebank, Staten Island, and they came to Long Island City.

SH: Where was your mother from? What was her family background?

MC: My mother was born in Calabria in Italy. She was born August 25, 1891.

SH: Now they met on Long Island?

MC: No, they met in Rosebank, Staten Island, I think, and that's where they got married.

SH: How old was she when she came to this country, do you remember or did you ever hear that story?

MC: She must have been about fifteen when she came here.

SH: Did she come with other family members?

MC: Yes, she came with her parents. Yes, they came with the parents and she worked as a seamstress. Anyway, they were married December 15, 1912 in Staten Island.

JC: Can you tell us a little bit about where you grew up in Long Island City and what your neighborhood was like, what your family was like, maybe important aspects of your culture or town culture or your religion and household?

MC: I was born in Long Island City, New York and it was in an apartment right next to the Queensborough Bridge, 461, I believe, on Vernon Boulevard.

SH: What do you remember as a little boy about the neighborhood? What did it look like?

MC: Yes, right, right. As I remember, now as a little boy, this trolley car used to run on Vernon Boulevard and we used to go to school, ride the trolley car to go to school, public school. They called it Ravenswood, Long Island City, and I remember the winters over there. We used to have snow, it must have been about ten to twelve feet that went up to the first floor, and the East River was frozen. We could walk on the East River. That's in 1920, something like that, when I was a young fellow. The environment was all Italian, Irish, nice people, old-timers, mostly immigrants that just came from Italy, or different countries, and we had a nice gathering there.

SH: Did your parents speak Italian in the home?

MC: Yes, they did speak Italian at home, yes, and we picked up a lot of Italian. We would speak Italian and my brother, Joe, he spoke Italian pretty good and he used to read and write and now I do a little reading and writing myself in Italian because I have an aunt in Italy and we correspond with each other, you know.

SH: When your mother and father's family immigrated to this country, did they leave extended family back in Italy, or did they all, except for the aunt, wind up in this country?

MC: No, just my dad had relatives in Italy. He had his mother and father and he had brothers and sisters there and right now, at this time in 2005, he's got one sister still living, she's ninety-two years old. He left the country before she was born and he hadn't seen her since he was in this country and he passed on in 1975.

SH: Did both your parents speak English very well?

MC: They spoke English with a broken accent. As you know, they had done pretty good.

SH: Did they go to school to learn English or did they just learn it...

MC: No, they just learned it.

SH: What church did you go to and how involved were you?

MC: From the tenement house in Ravenswood, Long Island City, we moved to a house on 11th Street, 3618 11th Street. I was a young fellow then and we lived right across the street from the church of St. Rita and you were able to see the altar from the stoop of my house. We were always going to church there. My religion was Catholic.

SH: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

MC: I had two brothers and one sister.

SH: Where they older or younger?

MC: I was the second born. The first born was Joe. He was about, almost two years older than I was and my sister was about six years younger, and then my other brother was about eight years younger, and my brother was also inducted in the service.

SH: Before we talk about the military, let's talk a little bit about going to school, what you remember about school. Did you go to Catholic school or public school?

MC: No, public school, P.S. 83 in Long Island City. I finished public school and then I went to Murray Hill High School in Manhattan, New York City.

SH: Why did you go into Manhattan for high school?

MC: Because a friend of mine was going there so he suggested we could go together. So, his dad used to take us most of the time. We used to go over the bridge to Manhattan.

SH: Was that common to not go to high school in Long Island City?

MC: Yes. There were high schools in Long Island. In fact my other brothers and sisters went to high school in Long Island City, Bryant High School.

SH: Did you get to go to this school because you were interested in vocation, or what were you studying, or college track?

MC: No, more of a trade school I think. Yes, a trade school I think it was.

SH: What were you learning?

MC: Mechanic, yes.

SH: Did you have after school jobs?

MC: Oh, yes.

SH: What did you do?

MC: When I was a young fellow I used to go to an ice cream company there and I used to help on the truck. They used to give me fifty cents a day.

SH: That's big bucks back then, right?

MC: That helped me buy something anyway. Then when I was eighteen years old I was driving a truck, Plaza Beverage, a beverage truck and that was in 1938, or 1939.

SH: Did you finish at Murray Hill?

MC: Yes, I finished at Murray Hill.

SH: Did your family come to your graduation?

MC: Oh, yes.

JC: Were they proud of you that you graduated high school?

MC: Oh, yes, they were proud.

JC: Was your family affected by the Depression in the 1930s?

MC: Well, a little bit, because, see you know jobs were hard to get then. My dad had to travel to Upstate New York sometimes to get a job, Tuckahoe, Upstate New York. He used to carry a bag on the bus and train, so, it was tough.

SH: Was your mother able to work as a seamstress in the home?

MC: No, no, she was working in a factory in Long Island City.

SH: What did they make in that factory? Was it clothing or was it uniforms?

MC: Some kind of bags and stuff like that, sometimes that's the work she was doing, but then she used to do sewing on the side..

JC: Did she make you or your brothers and sisters any clothing?

MC: Probably more or less my sister, maybe she made things for her.

SH: As a young man in grade school and junior high school, what were the sports that you were involved in? What was your passion, what did you love to do?

MC: A little baseball, that's all. We didn't have too much then.

SH: Did you go to any sports events?

MC: Yes, yes. In fact, there was a ball field in Long Island City, I forgot what they called it, Queensboro, and we were close to it so we used to go watch them play over there, too.

SH: Were you a Yankee fan or a Giant fan?

MC: At that time there wasn't much. It was just the Brooklyn Dodgers, yeah that's all I remember now.

SH: What about music?

MC: My dad was good in music. He used to buy records a lot. He used to like opera and we used to get records for ourselves, too. We had a phonograph that we used to play, an old phonograph, a wind-up one you know.

SH: Did you enjoy dancing at all?

MC: I enjoy dancing but I wasn't a good dancer. Yes, I just love to dance but, you know, I'm not...

JC: Did you have many dances during high school?

MC: No, no. Most of the dances were when somebody got married, or something like that.

SH: What were some of the customs that you remember being distinctly Italian that your parents have brought from their family that may perhaps not be familiar to people today? Do you remember any?

MC: No.

SH: How did you acknowledge the saint's days?

MC: You know, when my dad was in Italy they used to have beans and greens and they used to have a lot of it, in Italian they called it *Fagiola* and they used to make that in their country and it was something new here we had a few times. We got to like it.

SH: As a young man what was the treat when the family would do something, whether it was to go on a trip to the beach or shore, what was considered your treat?

MC: When I was young my dad used to go back to Rosebank, Staten Island, where he had stayed because he had some relatives there and he used to take us on the train and the boat. The ferry boat used to take us to Staten Island, we used to go to Rosebank and I remember they had a house there and the toilet was outside, it was an outhouse, no toilet inside, and I remember that. We used to love to go there you know just a different environment, and we sure loved to ride the ferry.

SH: So that's kind of like the family vacation to go back to Rosebank?

MC: Yeah, actually when you got older you used to go to the beach you know, Jones Beach and all that.

SH: You went to Jones Beach?

MC: Yes, Jones Beach, we used to go a lot.

SH: Now did you have a gang of friends you ran around with?

MC: Yes, I had quite a few friends. In fact, I belong to a club and we went to, I used to take trips to Pennsylvania. I would take some trips with the fellows, we used to run dances. I tried to keep busy.

JC: In elementary school what subjects did you learn? Do you remember anything about learning about World War I?

MC: Not exactly. I don't think we learned much about World War I.

SH: What was your favorite subject in school?

MC: Well, you still have to read, and I was pretty good in math.

SH: You have an older brother, then you, then your sister, and then a brother. Did you all get along?

MC: Yes we all got along pretty good. Yeah, once in a while, you know, you argue with one another but we used to get along pretty good.

SH: Was mom the disciplinarian or was it your father?

MC: My father was, yes. He was in fact, when we were young to get our attention, he never called us, he used to whistle and eight o'clock if we didn't hear him, we'd get something from him. Yeah, he used to whistle out the apartment, he used to call and we had to listen to that whistle at 8 o'clock. Yes, we had to be in at eight o'clock.

JC: Did you have any chores that you had to help out with in the house, or did you have to work to help out with the family?

MC: Not much to do, just to go to the store, that's all.

SH: Did you have to shovel some of that snow that you talked about earlier?

MC: No, no, because it was an apartment.

SH: Do you remember any of your neighbors in the apartment growing up?

MC: Yes.

SH: Do you remember any of their stories?

MC: My granddad used to live downstairs, on the first floor. We lived on the second floor but we had the bathroom in the hallway on each floor and there were two apartments, and they both shared the bathroom.

SH: Was there a trick to be able to get in there when you needed to?

MC: No, if it was occupied we couldn't get in there. We had to wait until they got out.

SH: What did your grandfather do?

MC: My grandfather worked in the stone yard, in fact Bradley's Stone Yard on Vernon Boulevard. It was close to the home and he was in the marble business there and I remember when a marble fell on his leg, he fractured his leg. It took a long while before it healed up on him. We were pretty close.

SH: Was your grandmother still alive at that time?

MC: Yes, yes. We were all living there.

SH: How many siblings did your mother have?

MC: My mother had two sisters and two brothers and they are all now deceased.

SH: Did they live close by as you were growing up?

MC: Yes, we were pretty close by. We lived maybe a few miles away. After a while, they bought a house in Astoria, but we were pretty close.

JC: You got together for holidays and birthdays?

MC: Holidays, yeah, holidays we would have it at my house or their house you know. No, we were a pretty close family and still today we're pretty close, I mean whoever is left.

SH: When did you meet Mrs.Catera?

MC: I met her after I came out of the service.

SH: As a young man growing up in Long Island City and with all the events that are taking place in Europe, Hitler's coming to power and Mussolini is in Italy, did your family talk about that around the supper table? Or were these events something that you were not aware of or were you just busy being a young man?

MC: I don't think so, no, I don't remember them talking much about it. I guess they just wanted to get away from it, get used to the US conditions, you know.

SH: Where were you working after high school?

MC: I got a job as a truck driver. First, I was a helper on a truck delivering soda to the stores and then I became a driver when I was eighteen. I was a helper, I think at sixteen, because jobs were hard to get. Then I started to drive the truck in delivering soda.

SH: Where did you learn how to drive?

MC: We had a car. My brother had a car when he got his license and I started to drive. In fact, I learned to drive the truck first because when I was the helper I used to drive the truck.

SH: What did your older brother do after he graduated from high school? It was really tough at that time to find any kind of work.

MC: Yes, it was tough. In fact, he was working at the same company, the Plaza Beverage Company, yeah. He was a driver before me and I used to go to help, too. He was driving there a long time, too, and then he got a job as a letter carrier in Long Island City, New York and he retired, put his thirty years in, and he retired.

JC: Now when you finished high school, did you ever think of going to college or was it something that you never really...

MC: No, I never realized, I was always trying to make money. That goal, at that time, was difficult because, my dad wasn't making much.

SH: Did you still lived at home? Did you have to pay rent or what did they call it?

MC: No, no, I just contributed to the house, that's all.

SH: Who was in charge of finances, mom or dad?

MC: More or less both of them. I bought a new Dodge car in 1939, the price was eight hundred dollars, which was paid in 1941. The car was paid for and I was drafted in the Army. I didn't get a chance to enjoy my car, although when I married in November, 1946, we drove to Florida on our honeymoon.

JC: What age, or what year, were you drafted into the army?

MC: I was twenty-five-years-old and I was drafted March 1941 for one year service. I was drafted in Astoria, Long Island, New York in the school, and then from there we went to Jamaica, the armory in Jamaica, Long Island, New York, and from there we were transported to Camp Upton, Long Island in Long Island, New York, and there we were issued clothing. The clothing they gave us was World War I clothing, all woolen, woolen underwear, woolen pants, and we had those knee pants with wrap around, the leggings, yeah, they wrap around and a woolen coat. But then we had to stay there for a while until we got assigned and at that time it was so cold. We had a pot belly stove in one of the tents, with four of us sleeping in it, and one of us had to stay up all night to feed the wood to the stove, and we would sleep with coats on, and everybody was so cold. Then after a week or so we were shipped out to Fort Benning, Georgia and we got off the train in Washington, DC to do a little exercise and then we went to Fort Benning, Georgia and we were assigned to the 2nd Armored Division, General Patton's outfit.

SH: Before we talk about General Patton and your training, tell us about the train ride and your adventures to the South?

MC: Yes, it was a tough ride that we had, but, then we had to take a bus to the post and then over there, I remember that after one or two days we were there, we still had the woolen clothes, the World War I clothes, and we were restricted to go outside of the fort. A few of us went out to Columbus, Georgia, right outside Fort Benning, Georgia, just to go and see what the town looks like and, lo and behold, we ran into a couple of officers from the fort and next thing we were restricted and they issued us new clothing. It was hard to get along down there because the Southerners didn't like the New Yorkers. Especially those soldiers over there, they were non-commissioned officers and they were controlling us, giving us orders. So, my friend, he used to box a little bit and this here sergeant was picking on us, you know. My friend said to the sergeant, he says I mean "You're tough with us over here, how about outside? How tough are you outside?" He says, "Well what do think I'm afraid of you?" He says, "We can go outside and try to straighten this out." So, he beat the hell out of him and, from then on they took care of us. They watched over us. Yes, it was tough to get out there and it's hard. Then we used to go to the town of Columbus, Georgia and there were restrictions for the blacks. They couldn't ride on

the bus; they had to sit in the back of the bus. In the restaurant they couldn't go in, the movie house, and they had to walk on one side. Then there are a lot of restrictions there.

JC: Did you ever encounter any blacks, in your personal experience, either during training or when you were in town in Georgia?

MC: Yes, we used to speak to them, but the Southerners didn't like that.

SH: So, all of the non-coms were southern cadre?

MC: Yes, they were Southerners most of them. Because, I guess, over there they didn't have any jobs or anything they got clothing and dressed up.

SH: You said before you got your newly issued uniforms, someone thought that you guys were World War I soldiers.

MC: In town they thought we were, yeah, when we had gone to town with those World War I uniforms, they said, "What were you guys in World War I?"

SH: What is there to do in Georgia, in Columbus, Georgia?

MC: Well, there were movie houses and bars and a few stores that you could go in. We went to Atlanta, Georgia; yes, over the bridge. We used to go to Atlanta, Georgia and over there were many fights between the Southerners and the New York Yankees. They thought the Civil War was still on.

SH: Did you go as part of a unit from New York or did you go there as individual recruits?

MC: No, recruits there. We used to go and we were assigned, I was assigned to headquarters, 41st Infantry, 2nd Armored Division, and we used to go on full pack trips, hikes. We used to go in full packs, the packs must have been about fifty to sixty pounds, and we used to go on maybe thirty to forty mile trips. We had a tough training there. General Patton, he was a strict man, he was strict.

SH: Did you get to meet General Patton?

MC: Yes. He used to give orders when we used to have meetings. He used to give orders and he used to bring his wife and daughter and he used to make speeches. He used profanity, too. Yes, he was a tough man. He knew what he was doing, though.

SH: What were some of the things that you saw, the interaction between him and his other officers? Was he friendly or was he aloof?

MC: No, he was friendly, yes, he was friendly. No, he was a good man.

SH: Did he talk to some of the enlisted men like yourself?

MC: Yes, sure.

JC: Did you ever hear of General Patton's theory of attacking called walking fire?

MC: Well, he used to tell us about the Japanese. He said, "Whether you get him in the front, you go in the back". He used to tell us things, what to do, you know. In the Meantime General Patton's outfit went to Europe ...

SH: What were you being trained for in Georgia?

MC: Well, I was a rifleman in the 41st Infantry and we were attached with the armored, the tanks. Then on December 7th, 1941, we were in the movie house with my friends, in Columbus, Georgia and they stopped the movies and they announced that Pearl Harbor was attacked. Oh, that was the end of it. People were crying and screaming all over the place and some of my friends, who were supposed to be discharged, they had the time in, someone was thirty-three years old, and they were getting out and they said "Now we will never get out." So, we went to the bar, started drinking, and that was the end of it. Then we had full training.

SH: How did your training change then? Were you almost finished with your training by December?

MC: Oh, yes, we were finished. We were still going on maneuvers; we used to go to maneuvers to Louisiana.

SH: Can you tell us about that? Tell us how you transferred from Georgia to Louisiana.

MC: No, we used to go by trucks; we used to travel by convoy, even the tanks used to go to Louisiana and North Carolina.

SH: Now was this before Pearl Harbor that you went to Louisiana, or after?

MC: Before.

SH: Were there still horses involved?

MC: No horses motorized, yes, no horses. Then I don't know what date it was when we got more training because we were going on hikes and more maneuvers, and all that stuff, and we didn't know where we were going to go. One time we were supposed to go on maneuvers to Fort Bragg, North Carolina and we were out in the field there and a bunch of us got dysentery. The outfit was all ready to go to England, overseas, and a few of us remained because we had dysentery. We were in the hospital and we stayed in the hospital until we were much better and we were assigned to an outfit in Fort Bragg, North Carolina until we were assigned and they stopped investigating us if we had any relatives in Italy. So, I happened to have relatives in Italy and they didn't ship me to Europe, they assigned me to another outfit in North Carolina and in time, they sent me to California.

SH: Did your training change at all at that point?

MC: No, see, we didn't have too much then. But they sent us by train to California. We got to a place in California, then from there we had to go to Camp Stoneman in California and we were assigned to an outfit there and we were there until we were transported to the Pacific. We were there for maybe six months, or so.

SH: Did your training change at all from the time you were in North Carolina until you were in California? Was it still the same kind of training or what did they do to keep you busy?

MC: Yes, they gave us a little training there and then they sent us to the Pacific.

SH: Did you get a leave? Did you get a chance to come back to New York before you went to California?

MC: Well, see now, when I was in Fort Bragg waiting for an assignment, I took a leave, AWOL [Absent without leave]. Yes, we went down, I took a trip home and then we had to come back. So, we came back and we were assigned to an outfit.

SH: How were you disciplined for that AWOL?

MC: Well, we weren't assigned to anything then, and then this friend of mine called me up. He said, "You better come back because they're going to assign us." I just went home but when I was in Fort Benning, Georgia, we had a furlough and I had a furlough in 1941. I came home for a wedding. My sister was getting married when I was in Fort Benning, Georgia so I got a leave then and I was supposed to be the best man then. But I just made it in time but I wasn't in time for the best man. My brother Joe was the best man then. I made it for the wedding and I stayed just for a week, that's all, and then I went back to Fort Benning.

JC: When you were in California, did you see any Japanese prison camps or come in contact with any Japanese-Americans who were in concentration camps?

MC: No.

SH: They had already been taken to the interment camps?

MC: No, not yet, no.

SH: When you made your cross country trip what do you remember about that train trip to California?

MC: I saw the scenery that's all we saw. We didn't stop for anything.

SH: You didn't stop at all?

MC: No.

SH: What were your accommodations? Did you have a place to sleep?

MC: There was a place to sleep, just lay down to sleep, that's all.

SH: How was the food traveling across country?

MC: I don't remember now.

SH: Did they have a dining car set up for you?

MC: I think we had box lunch then, that's all, because the trip was only twelve hours.

SH: Did you notice any difference in the military before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and then after? If so, how did it change? Was there a heightened sense of urgency?

MC: All the soldiers, that were in the service when they heard this, were disappointed because they wanted to get home. But some of them were willing to go and fight for the country. Yes, some of them were willing to fight.

SH: Your brother, Joe, was able to be home for your sister's wedding, had he been drafted?

MC: No, he was rejected because he had a perforated eardrum but my brother John was drafted and he was in the Air Force. He was a waist gunner, I think, in the B-17. He was a waist gunner and he was in Europe. He flew his missions in Europe and, thank God, we all made it home safe.

SH: When you were in California, did you get any furloughs? Did you get a chance to go and look around?

MC: No, furloughs, no.

SH: How long were you there? Do you remember when you shipped out to the Pacific?

MC: I think it was after Christmas, 1943; beginning of 1943 I think it was.

SH: What were you attached to then? What were you assigned?

MC: At the time, we weren't assigned to anything but, I'm sorry; I just want to get back to California again. During the holiday season, in 1942 I think it was, the people in California were so nice to us. We used to go to town, Pittsburgh, California and we used to go to town there, from Camp Stoneman, and people used to treat us nice. People were making wine down in their basement. I, as an Italian, I used to yell to them, I said, "Hey, you're making wine." "Yes," and I spoke Italian to them. "Oh, he said, "Come down, come down" and they were so hospitable to us and they were really glad to see us. In fact, some of them invited us for dinner and we had a barbeque one Sunday at some house there because they knew that we were going to go overseas.

SH: Did they come to the base, or they come to the church, or to the USO [United Service Organizations]? How did you get in contact with them?

MC: No, we go just went into town, that's all. We met them in the town, yeah. They were very nice to us.

SH: Were there USOs in California?

MC: I assume so, but I didn't see any. Then we shipped over to Pacific.

SH: Where did you leave from, do you remember?

MC: San Francisco, we left from San Francisco on a troop ship and it took us twenty-nine days to reach Brisbane, Australia.

SH: Did you make any stops in those twenty-nine days?

MC: No, no. The reason it took twenty-nine days is because Japanese submarines were in the waters and they were zigzagging their course until we got to Brisbane. Then we were in Brisbane for a while and we met some Australians there, and they welcomed us.

SH: Did they?

MC: Yes, they welcomed us.

SH: How many were in your convoy? Could you see the other ships?

MC: There must have been at least a thousand of us on the ship or so.

SH: Do you know how many ships were in the convoy?

MC: I don't remember now.

SH: Do you remember on the ship. What did you do for twenty-nine days?

MC: We used to lie down and watch the sky, and there was nothing. The food wasn't too bad but there was nothing else we could do. You would walk around, or you get sick and then from there, from Brisbane, Australia I was assigned to the 114th Engineer Battalion and we were part of the 32nd Infantry Division. We were the engineer battalion and it was started in New Guinea Islands.

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SH: Please tell us what the duties are of an engineering battalion?

MC: An engineer battalion is a battalion that goes ahead of the infantry so they can make ways to get in to fight the enemy, whether there was water, they built bridges across, or any construction that's obstacles, so they can get through to fight the enemy.

SH: When you were in Brisbane, were you assigned to that group?

MC: Yes, yes, I did and then we started to go the islands.

SH: Were you transported on the same ship, different ship, or the same type of ship?

MC: Troop ship, yes, little landing ships. We used to go from one island to another you know and there's one island, now this is going back a couple of, the islands, was Good Enough Island was the first one. We went to Finschafen, in 1944. On Aitape island we were attacked by a Japanese Betty plane. They call it Betty and he followed one of our American planes, a fighter plane, into our area overhead and dropped, the Japanese plane dropped three Daisy Cutters they call a bomb that spreads as it hits the ground and the shrapnel just spreads all over. I was on the island, I was in the message center. Lucky thing I was on duty then, at my bunk. We were resting at this here island and I had my bunk made, we had bunks with nets on them you know, and when I went back to the tent that we had, the bunk was all cut up in pieces with shrapnel from the Daisy Cutter. But then I helped take all the wounded, we lost half of my company from the shrapnel that was from the bomb, and I helped with the IV bottles, holding them up. We gave them to the soldiers that were wounded and they were taken away to the hospital. I was a message center chief. I should have mentioned that before. I was a tech sergeant, as a message center chief, and I used to put communication up to the frontline, as my battalion engineers were at the frontline with the infantry troops, because I had communication with them. During that time, I was fired on with artillery fire from the Japanese and I kept putting telephone wires to forward echelon and I was awarded the Bronze Star medal by doing that, as chief communication.

SH: From Brisbane, what was the first island and what do you remember about that? Were you under fire when you came onto the island?

MC: No, no.

SH: Did you get to see the island?

MC: Well, there was nothing on the islands, it's all coconut trees and the natives. You had natives with the grass skirts.

SH: Really?

MC: Yes, yes, I should have said that.

SH: Were you able to communicate with them?

MC: There was somebody that ...

SH: Did they help you?

MC: They speak it, you know, some of them understood because they had a translator there, you know, and we used to communicate with them. But they knew what they wanted and we knew what they wanted, but the women wear grass skirts and the males had G-strings there. I used to communicate. I used to put wires, telephone wires, on coconut trees that we used to communicate to one company, to another. How I climbed them, the trees was that I took a dare and I climbed the trees to get coconuts from the tree, with a machete knife, and I used to go up the coconut trees, and the tree was about fifty to sixty feet high, and I used to chop down the coconut, for the fellows and that's how I learned, from that, and then as high as you could climb up the trees putting the lines on.

SH: Where did you get the training to set up the lines? Where was your training to learn to set up communication lines?

MC: I didn't have any training at all, just helped, you know, and ...

JC: So, you learned along the way?

MC: Yes, and I taught myself, you know, because I had a little experience back home, too.

SH: Where were you when you were first under attack from the Japanese?

MC: This is the first time we were under fire, by the plane, you know.

SH: Was that the one you just told us about?

MC: Yes, and going from one island to another, we were being attacked. The Japanese plane, they had these suicide planes, they used to come down and going after the convoy. We were in convoys, and it was going for the fuel ship, and all the Navy ships shooting at it, before it hit one of the ships. The plane was hit and it just fell before the ship. They were dropping torpedoes and I saw one of the ships get hit with a torpedo and sailors flying off of it. Yes, I saw it. We were looking at the side, from the ship that we were in, and they were around us for a while and then we went to another island and we stopped fighting there on Hollandia.

SH: When you would go ashore, how much material were you carrying and how ...

MC: We had full packs, you know, that we carried the machine gun we had, and some had landing ships and we have the jeeps and half tracks that were on there, too.

SH: Your job was to immediately start setting up communication lines.

MC: Right, yes, as soon as we get on to the island, we put communication lines to the front echelon and they were doing the fighting down to the infantry.

JC: Did you ever get into combat, or, not really, because you're doing communications?

MC: No, the only thing we went through was with the machine gun that we had we used to go out on the island to see if there was any Japs around, that's all, but we didn't see any.

SH: When was the first time you fired your personal weapon or did you ever fire your own?

MC: Yes, on one of the islands I fired one of the machine guns, because there was a couple of Japs they said were on the loose, but I fired and I missed. I did not hit anything.

SH: When they begin to invade an island, did the ships fire on the island and then you would go in? At what stage in all of this would you personally go?

MC: Yes, the Navy would blast out the islands with ammunition you know and then the infantry would go in you know, and we would go in after them you know.

SH: You basically were just sitting on the ship waiting for your turn to go in and you saw all of what was going on.

MC: They go in first, see, and then we go in after them.

SH: How long would you be on the island before you would get back on the ship to go to another island?

MC: When they take over one island, then they would take over another island, and we used to go in after, but the infantry division would go first, and then when there's trouble, the engineer battalion would go in to the frontlines to give them a clear way, so they could get through.

SH: Did you ever have to set up an airfield, or any kind of landing strips?

MC: No, no, we didn't have any of that because the islands weren't that big.

SH: Once the island was secured, what would then be your job? What would you do and how long after they said it was secured before you left again?

MC: Then we'd probably stay, rest for a while, you know, like we did at Aitape where we were attacked. We were resting there for a while. Then we go island to island and we wound up at Luzon, Hollandia, and Leyte, and then we went to Manila.

SH: What do you remember about Leyte?

MC: In Leyte, yes, we had a little trouble there in Leyte. We lost some men there.

SH: You talked about the daisy bomb in the attack on your ...

MC: The daisy cutters, yes.

SH: Did you bury the men who were killed from the daisy cutters? Where did you take them? What do you do when you're attacked like that? You talked about helping getting medical attention.

MC: Yes, we helped to get them medical attention but the deceased had to be taken away and they brought them to someplace there, although, I don't know where they took them.

SH: The group that you were assigned to, from Brisbane, were you from all over? Do you remember some of the people that you served with and who they were or where they were from?

MC: No. This 114th Engineering Battalion I was assigned to, that was a battalion already made up and I was assigned to that.

SH: You were like a replacement.

MC: Yes, and most of them were from Massachusetts, this battalion 114. But the other troops, the 32nd Infantry was from New York, they called it the Red Arrow Division. They were men from all over. You can see in the book where the fellows were from.

JC: Did you form close relationships with men in your unit?

MC: Yes, we had close relationships. Some of the fellows were local, from the New York area, most of them were from Massachusetts, we were doing pretty good.

SH: Were you well supplied? Did you feel that you had everything that you needed?

MC: Yes. Yes, we had everything yeah.

SH: Did you get any mail from home?

MC: Rarely, we got some mail from home. I had a girlfriend I left home and we corresponded once in a while when we could.

JC: Did you write letters to your family?

MC: Yes, I used to write letters to the family and made sure they got out, you know.

JC: What was censored in your letters? What did you tell them about what was going on? Did you make it sound like you are always okay?

MC: Well, that's all. We couldn't say too much about where we were. I told my mom that everything is all right. She used to get my allotments and I told her to use the allotment for what she needed, but she used to save it for me when I got back.

SH: When you were coming in to the different ports, was there anything that you did when you were getting ready for an invasion? Did you have any sort of a ritual that you would go through as a good luck charm, or anything like that? Did you pray?

MC: Oh, yes, I prayed. In fact at that time we were bombed, that was a Holy Thursday and I prayed. I said, "Thank God." I even told my mom, I said, "It was Holy Thursday, God was with us."

SH: Were there chaplains with your group?

MC: Yes, we had a chaplain.

SH: Did you ever get a chance to go to services at all?

MC: Yes, we had services. Like at Fort Benning, Georgia they did. It was good there, but from island to island we couldn't get too much service.

SH: When you were under attack, how long did you stay on that island then after the daisy cutter bombing?

MC: We did not stay too long on them. We used to go island to island because they are the small islands. Only in Luzon we had a problem. We were on a landing ship and there was coral and we had to jump into the water and walk onto the beach and we had a little action there with the Japanese until we flushed them out.

SH: Can you describe for us what you were doing and what that action was?

MC: Well, the action was we had our guns, but there was not much for us because the infantry was ahead of us. The infantry were taking care of us, and we used to follow them in, but that was bad in Luzon. Then in Manila, the town was all bombed. I had pictures; I had to bring it with me. Manila was a nice place but it was bombed out. Churches were bombed.

SH: Did you ever try to help any of the natives in any way?

MC: We were friendly to the natives, then in the Philippines we were pretty close to the natives, the Filipinos.

SH: Did they help you?

MC: Yes, they were trying to help us. I was friendly with a couple of teachers, Filipino teachers, woman teachers and they were friendly and gave us straw hats. They lived on grass huts there. You know, they were not up to date on some of those islands.

SH: What was the interaction with the officers that were attached to your engineering battalion? Did you have good relations?

MC: Oh, yes. The officer relations were good. I mean, they knew they were in, we had to work together and have a good relationship.

SH: Some people complain that their officers were incompetent or they were arrogant.

MC: No, they were all right.

SH: Did you ever see General MacArthur?

MC: Yes, I saw him once, I think in Luzon we saw him.

SH: What did you think of MacArthur?

MC: Well, I don't know much of him but they said, you know, ..., he used to like his women I think. He had a woman in the Philippines I think someplace. I think he controlled his troops pretty good.

SH: When did you hear about Corregidor and places like that?

MC: I didn't hear much about Corregidor.

SH: Did you get anytime to take an R&R while you were in the Pacific?

MC: Well, they used to instruct us to expect a little action. They used to tell us, expect this, expect that, but, like I said, the infantry used to go in first and then clear out and then the battalion, our battalion would go in.

SH: Once you have set up these communication lines were they ever sabotaged where you had to go back and do it again?

MC: Yes, yes. That's another thing, too, when you lay the telephone lines on the ground, the Japs used to cut them and they used to put a booby trap on it, so, I had to check whenever there was a break in the line. Every time we would walk, we would pull the line to see if it was loose and then we go a few more feet, pull the line to see if it's loose, because whenever it's loose, there's a booby trap on the end of it. We were pretty lucky, I mean, as far as that. The only thing is that artillery fire was on us all the time.

SH: From the Japanese?

MC: Yes, from the Japanese.

SH: What were some of the booby traps that they used? Did you ever have to diffuse one?

MC: No, I didn't have to, no.

SH: How many people would go with you when you went to check on a broken line?

MC: I had another assistant.

SH: Did you?

MC: Yes.

SH: You rose in rank fairly quickly.

MC: Yes, I did, because, I think, I was a Corporal and then I went to Tech Sergeant, yes, so, I had control of the message center.

SH: Describe the message center.

MC: The message center had these telephones, the box telephone that you crank. You hook up the two wires and two wires to the other in the switchboard. We have a switchboard and the switchboard is tuned that you had to call back. The switchboard is about maybe half of that desk.

SH: About two feet?

MC: Yes, that's all. We used to hook up lines there and that is how we had radio connections. I didn't learn the Morse code.

SH: Who carried this equipment when you would move forward?

MC: We had jeeps that we used to put them in and the jeeps used to go on these landing crafts.

SH: When you were setting the message center, did you ever have to scavenge material from some place else or some other units?

MC: No.

SH: You always had everything you needed right there?

MC: Yes, we had some, we had everything.

SH: How was the food while you were going from island to island?

MC: Well, most of it is canned food, this box food that we have.

SH: The C-rations?

MC: C-rations, yes.

SH: Did you ever have hot meals? Did the cooks ever...

MC: No.

SH: What about showers and things like that?

MC: Outside showers. When we had a rest stop, we would use the outside showers.

SH: Now did medics go with you?

MC: Yes, we had a medical unit.

SH: Did you?

MC: Yes, they were always ready. We had malaria shots, too. Most of the guys were getting malaria. I had the dengue fever.

SH: Did you?

MC: ...Malaria has a reoccurrence but dengue fever you don't get a reoccurrence on that. With dengue fever you get a high fever. I had a high fever of 111 degrees I think and they call it a bone breaking fever, all the bones in your body ache, and I had that for about a week.

SH: Where were you when you had dengue fever? Were you hospitalized during that time?

MC: Yes, we had little tents.

SH: How did they treat you?

MC: Well, we were taking Atabrine pills for malaria. We used to take pills for malaria and I think that helped most of it.

JC: That helped the fever, too?

MC: No, the fever, it didn't help the fever; it just helped from getting malaria.

SH: Did you turn orange or yellow?

MC: Yellowish, yes, you get yellowish.

SH: When you were in the hospital with the dengue fever were you given any kind of drug?

MC: It was not a hospital; it's a tent they had, a medical tent. The drug given was atabrine

MCSH: Did you have access to lots of water or was it difficult?

MC: No, somebody was there to take care of what you needed.

SH: Did you ever see any female officers, nurses?

MC: Not with us, no. We didn't have any.

SH: What did the soldiers talk about, were they talking about home, or food or girls?

MC: Oh, they talked about home most of the time. How they missed home and could not wait to get back, but they wanted to finish up what they had to do and that's it.

SH: Did anybody ever try to entertain with music?

MC: No. We didn't have any of that. Once in a while when we laid over and the island was clear, we used to put a movie on. That is what happened that time, after the movie, I guess the Jap plane must have saw we had candles, lamps, that's all we had, they must have saw lights and that's how they bombed us that time.

SH: That time with the daisy cutters?

MC: Yes, the daisy cutters, they dropped three bombs.

JC: What were your feelings toward the Japanese?

MC: Well, I mean, the Japanese, they were taught one thing, and that was to kill, and they were taught not to be captured. They carried hand grenades; if they were captured they would blow themselves up. They had a *hari-kari* knife that they used to kill themselves. They were in caves in the mountains on these islands some of these had mountains, they were in caves and they will never get out. If you got them cornered in there, they would never get out and we, the engineer battalion, would go with flame throwers. They used the flame throwers to go in the caves and burn them out, so they would come out.

JC: Did you find their way of war unfair when you tried to capture them?

MC: When they captured us, the American troops, they used everything on them. They treated them like dirt you know, beat them up but when we captured Japanese they were treated like a human being. Some were all right; some were in just like we were, and had to fight for their country.

JC: Would they just kill themselves if you captured them? Would they use the grenades that you said they had?

MC: Yes, they used to do that, some of them. Some of them wanted to be captured, too.

SH: Were you ever part of a group that captured the Japanese person?

MC: No.

SH: Did you ever see any American prisoners of war that were released?

MC: I didn't see any, no.

SH: Did you ever have to go back and retake an island that you had left?

MC: No.

SH: You were able to keep moving?

MC: Yes, we kept moving.

SH: What about the interaction with the other services, with the Navy or the Marines? Did you ever have any interaction with them?

MC: No, just the Navy. The Navy used to be with us most of the time and when we were on a Navy ship, we saw that they would eat like human beings.

SH: Really

MC: Oh, my goodness, yes. We met some of the sailors there. They said what they ate, my goodness, next time I go into the service I'm going to go in the Navy. It's a cleaner life and you eat well. Yes, I don't want no Army, no more, especially in the jungles.

JC: After Pearl Harbor did you think about joining another form of service?

MC: No, I wish I knew though, I would have joined the Navy instead of the Army.

SH: Had you ever thought of applying to Officer's Candidate School?

MC: No, I just wanted to do my duty and get out.

SH: Did you have that mindset? I know that's one of Jessica's questions.

JC: Yes, in the book by Gerald Linderman, he said, "He's a man that has a job to do." Did you feel that this was true at the time and that it was something you needed to do?

MC: Yes, I think it had to be done because with the way they treated us, how they bombed Pearl Harbor, you know, so they had it coming to them. I think that A-bomb [atomic bomb], I mean, I hate to say it, but, it probably helped us because those Japs would never give up. They fought to the last minute.

SH: Was there any talk of the invasion of Japan before the bombs were dropped? Were you aware that they were getting ready to mount a large force to go in and invade Japan?

MC: No, I think that's why they threw that bomb down there, the atomic bomb, they knew that probably ... all along.

SH: Were you made aware of when the war ended in Europe? Do you remember that?

MC: Yes, we were in Manila when they threw that bomb and we heard about it and everybody, I mean, sorry to say, but we were happy that we did because, if not, the war would have been still going on.

SH: When you were fighting in the Pacific were you aware that the war had ended in Europe?

MC: Yes, we heard about that too, yes, and some of the troops were coming over to the Pacific.

SH: Did you meet some of them?

MC: No. No. They were on their way when the Japs were hit with that bomb.

SH: Did you ever have anyone serve with you that had already been in combat in Europe and had come to the Pacific?

MC: Yes, my brother-in-law. He was in Europe and he was on his way to the Pacific, and he was turned back because the war was over.

SH: What did your family think of Franklin Roosevelt?

MC: They thought he was a good man. Yes, he was a good man.

SH: What was the reaction with the troops when they heard that he had died?

MC: There was a little sympathy. They were sort of hurt that he passed on, because he was a good president. I mean, he had to do what he had to do.

SH: Did they have confidence in Harry Truman that he would be a good Commander in Chief?

MC: Yes, yes. He was a good man, also.

JC: When you were on the islands, when you were writing letters, did you ever write to your brother? Did you keep in touch with him or were you not able to do that?

MC: Yes, I was able to write to my brother, John, in Europe and he corresponded with me. He sent me pictures, too. I had to take pictures, I had a 35 mm camera that I was taking pictures with and we had some way of getting it developed. In fact, we had a photographer with us taking pictures. He took pictures of Manila; he gave me some pictures of Manila, too. I didn't bring them with me.

JC: When you were in Fort Benning, you were just talking about how you were the pressman for the press, for the newsletter. Tell me a little about that.

MC: Yes, when I was in Fort Benning, Georgia, I was in the headquarters department and I was a pressman on the mimeograph machine. We used to write, receive letters, and print them on the booklets that we used to make for the 41st Infantry Division.

SH: *The 41st News, Straight News and Stalwart News.*

MC: Yes. Yes, that's what it was. It was the *41st Infantry News Bulletin* and we used to get stories around from home and abroad and I used to print them on a mimeograph machine.

SH: One of the headlines here is, "The Fighting 41st Wins the Title in Division Boxing tournament".

MC: Yes, they are all stories of different things that happened.

JC: Was that your friend that had the incident with the officer?

MC: Yes, he was the boxing instructor.

SH: All sorts of great stories in here. You had a basketball team and a baseball team and you had a "Dorothy Blitz" column where somebody wrote in for advice. There were a lot of sports going on here it looks like, even Ping Pong.

MC: Ping Pong, yes.

JC: Did you ever take part in any of those sports?

MC: No, I didn't.

SH: They even have one headline in here, "Etiquette says, "when you enter a door don't forget to close the door."" There are great graphics in here. "Stop that Tank." So, the motto for the 41st was "straight and stalwart," and there's a history in here and jokes and cartoons, quite a piece.

MC: There are little stories in there.

SH: Was this weekly?

MC: No, I think, this was monthly.

SH: Now did you do any of the drawing in here? There are some good artists.

MC: Yes.

SH: Had you ever worked on any kind of a newspaper before, in school?

MC: No, no. I didn't do any typing, it's just the printing I did, that's all. They used to type on those sheets, I forget what they called them, and I used to mimeograph them.

SH: When did you have confidence that the war in the Pacific was going to be won? Did you think that from the very beginning, or were you doubtful?

MC: I think we were doing well from the beginning, yes; we were doing well because we were ahead. We were taking over the islands, and all that and it was much more; they were controlling the Philippines, too, and, thank God, we went through with that.

SH: So, you always had that confidence that we were moving forward, we are making progress?

MC: Yes, we were moving forward.

SH: Did you have any idea when they started that it would take that long?

MC: No, I had no idea, not that long. Just like the Marines at Iwo Jima, they put the American flag up there. That's one of those islands. We didn't go on those islands. Marines took over that island.

SH: When did you think, or when were you aware that the war was winding down? Did you have that sense before the bomb was dropped or not?

MC: Yes, before the bomb was dropped. I was sure it was, but some of them thought it would never end.

SH: In Manila, was your duty less? Did you have more time to yourself? What was it like to be in Manila, I should say?

MC: We weren't there too long and we took off from Manila. Things were pretty good there, quiet, and we saw a lot of destruction, churches and all the different municipal buildings and swimming pools, city buildings, they were all destroyed.

SH: As an engineering battalion did you help with any of the clean up like that?

MC: No, we didn't do any of that, no.

SH: You said you were in Manila when the war was over.

MC: In Manila, yes.

SH: Had you been preparing to go out again?

MC: No, we had just taken over Manila and I don't know what the next step was.

SH: What was your job in Manila then once the city was taken?

MC: Well, we just trying to keep the infantry, keep them moving, so they had no obstacles to come across. What else could we have done?

SH: When were you awarded the Bronze Star?

MC: That was in the Aitape. General Gill awarded me the Bronze Star.

SH: You received it then, you didn't receive after?

MC: No, I received it then.

SH: Do you want to explain for the tape what some of the medals are that you have received?

MC: See, I have the Asiatic Pacific Medal, and a Service Medal, the Bronze Star Medal, and there's a Good Conduct Medal, Philippines Liberation Ribbon, and the Defense Service Medal. So, I got five medals.

JC: These were all received when you were on the islands?

MC: Yes, this is all on the islands, in the Pacific.

SH: When did you leave the Pacific, before the surrender was signed or after?

MC: Oh, after the war was over, after the A-bomb was dropped, and it took a while before, I think it was about in August and then, in the time, I got out.

JC: So, you left from Manila and you went back to the States?

MC: From Manila we were supposed to go back to Frisco, I was supposed to go back to Frisco and on our way to Frisco, on a troop ship, we hit the tail-end of a typhoon and I thought, we all thought, we would never make it home. That ship was going up and down, the water gushing up the bow, front, and we were bouncing up and down and so, we couldn't make it to Frisco. They had to detour us to Washington State. I forgot the port there.

SH: Bremerton, Fort Louis?

MC: Then we saw some prisoners, Japanese prisoners there, they were behind bars.

JC: This was when you got back to the States?

MC: In Washington State. They lived better than we did, in Washington. Then, from Washington State, I was shipped to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I think it was a C-10, we had to

sit on the floor then. We were all sitting on the floor and the breeze was coming all over the plane. We finally made to Fort Dix. I don't remember the date now.

SH: You were discharged in October of '45.

MC: Yes, October 15, 1945.

SH: You took the C-10 back Fort Dix?

MC: C-10 to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, yes and we arrived on the 7th of October and the 15th of October I was discharged and went home. We were discharged from Fort Dix.

SH: It says Fort Dix on your discharge.

MC: I'm sorry.

SH: I just wanted to clarify.

MC: Yes, that's true, Fort Dix, New Jersey on October 12th 1945.

SH: They sent you by train up from Fort Bragg to Dix?

MC: No, no, we were sent by plane, we went to Fort Dix, it's not Fort Bragg, it's Fort Dix, by plane we were sent to Fort Dix and then from Fort Dix we were separated and we were discharged the 12th of October. We arrived the 7th of October and we were discharged the 12th of October.

SH: When you got in the States, what was the first thing you did when you got into Washington? Did you call home, send a telegram?

MC: Yes, I called home to tell them that I was in Washington State, and they were glad to hear from me and then I got into Fort Dix and I called them, again, and I said, "I'm in the separation center and I should be home soon." They were glad to hear it.

JC: What were your feelings when you returned home?

MC: Oh, happy. The only thing is when I went home, my girlfriend had got married.

SH: Before you got home?

MC: Before I got home my girlfriend got married, and that was the end of that. So, maybe it was for the best.

JC: Did it take time to adjust back to normal life?

MC: Yes, a little bit. So, I took a test, a civil service test with the government as a letter carrier and a four hour written test that we had taken and, thank God, I passed, I had an 89.2.

JC: Wow.

-----END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO-----

SH: Please continue.

JC: We were talking about how you adjusted back to your life when you came back to the States. You were saying that you took a civil service test for the postal job.

SH: Did you think of staying in the military?

MC: No, no. I was glad to get out, yes, I was glad to get out of the military.

SH: Did they offer you that opportunity to stay in the military?

MC: No, I don't think they did, no.

JC: Did your brother, John, did he come home around the same time as you?

MC: He came home before I did, but when I came home in October, the mustering-out pay was maybe three hundred to four hundred dollars and I just took it easy for a while and I went back to my old job months later, I had done that for a little while. Then, I took a test, the post office test and then I met my wife, my girlfriend, my future wife. A year later, I got married, in 1946, I got married and I also got my notice of the postal examination, that I passed and I was on the job in '46. I was appointed in 1946 as a letter carrier in Long Island City and I put almost thirty years in. So, I retired in 1978.

JC: Where did you meet your wife?

MC: I met her when I was living in Long Island City and I met her at a party and somebody introduced me to her, one of the relatives introduced me to her. Her name was Marie DiRobertis and she came here from Italy, from Bari, when she was twelve years old and she went to school, finished her school, had a couple, two years of high school and then she was a seamstress. In fact she worked at the, she was a floor lady at one of the shops in Long Island City making coats for the GIs and she worked there for a year or two.

JC: She was doing that while the war was going on?

MC: Yes. She was working there as the war was still going on and I married her in '46, November 11th 1946 and I was appointed to my job in 1948 I think and we had our first child, he was born in 1948, his name is Michael. He was born July 2, 1948.

JC: How many children did you have?

MC: I have four children, four boys, Michael my first born, James was my second born, April 26, 1951, my third born was Ronald. Ronald was born March 30 1953 and my other son, fourth, was Anthony Catera, he was born on July 18, 1956 and that is it. Thank God, they are all here and we are enjoying ourselves. We get together often. Three are married and one is with me, James is with me.

SH: When you first came back you talked a little bit about taking some time off. Tell us what it was like to come out of the jungles of the South Pacific and suddenly be thrust back into what was supposed to be a normal life in New York? Was it difficult? Did you have other friends that you could go and talk to?

MC: Yes, I went to my friends, we had a club, and I just passed my time there and it took me a little while to get used to being a human being again. It was good to eat the Italian food, I was enjoying Italian food.

JC: Did you join any veterans associations when you came back or a couple of years after you came back?

MC: Yes, I joined the VFW when I moved to Whitestone. We moved to Whitestone then from Long Island City. When I got married in '46, we lived in an apartment in Astoria, 45th Street. Then my in-laws had a house in Jackson Heights and my father-in-law had passed and so my wife was the only daughter, so we moved to the mother's house in Jackson Heights and we stayed there for a couple of years. Then we bought our house in Whitestone in 1951, 1950, something like that, in Whitestone, New York and that is where James was born in '51 and all the others.

SH: When you came back from the war, did you talk about your experiences or did you just come back and, basically, not really talk about it?

MC: We talked to some that were in the service, you know, how it was. Like my brother John, he told me about his missions and I told him about my missions on the ground and, you know, we just reminisced a little bit.

SH: He was stationed in England.

MC: He was stationed in England, yes.

SH: How did the people treat you when you came back? Did they act like they were glad to see you, or did they take what you had done for granted?

MC: Oh, see, by the time I got back, it was months later than when the war was over so people already had their trust in others that came first and welcomed them and us.

JC: Did you stay in contact with any of the men that you were in the islands with?

MC: No, believe it or not, I have not seen any of them; neither was I in contact with them.

JC: Did you ever take advantage of the GI Bill, for a loan on the house?

MC: No. When I went to Whitestone I had the house put under my name and it was on the GI Bill, so I got the credit for the GI Bill. The house was still my mother-in-law's house and then eventually in '67, in the '60s, I think we bought a house and we split the money with the other children. That's how I bought my house, I put it under my name because it was already under my name and I had to split the money with the three others.

SH: Do you think that being involved in World War II changed the man that you were?

MC: Well, I don't know. It made me tougher, maybe, but as far as the same personality, I don't think it changed much.

SH: Have you ever used any of the Veterans' Administration health benefits or anything like that?

MC: No, I did not, no. Even when my wife had passed on, we didn't go to the Veterans Cemetery in Long Island because I wanted her nearby so, I could visit more often .

JC: Did any of your sons ever join the military?

MC: No.

JC: Michael was in the reserves.

MC: Michael was in the reserves, Air Force Reserves, yes. Michael, my first born, was in the reserves.

SH: When you came back did you think about getting involved in politics, or anything like that?

MC: No, I did not go for that.

JC: What is your take on the war today in Iraq? What are your feelings on that?

MC: Well, I think Bush, President Bush, had to do what he had to do because, I think, he tried to do the best for this country, what we're going through you know. But there's pro and cons about that. I mean, it's too bad there are too many people being killed.

SH: You personally, what are you most proud of?

MC: I'm proud to be here back in the US, enjoying life again.

SH: One question that I have before we end the interview is you had told us that your father did not get to go back and meet the younger sister that was born after he left, but did you get to go

back. The other question I have is that, did your family ever tell you or your father or other members of your family, what it was like to be in Italy during the war?

MC: No, I don't think they had any closeness to where the fighting was, but, as far as some of my friends had gone to Italy and they went to their parents where they were born, they went to see them. If I had gone to Italy, probably I could have made that. But I have an aunt there and in 1976, I think it was in June or July, June, I think, we went to see my dad's sister that he had never seen while he was in the US and she was happy to see us and he has other relatives, the nieces and nephews which were living with the aunt and they were happy, they didn't know what to do with us. I went there with my wife, my brother and his wife and a couple of other nieces, my nieces and my son James went with us too, and we had a nice time, we went on a tour to Italy and we took a day and we went to Bari where we met. We just stayed there for a day. In fact, we took a train from Rome to Bari. It took us six hours and what a strenuous trip that was.

JC: So, you got to see where your father grew up?

MC: Yes, so we stayed there and that night we came home by plane. It took us an hour to go back home to Rome. But it was a pleasure. They took us to the airport. In fact, they picked us up at the train station. They had a van, they put us all up and then they took us back home to the airport to take the plane back to Rome with the van that they had rented. So, they were really happy to see us. In fact, my dad had vouched for a nephew of his to come to America and we had, this was when I was young, in Long Island City and he came to Long Island City and he stayed here a while and then his relatives came later on. But then we had a visit from my cousin, my nephew came from Bari, they came to the U.S. for a trip in 1975 I think, '76, something like that and that's it. I would like to go back to Italy again but at my age now it's too much walking you have to do, yes, a lot of walking. We saw a lot when we were there, we were on a tour. We saw a lot.

SH: Was there anything that we forgot to ask you about or that you want to put it on the record about growing up or your experiences during World War II?

MC: No. I don't think so. Oh, there's one incident that happened working in the post office; a letter carrier and I had this route in Long Island City for a good many years, maybe twenty years. I was delivering mail to a home in Long Island City and the people that I was delivering to ended up to be the family of my son Ronald's wife. My son Ronald met this girl that he was going to school with in the Bronx, Monsignor Scanlon High School, and this girl happened to be living in Long Island City. I delivered mail to her parents in Long Island City and it's a coincidence that they went together and they got married. Another thing happened, I was delivering mail to this party in Astoria and he worked in Ronzoni Macaroni and he said to me, "Mike," he said, "I'm going to retire now and I'm going back to Italy. I'm going back to Italy to stay and I'll get a pension from Ronzoni, then I get a social security pension, then I'll stay in Italy and enjoy what I get." So, have and behold, in 1976, when I went to Italy we were in the café in Rome, outside café, we were having breakfast there and this fellow was out in the street working out in the street with a couple of men and I said to my brother, "John I know that fellow from Astoria, I delivered mail to him." "He says what are you kidding?" I said "no, I'm not kidding. I know him and his name was John" and I called, I said, "John," and he came over. He said, "Oh,

Michael, I'm glad to see you. How are you?" I said, "John, what are you doing? You're working again." He said, "Yeah I'm going to work here now for a while and I get this pension from Italy." He said, "Oh, I wish you would come. My wife would like to see you." I had been delivering mail to this gentleman for almost twenty years. He said, "My wife would love to see you." I said, "John, I'm sorry, we are on a tour so I got to get back and go on with the tour to another town." Oh, that was some coincidence. My brother couldn't believe it.

SH: That's a great story. Thank you so much and with this we will conclude the interview.

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Reviewed by Jessica Catera 8/8/05
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 8/17/05
Reviewed by Jessica Catera 1/28/06
Reviewed by Michael Catera 3/14/06