

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Frank J. Martinelli  
U. S. Army, World War II  
2003

OH  
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**Martinelli, Frank J.**, (1922-2004 ), Oral History Interview, 2003  
User copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.),  
Master copy, 1 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.),

### **ABSTRACT**

Martinelli, a Madison, Wis., native discusses his World War II service with the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. An Italian-American from the Greenbush area in Madison, Martinelli tells about working at a meat market in a sausage kitchen when he heard the news about Pearl Harbor. He describes his basic training at Fort McClellan (Alabama) and relates that the 29<sup>th</sup> unit had men from all over the United States. He tells how some of his buddies would go AWOL and leave the base to go home only to be brought back by the Military Police. He comments on his unit's departing from Ohio on a landing barge and how they had to use ropes to get down into the barge. He states that his unit was assigned to the 115<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in Normandy. Martinelli declared D-Day as the day the "29'ers" became involved in the violent fighting in Normandy, although he did not participate in D-Day as he had been in a jeep accident the day before. He points out they took out a large number of casualties, and that the unit was a spirited and extremely effective fighting force. He relates how the division helped capture St. Lo after a fierce and devastating battle and moved on to eventually take Brest where he was wounded. He characterizes the Germans as arrogant and disrespectful. He points out that he was a messenger and radio operator for a mortar platoon. He tells that he got out of the Army in October 1945. Martinelli comments on being home and his love of being around his friends and family.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Martinelli, a Madison, Wis. native, served with the Army infantry during World War II. He was wounded during the battle for Brest and received a Bronze Star. He returned to Madison where he owned and operated Martinelli's Market on Olin Avenue for many years.

Interviewed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer.  
Transcribed by John K. Driscoll, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Volunteer.  
Transcript edited by Gayle Martinson, 2004.

## Interview Transcript

John: Okay, this is John Driscoll, and I'm a volunteer with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. And today is March 5, 2003. And this is an oral history interview with Frank Martinelli. We are at Frank's house, home, at 2123 Keys Avenue, in Madison. And Frank is a veteran of World War II, with the United States Army. Right?

Martinelli: Yes.

John: Okay.

Martinelli: 29th Infantry Division.

John: Okay. Good morning, and thanks for agreeing to the interview. Can we start about your early life, before you went into the service? Where were you born?

Martinelli: Madison, Wisconsin.

John: Madison, Wisconsin. That's great.

Martinelli: All my life.

John: When?

Martinelli: 1922.

John: 1922. Okay.

Martinelli: That is a long time?

John: Well, you know, it gets longer every day.

Martinelli: That's the truth.

John: Your family was from Madison? Oh, of course, you were born here, but, originally from Madison?

Martinelli: Well, they come from Italy.

John: Oh, they did? Okay.

Martinelli: Oh, yes.  
John: Okay.

Martinelli: Oh, yes. My dad came over in 1919.

John: Okay.

Martinelli: But, then, again, he went back to Italy because he got, they called him up. For two years.

John: The Italians?

Martinelli: Yea. The Italian army, because, I don't know how they worked that out. I have no idea how it works. But he had to go back. And two years later he came back over here. Called my mother. I am sure my mother and he got together. And he came back in early '22. And I was born that year.

John: That is interesting. Okay.

Martinelli: I haven't heard of someone going back and being drafted. But two Martinelli and a Viganni, they both came from the same little village up in the Alps, in Italy.

John: In the Alps? Okay.

Martinelli: Yea.

John: That is great. Went to school in Madison? Where?

Martinelli: Madison Central.

John: Madison Central. Okay.

Martinelli: The Powerhouses. Yea.

John: Okay.

Martinelli: They had good athletes. Not me. I was too small.

John: Sports? Anything like that?

Martinelli: No.

John: Okay. 1922, you were nineteen years old when Pearl Harbor was hit?

Martinelli: Yes. Yes. That's right.

John: Do you remember that? Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

Martinelli: Why, what I read in the paper, I remember. I read the paper awful, I still do.

John: What was happening around you? What were folks doing? I remember, we couldn't figure out where Pearl Harbor was.

Martinelli: Yea. Well, I just read it in the paper, you know. That is all I can think of, really.

John: What were you doing then? Going to school? Working?

Martinelli: I was working for Esser's Meat.

John: Oh, yea. I know Esser's.

Martinelli: Yea. For years.

John: Doing what?

Martinelli: Sausage kitchen.

John: Sausage kitchen.

Martinelli: Sausage maker.

John: Okay. Hey, great. Yea. Is Esser's still around?

Martinelli: No.

John: I know the name.

Martinelli: They were on Fairchild Street, off the Square.

John: Okay.

Martinelli: Yea. That sounds like it. But I don't think they are functioning any more. Miller's is in there now.

John: Miller's. Oh, yea.

- Martinelli: It's called Miller's. They deliver.
- John: What made you go in? Were you drafted? Did you enlist?
- Martinelli: Drafted. I went in there, I had to go to Milwaukee, and stuff. I just, "You mean to tell me I'm drafted?" I asked the guy. Yea, I wasn't very, if I was drafted, I was drafted. I would reconcile to the fact that it could happen. There was no, "Yes, sir!" No question. Then I went to Alabama. Fort McClellan, Alabama, for basic training.
- John: Okay.
- Martinelli: And then I came up to Ohio, some place, some center there, before we, because we were going to go overseas. We all knew that. This one buddy of mine, I'm not going to mention his name, because he was a rip-snorter. He says, "I'm going home. We're going to hop on the train. We are going home." I says, "Look, Mo," that was his name. I will come up with it. "You know, you are going to get caught, and they are going to bring you back." And that is just what happened. And they put him in the brig for a little while.
- John: I remember my uncle was going to the South Pacific, and he was, they were staging twenty miles from his house, and he'd come home on Saturday, and the MP's would come on Sunday, and take him back.
- Martinelli: Why, sure.
- John: And his mother said, "You're going to get in trouble." And he was saying, "Mom, we are going to the South Pacific." Okay, Fort McClellan. Basic training there. What was it like for a kid from Wisconsin to suddenly be in Fort McClellan, Alabama?
- Martinelli: Hot as hell!
- John: Okay. What was this? Summer? Do you remember when it was?
- Martinelli: I left for overseas in about February.
- John: Of? It would have been '42. Pearl Harbor was December, of '41. So? Did you go in right after Pearl Harbor?
- Martinelli: I got my, I got my information here. [Opening wallet.]
- John: Okay.

Martinelli: That is my dear wife. Boy, she was my sweetheart. Still is. Come on? Have you got a, I shouldn't bring this up, one of these things? [Showing Wisconsin Senior Care Enrollment Card.]

John: No.

Martinelli: It helps your insurance. The state of Wisconsin, there is only two or three states that have that. My kids even keep up on this. Yea. Just check it out.

John: Sure.

Martinelli: The bills I have, you got to be 65. Well, I figure your are getting close. And 65, now how does that work? I got paperwork on this.

John: Yea. I am glad you suggested that.

Martinelli: You just check it out. Wherever you can save a nickel.

John: Oh, absolutely. Oh, yea.

Martinelli: This day and age.

John: Yea.

Martinelli: Oh, come on. You asked me. This is the age. I'm a lot older than you are, I bet you.

John: Yea.

Martinelli: Here is my golf card. You're not interested in that. I still shoot golf.

John: Good.

Martinelli: This year I might not. My back has got to straighten out. It's got to straighten. What was the question you asked me?

John: When did you go in?

Martinelli: This money we got. [Showing contents of wallet.] I think it is fake. I can't get used to that. Just to have enough of it. Damn it!

John: Oh, that's okay. Take your time.

- Martinelli: I'm not going anywhere. I got my discharge papers. Little card. You never know when people, you were asking early on, you know. Come on. I couldn't have lost that. Oh, I got it slipped between [Looking in wallet]. Something.
- John: Oh, okay. [Looking at reduced size DD-214 laminated on card.] That's a great thing to have.
- Martinelli: Remember that? Maybe you don't have that?
- John: Oh, yea.
- Martinelli: Or, you do, huh?
- John: Yea.
- Martinelli: You never know when, when I first got out, I was given, a lot of questions were asked. I always had that handy.
- John: You got out in October, '45. [Reading from DD-214.] And, does it say when you went in?
- Martinelli: At the end of the year.
- John: 29 December, '42. Okay. Good. Okay. Well, so, down in basic at Fort McClellan, what was the shock? I mean, a kid from Wisconsin?
- Martinelli: You know what it was that I always remember? Guys from the East, from New York City, and they always got that brogue, and stuff. And I used to, I would fight with them all the time. I mean, good friends. One guy I still talk to, periodically. His name is, he is from "Joisey City." You know, they had all that accent. And, his name is Celso Santo. He was a runner, for one, for some outfit. He wasn't with the same outfit, but he was close.
- John: When you went into basic, were you assigned into a unit then, or were you assigned to a unit later on?
- Martinelli: When we went overseas, I'm pretty sure that is how it worked.
- John: This was infantry training?
- Martinelli: All infantry. Yea, I still remember, the only problem I really had, though, I can never forget that. We used to go from, and in the invasion, you know, we were on a big, big thing, and then you had to go down the ropes.

- John: Down the ropes into the landing barges.
- Martinelli: My hands used to bleed, because I used to hold that darn, I was so scared. I was just plain scared. You know, that was the only thing. And when I still got on land, then everything was honkey-dory.
- John: I remember going down, and seeing the boat, and you'd go to step into it, and when you stepped into it, it was five feet down!
- Martinelli: I've never forgotten that. I really have never forgotten that.
- John: Okay, then out of basic, you were assigned to what unit? Out of McClellan?
- Martinelli: Basic? 29th Infantry [Division].
- John: Do you remember battalion, company?
- Martinelli: Yea. 115th Infantry [Regiment]. They invaded on D-Day.
- John: Did you make D-Day with them?
- Martinelli: No. I smashed a jeep up, just before D-Day. And I was in a re-hab center, right on the English coast. And I still remember the doctors, it wrecked all my ribs, and they wanted to take that tape off. And he says, "Well, Mr. Martinelli," he should never have told me this, he says, "Tomorrow morning, we will go in and take the tape off." I says, "You think you are." I went in, I got up real early, went in the shower, I let the water drip on me, and drip, a little bit, because those guys--
- John: They'd rip it right off.
- Martinelli: They had too many guys. That isn't very funny, but that is how it worked. And I still remember, when the planes were coming in, all the injuries that were, oh. Then I replaced my outfit when they had just taken St. Lo. Remember, they had just taken St. Lo. And, in fact, I'll give you a little history.
- John: Okay, fine.
- Martinelli: This brings stuff back. We were in an orchard. We were trapped in this farmer's orchard. And my, I'll give you a little history. The captain says, "Martinelli," I was a runner, "You go ahead with Supple," It will show it in here, because I picked this book up when I went, I went to two reunions, and that was enough. I can't take, the same guys show up. You know. But, that is okay. I got nothing

against them. But, anyway, he says, “Supple, you go in and see if you can find if it was Germans. We could hear the cloppity, you know. And we went off through the fields, and we could hear, and it will explain a little bit more in here. I even keep track, everybody I can talk to, and, we got in this orchard. We could hear the Germans going down the road, and we thought they were Americans. We almost walked into, we were high, fortunately, but as we got close to them, they shot at us. They were going over our heads, and there is this one paragraph, it starts here, and it mentions this Supple, he is the captain, lieutenant, whatever his name was.

John: Okay. All right. “And Private First Class Frank Martinelli, a radio operator, was sent back to contact the mortar platoon, under cover of darkness--”

Martinelli: He said, “Let’s get the hell out of here! You know. What we went through, I never saw anybody run so fast in my life.

John: Let me just mention the title, this book looks great.

Martinelli: This guy that writes, that wrote in there, he was this Binkowski. I got a picture of him in one of my books. He’s passed away now.

John: The book is “*The 115th Infantry Regiment in World War II*,” it’s by Joseph Binkowski and Arthur Plaut, it’s by the Battery Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1988, and Frank is mentioned by name on page 106. That is really great.

Martinelli: And Mr. Supple, too.

John: Yea.

Martinelli: He called me up. We were teasing each other. We sure took off. That is all we could remember. I was twenty-two years old at that time.

John: That is something. “And the enemy moved on, and Supple and Martinelli were able to return and report what had taken place.”

Martinelli: We had chicken for dinner. We caught a chicken in the yard. And, you know what we did, we got our helmets underneath, dug out a little bit, got the heat going. No food, you know.

John: That helmet was a tremendous, you know what I found the best use for that thing was? It was something to sit on. You know, you didn’t have a chair. Sit on the dirt? You could wash in it, cook in it. Yea. That is great. So, you got back to your original outfit, then, when you came--

Martinelli: Oh, yes. At the orchard.

John: Okay. Were you with them all the way through?

Martinelli: Pardon me?

John: Were you with them all the way through?

Martinelli: Yes, we went from there to Brest.

John: Brest.

Martinelli: And I remember, we went out and we captured a bunch of Germans.

John: Okay.

Martinelli: As arrogant as they were at that time. They spit at us, and everything. And we couldn't do anything to them. You know. We couldn't shoot them, or anything. I wouldn't shoot anybody, but they were very arrogant, and stuff. That is where I got wounded. I still got a piece, I still got a piece of shrapnel in my side. Yesterday, my golf gang, we all met at the Laurel Tavern, down here, for lunch. About six, seven guys. My cousin said to me, he was in South Africa, South Africa? No, North Africa, wherever, he was part of Africa. And he says, "You mean you got wounded?" I says, "Do you think it gets better all my life?" Just teasing each other.

John: That's great. Yea, this thing is working good. I ask a lot of guys, you go from Wisconsin, you go to basic training, to England, what is it like that first day when you realize, hey, this is serious?

Martinelli: We were in Bodman, in England. That is way in the south of England, see. There used to be planes used to fly over us sometimes, reconnoitering, I'm sure.

John: German?

Martinelli: German. And they shot one down. I was in a mortar platoon. That is why I reconnoitered with the lieutenant, because we had to check it out. And they saw this thing flying over, and they got some kind of a weapon, it was a machine gun, and they shot it down. We captured this German. I don't know what happened to him. They took him away right away.

John: I'll be darned. That is something.

Martinelli: I forget all that stuff. You know, you really do. You want to just stay out alive, to

- John: be honest with you.  
So, do you remember what you were thinking when you first realized, hey, this is, I am in--
- Martinelli: I accepted everything. I'm not a good guy, I'm not. But I just accepted, this is where I am going to be. I want to, I am going to stay as long as I can keep myself going and, fortunately, I did.
- John: Did you make good friends with--
- Martinelli: Every, oh, yea.
- John: You got along?
- Martinelli: A lot of guys didn't. They were very angry. I can understand that. But I did get along with everybody. I knew I had to stay alive.
- John: You said, you got a chicken? How did you get fed, food up to you, when you were up?
- Martinelli: We had a certain amount of those packs.
- John: K-rations?
- Martinelli: Yea. K-rations. I forget the name of them. That, we got a little food, but we weren't trapped up there too long. It wasn't very long. We took off from those Germans, they realized a lot of guys were, they didn't realize we were in that area. We were just trapped in that orchard. As far as feed, that is why we found these chickens in that farmer's, that was good enough for us. You know. We made things work.
- John: Sure. You got up there shortly after D-Day. That was the summer. It was June. Supplies, new shoes, ammo?
- Martinelli: Never had a problem.
- John: All of that got up to you?
- Martinelli: All got up to us. Because we went from there to Bremen. We were there for quite a while. It was a seaport.
- John: In Germany?

Martinelli: Yea. Is it Germany? I guess it is.

John: Okay. But you were close to the sea?

Martinelli: I was drowned up in, that is why there is a picture of a couple of German girls, there. I got to know them pretty well. Was Bremen the seaport? No, that was in , geez, that is funny. I can't remember. That was in, the river right across there, where all these boats came in.

John: The Rhine?

Martinelli: Rhine! We would, I thought, you know, distances in the water, because I used to go to Brittingham Beach, I used to swim a lot. But we weren't swimming very far. But I was going across this darned thing. I was about a third of the way across, maybe even more. I didn't think I would make it.

John: Swimming?

Martinelli: Swimming. All of a sudden, a nice looking girl happened to come paddling out. Drug me in to shore. I was passed out, practically. Because we didn't, how often did you swim in the service? And then with her, I got to know her pretty well, and stuff. I thought I'd even marry her, but, you know, I thought, this can't be. A lot of guys got married. English, you know.

John: You went from Normandy, when you caught up with your outfit, all the way to, where were you when it wound up? In Germany?

Martinelli: I came, I was up, jeepers, that is very funny. I came back to La Havre. Come over in the boat. That is in, yea, I came back to La Havre, and got on a boat, and I went home. I think.

John: Do you remember when that was? Your discharge says October, '45. So you were there at the end of the war?

Martinelli: Yea, I think so. The only thing, even memories I got.

John: That is what it's all about.

Martinelli: Me and this other guy, we were, when we were in La Havre, we were up in, I forget where we were. We were guarding, the war was over, and we were guarding banks, and wineries.

John: Well, they had to be well-protected!

Martinelli: The trouble is, me and this other guy, we were on guard this one night, and this lieutenant came up and up and gave us hell! "What the hell are you doing?" Letting these displaced persons, you know, there were a lot of displaced persons up there. We'd let them go down and get the wine for nothing. But the lieutenants, they were going to take care of their own. You know? I understood that. After all. But these guys went down in the dog-gone great big vats of wine. And they got stinking drunk, three or four of these guys. And we wondered why they weren't coming up. And this lieutenant happened to pull up in a Jeep. Did we ketch hell? So, it won't happen again. And it didn't happen again. It was real bad. Because these guys, they were suppressed and everything. They just wanted a little bit of wine. Come on!

John: That's great.

Martinelli: And you did the rest. I didn't remember that. I didn't mean to interrupt you. If I do, just say so.

John: No. It is your story. And don't hesitate, if you flip back to something that you remember. Don't get--

Martinelli: I'm surprised I've even got a little half-way memory yet.

John: You were there during the winter?

Martinelli: I don't--Oh, when did I get discharged?

John: October, '45, it said.

Martinelli: Probably not. But I came home. I came home quicker than I should have because I wanted to get home so bad. Well, that would be before winter, October.

John: Yea. October, '45, though, was, D-Day was June of '44. And you got out in October of '45. So, were you there over winter? I think, if you were, you'd probably remember being cold. Because that was a bad winter.

Martinelli: It was a bad winter. I can't remember.

John: This is quite a book. I'll try to get a copy.

Martinelli: You can take it for a while.

John: No, I'll get a copy, I've got the title on the tape, and I'll get a copy, have the Vet's Museum get it.

- Martinelli: Here is where we were. This is what I was looking for. Where it was, I was sure I'd seen it [looking at the end-papers of the book]. We came up to Brest. We came from La Havre, right here, and then we went over to Brest, and that is when those German guys were spitting at us, and we couldn't do anything, see.
- John: Well, that is the first they had, the ones in Europe, had really faced any opposition, until you guys.
- Martinelli: Probably so. Right there. That is right.
- John: Did you get to Paris?
- Martinelli: We pulled in at Paris. We went right, here is where we went. To the end. And when we got into Paris, a lot of guys just took off.
- John: I can imagine.
- Martinelli: Well, with the war, the feeling was, but I figured I had a job to do, and, you know.
- John: Sure. Sure.
- Martinelli: My whole life has been dictated like that. No, that is right. This is what I was looking for. 115th Infantry, that was me, that was us. And here is where we went over.
- John: Plymouth, in England, okay.
- Martinelli: And we went over to Brest, and we went right all the way across to the very end, to the Elbe.
- John: Did you bump into any Russians up there?
- Martinelli: No.
- John: I was talking to a fellow, a couple of weeks ago, who did meet the Russians, and he felt that he wasn't meeting Russian soldiers. He felt, whoever he was meeting, had been sent to meet the Americans, because--
- Martinelli: It was still politics, even then.
- John: Oh, heavens, yea. So you got all the way through Germany?

Martinelli: Oh, yea. We were in a train all that time. A train. We didn't see too darn much.  
John: Here is Huelich, February 24th. That would have been winter. And Munich, March 1, well, that would be spring.

Martinelli: I remember Gladbach, oh, yea. That town. Then were shelling it when we were there.

John: Germans were shelling it?

Martinelli: I went down to the basement. You learn all that stuff, you know.

John: That is Gladbach. That is right near Munich, yea. Okay.

Martinelli: Well, they were way ahead of us on, I remember, because we got, I forget where we were. What is the big highway that goes all the way through there?

John: Autobahn?

Martinelli: Autobahn. We went in--

John: Yea, that was back then.

Martinelli: Back then. They were functioning, and so. I forget exactly where we were, but we decided to get in the Jeep, with another guy, and just go down the Autobahn. What the heck? We took off. The Germans were out there, looking at us. Pot shots, but they never hit anyone. Funny, how you jeopardize yourself, you know.

John: Let's see. The Maas. Hanover, you were there?

Martinelli: Don't remember Hanover.

John: Well, April 24th. That was close to the end, and then you came back, and came out of Bremerhaven?

Martinelli: I was in Bremerhaven, yea. That really sounds familiar. Yea, we were up there, we had gone past there. I see.

John: I'll tell you what, I am going to turn this tape over.

**[End of Side A of Tape 1.]**

Martinelli: I prattle enough, you can understand that.

- John: You know, one of the things, if you keep your mind going, keep active.
- Martinelli: That is what I am saying about the kids. They keep you. I got four boys and three girls. And they question me for everything in this house. I don't know if you noticed it, but this is pretty nice here now. And, I got a lady that comes in. They said, "Dad, don't you think you ought to get somebody to clean up, you know. When you are living in a house, it's a little different than when a female, or their mother was here, you know. Well, that's right. They are always questioning me, what I am doing. So, but they do clean it up, and it looks half-way decent. Upstairs and downstairs. I hate to spend that kind of money, but, by golly, you got to do it.
- John: Our youngest daughter just got married in June, and so it is my wife and I, and she works, she works for one of our daughters. So I am at home alone, most of the time, and I have been doing the house work, and I am starting to think, you know-
- Martinelli: After a while, you can do it easy.
- John: Yea. Okay, just kind of an overview. You mentioned what your attitude was, hey, I'm here, I got a job to do. Just general thoughts about being there, what you were up against, and again, everybody was doing it back then, but, what did you, what were some of the things you thought of back then?
- Martinelli: I'm not so patriotic, but I knew I was there. In Milwaukee, they beat me up, they told me, oh, this is, so therefore, the job I got, I got to tell you. This guy, when we came up from Alabama, this guy, he wanted to go home. And he got as far as Madison, yea. And the MP's were looking for people. Come on, that is just common sense.
- John: He got as far as Madison?
- Martinelli: He got as far as Madison, and then they questioned him. Because he still had his uniform on. I am sure, you know. But then, he was a rough, tough kid. He got a few medals, he did.
- John: What about some of the Europeans, the French and the German people that you met?
- Martinelli: The only thing is, as far as them, they helped me with their language. I went to school a little bit. We had an option to go certain days, some times, so I thought, well, as long as I am over here, why not try to learn. And I got to learn a lot of words. *Vier gehing zie, fraulein?* You know. And, it was very funny, because, but then, again, with an Italian with German accent. I--

- John: Yea. I spent some time. I wasn't in during the war, training the Italian Army in Italy. Vicenza, Pordenone, Padua, that part of north Italy, in the area of Venice. I never got into Venice. We did that three or four times, training them in close air support. How to call in air strikes. Beautiful country. Except for the winter. Oh, it got cold over there.
- Martinelli: In fact, my number two daughter, when she graduated from college, she went to my mother's home town in northern Italy. And the only problem she had over there, the dog-gonned Italians, all they do is pinch you all the time. I've heard of that before. But she says, they were very obliging when she was over there. She would go to visit Como, the province of Como, where my folks were born, in Como.
- John: Lake Como is there?
- Martinelli: Yea. Beautiful country. But these dog-gonned Italians, they feed you like tomorrow is the last day of your life, or something. They couldn't put enough food into you. But, that is the way I am. I treat anybody that comes into my house, they go to my refrigerator, take what you want. That is the way I am. It is inbred.
- John: You went over to Europe by ship.
- Martinelli: Oh, yes.
- John: What was that like? On a troopship?
- Martinelli: We were in captain's quarters. Everybody. The ship was loaded. I mean, they could put you, I ended up with three, four guys, not very much, it didn't make any, we were out on deck. And a couple guys. And these Americans. And they almost threw on guy into the ocean because they caught him with loaded dice.
- John: Oh?
- Martinelli: I was standing up there watching. I liked to watch dice games. I don't play, because I don't, you know, they were going to throw him in the drink, till the MP's grabbed him. I remember. That stuff you do remember.
- John: How was the food on the ship? Do you remember that?
- Martinelli: The only thing I objected to was that, orange marmalade. I hate orange marmalade. English. That is English. And I remember that. But, you get used to it.
- John: Yea. Did you ever get sea-sick going over?

- Martinelli: No, I never did. A lot of folks, a lot of guys were--
- John: The minute that thing would start moving, oh!
- Martinelli: I never did, either. Depending on how you approach it, I suppose. I mean--
- John: Do you remember what went on when the war was over? Do you remember hearing about it?
- Martinelli: When I got home, there in New York when we got off, and I remember, this Celso Santo fellow I was telling you about, Marty is my nickname. My folks came over from Italy. Martinelli was too long. So my dad says, Marty. Everything, they called me Marty. And he says, you know, they were, and New Jersey is right near New York City. I don't know much about that country. But he and I hitch-hiked to his mother. He wanted to see his mother. That night. The war was over with, the MP's weren't checking anybody. And that made sense, you know? And I still remember looking up, looking up the, the capitol, I mean, all that stuff in New York, and stuff. And then we got in--
- John: A taxi? The subway?
- Martinelli: Subway, yes.
- John: That must have been something.
- Martinelli: But he knows his way. And, when I got home, we called back, and to this day, we call back, not a lot now, but he says, "Santos," I says, "what the hell do you do?" We'd like to know. Me, I says, "You know what I do. I told you all that." He visited me two, three times, him and his wife. And he says, "Well, I am a jeweler." "What do you mean, jeweler?" "Well," he says, "a lot of nights I got to stay quite late, and all these big shots, females, come in and they like jewelry done a certain way." And he would fix it the way they wanted it. I never figured it. But he was quite talented. The picture of me that he drew.
- John: Is that the one on the wall?
- Martinelli: No, no. Oh, that one there? You know what that is?
- John: Hunh?
- Martinelli: My grandson, that isn't him, but the girl he married, they stole this out of one of the books I've got there, and she painted it.

- John: That's great.
- Martinelli: And they came in a couple, three weeks ago, and "Grandpa." You know, it makes no, you know, she says, "Here." I says, "What the heck is this?" And it was that picture. They are getting married in November, November of this year.
- John: That is a nice thing to do.
- Martinelli: So, I felt good.
- John: Do you have a book with pictures from the time you were in?
- Martinelli: I've got lots. [Pause]
- John: We have a photo album, quite full of Frank's photographs, but the first document in it is an Order to Report for Induction, dated December 17, 1942. And, "You have been selected for training and service in the Army, and you will report to Room 305, Washington Building, 119 East Washington Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin, at 6:30 a.m., on the 29th of December, 1942." What a wonderful thing to get in the mail, huh?
- Martinelli: I couldn't wait!
- John: Do you want to go through that, and kind of just describe some of the things that are in there? This is you?
- Martinelli: This is me. December of '43.
- John: Can I read from your citation?
- Martinelli: Go right ahead.
- John: I am just going to paraphrase here. This is the Award for the Bronze Star Medal Citation: "PFC Frank J. Martinelli, 36293116," that is your serial number, "115th Infantry, U. S. Army, for meritorious service in military operations against the enemy in western Europe, from 7 August, 1944, to 7 September, 1944, and 19 September, 1944, to 28 April, 1945. PFC Martinelli, messenger and radio operator, excelled in performance of duty in combat and contributed materially to the fine record established by the organization of which he is a member. The high standards of courage, initiative and discipline required of him during long periods of combat were met by PFC Martinelli in a manner that reflects great credit upon himself and the military service. Entered the military service from Wisconsin."

And there is a photograph of the young man himself. That is great.

Martinelli: Me and Tom Hanks. I remember, it's funny, because I lost a lot of guys, and the invasion, half these regiments were lost in the water. That is why I didn't go to the movie, because I didn't want to see that stuff. Too realistic.

John: This is a Red Cross map of the London Underground.

Martinelli: Is that what that is?

John: Yea.

Martinelli: What am I doing with it?

John: Well, were you in London?

Martinelli: Oh, yes.

John: On the way over, right?

Martinelli: Nuts! And I got a Belgian pistol [reading from a permit document]. I had to register that thing. In compliance with certain sections of, 1944. Then I give it to my brother, and I don't know where it is. He's passed away, so, it might be in his house, for all I know. Here is when we were in Alabama. Fort McClellan, Alabama. Mike Macarone. He sent that, I think you saw that picture in there.

John: That was a beautiful thing to do, you know.

Martinelli: Oh, she brought it. I went ashore, I was with most of it. But she did a good job on it. And then, besides that, she said, "Grandpa," she calls me Grandpa, I'm tooting my horn, now.

John: That's all right.

Martinelli: You know, I was quite a dancer in my days. But now I can't, but she says, "I want the first dance with you." At the wedding, you know. I remember when I first got married to my dear wife, she was called the Cherry Hop. Do you remember, do you go back to, in your life, the Cherry, have you heard of the Cherry Hop? It was a dance.

John: Sure. Oh, yea.

Martinelli: She was the Cherry Hop Queen of Sun Prairie. Could she dance! I thought, when I

get married, I have to, I really have to learn to dance, because this gal is going to want to dance. Yea, like most guys, then I got pretty good. As we were going to dances, our family and friends families were getting married, these gals were all coming over to me. And I got to dance with them, somehow. I'll fake it.

John: Duty calls.

Martinelli: I'll fake it. I'll fake it.

John: These photographs from Fort McClellan, they are dated March, of '43.

Martinelli: Yea.

John: Okay.

Martinelli: My daughter did all of this. She insisted on this. And I wanted her to get it over with. I am so glad she had done this. I wouldn't remember.

John: This is precious.

Martinelli: It really is, you know. Then Camp Shenango, in Pennsylvania.

John: Shenango! Was the place my uncle broke out of. We were from Sharon, which was the nearest town. This is where he would leave on Saturday and the MP's would take him back on Sunday. You went through the same place he did. Shenango is about eight miles from my grandma's house.

Martinelli: Oh, for crying out loud. Coincidental, here. This guy's name in Martin. Yea, Dick Martin. He is from Indiana, somewhere. If I remember correctly.

John: Isn't that something? Camp Shenango. The Shenango River runs right through Sharon, my home town.

Martinelli: And I never smoked. Do you smoke?

John: No.

Martinelli: I never smoked. I used to like cigars, though.

John: Well, yea, sure.

Martinelli: But now I cut it all out, because the kids would get mad, and as they grew, you know, "Dad, you know?" And it helped my health, too.

John: Yes. That is really neat. That is quite a collection.

Martinelli: Camp Shenango.

John: Isn't that quite a coincidence?

Martinelli: Here is when we were in England, here. We were in the moors. We were in the moors, here. I don't know what we were doing sitting around, because we went on walks. Do you remember that when you were in service?

John: Oh, yea.

Martinelli: Walk, walk, I was thirty pounds lighter. And then bands came in here. Here I am again.

John: Those are great photographs.

Martinelli: I have to tell my, I will call my daughter up and tell her it really has helped. I called her last night. This was in England, I think.

John: Could be. I don't know.

Martinelli: Here is my buddy. He was in the Air Force. Frank Rane. He had a grocery store, for a while.

John: From Madison?

Martinelli: He still lives here. Trouble is, they just opened him up, three, four weeks ago. He was loaded with cancer.

John: That is too bad.

Martinelli: Here is a guy, McCauly is his name, yea. Here is this Santos.

John: Okay, that is him?

Martinelli: We'll see him again. Maybe I have--here is Santos, again. He was a real good friend. He still is. That is my, watching a card game. So you had to get in it. To play cards. Here is--

John: Ah, swastikas. What is the caption on that? Does it say where that is?

- Martinelli: Captured German flag, at Brest. September 22. Pal George Markarian, Worcester, Mass.
- John: Oh, isn't that something.
- Martinelli: I saved everything.
- John: And the guys, just for the tape, this is a cloth German flag, red with a white circle and a swastika on it, and it is signed by a lot of the guys. That is, oh, there are several of them here. Oh, that is really great.
- Martinelli: Found them in a basement. German place. I knew they were here.
- John: That is really something.
- Martinelli: Here is the guy, that wrote the book.
- John: Okay. These are great pictures.
- Martinelli: Here is a Jewish guy. He was my sergeant. And when there would be shelling, and when the, let me think, I got to think. Between the mortars, there were wires, and when they were shelling, when the thing comes back from the lieutenant, where there is a shell, they go from that. The shell. And all of a sudden, he yelled at me, "Mattinelli, get your ass out here!" I says, "What do you want, Gerson?" Gerson was his name. And I felt bad, he's passed away now. I wanted to see him so bad. But he had more guts. And shelling, he'd be out there fixing all the wires. And, if he can do it, I can do it. You know. But he was a peach of a guy. Gerson Marcot.
- John: And that picture is from Schaa, Germany, April of '45. Okay. That is really something.
- Martinelli: This is a good book. It mentions a lot of them.
- John: Great for bringing back the memories.
- Martinelli: We shot a plane down, accidently.
- John: Oh, yea?
- Martinelli: I think that is the picture. Does it say anything about a plane being shot down.
- John: Yea. "M Company, 115th Infantry, shot down one ME-109."

Martinelli: In the water, somehow. It was up flying.  
John: "Near Pier, Germany, January, 1945." I, that it great. I've never seen one of those.

Martinelli: And here is this guy, here. He was another, nutty, I don't know what your nationality is.

John: I'm Irish.

Martinelli: Well, they're not all bad. You know, but this guy here, he was Polish descent. Oh, he had more guts. I would hide, I admit it, I would hide when they were shelling us. You don't go out there, invite them. But is it very funny how that worked. And this guy here, Paul Marcot, he visited me three or four times, from...I can't believe it. And these are these girls. That drug me out of the river.

John: Saved your life?

Martinelli: Yea.

John: Very attractive young ladies.

Martinelli: Oh, yea. I got to know. Oh, that is me, there.

John: Yea. This is really something. Who are, oh, this is Frank, you were telling me about. Frank Rane.

Martinelli: That is me, right there. This is Celso Santos. Marcott, he is out East, somewhere. It explains a lot doesn't it? I have to tell her this when I call her up.

John: This is great. This is really great.

Martinelli: These were the girls we met. And it explains where we were. The mail clerk and me. Oh, that guy, he was a racketeer, you know.

John: Oh, yea? Binghampton, New York. That is where the Erie Railroad is.

Martinelli: That is one guy I never went to see. I didn't trust him. I didn't trust him there.

John: I know what you mean. That is just a fabulous collection.

Martinelli: I don't know how far you got. This is Marcot, the Jewish fellow. He says, "Come on, Martinelli," he says. That is how we washed. Strip down and pour the water on them. I meant that, I don't know what I got. That is a bucket.

John: Oh, these pictures are fabulous.

Martinelli: At least, they explain themselves. This is all her work. Wait till I tell her. I was bitching like the dickens. I wanted to get it over with. Now, this was up in Brest. We took over a certain part of town, all these brick buildings, they were beautiful. Enormous windows, I remember that. You know, it just amazed me. Here, we were ready to go back home. I got on, one of the first guys to get on, and I had a little Brownie camera, that was all I could afford. That never came from me.

John: They took great pictures. This is when you were loading up to come back?

Martinelli: Loading up at La Havre. In La Havre.

John: That is December, of '45. Okay.

Martinelli: No, October.

John: October, I'm sorry. You are right, October of '45. Do you remember where you came back in to? Oh, you said, New Jersey.

Martinelli: This is my brother. He ended up in Alaska, he had quite a few years on me.

John: Oh, this is great.

Martinelli: And this is when we got home. All night. This gal here was a colonel in the medics.

John: I just interviewed three women who were WACs, and the three of them are just as sharp as a tack.

Martinelli: No, the army wouldn't take anyone that wasn't. But she has passed away. You can't get any of that at all.

John: That is really something.

Martinelli: Here it is. Santos did that. [Showing drawing of himself.]

John: That is great.

Martinelli: I've always kept it. I kept everything.

John: This is a pencil sketch of Frank with a helmet on. And it's dated February 12, 1944, by Celso Santo. That is a good picture.

- Martinelli: Isn't that good. He's got talent. I couldn't get the nose on that by myself. I'm serious. I got no talent. I got a son now is fifty years old, can he paint!
- John: And the first document in this book is your draft notice, and here is your discharge. That is great.
- Martinelli: History.
- John: History. Those are important documents.
- Martinelli: Because these are nice.
- John: Do you remember where you picked up the flags? The German flags?
- Martinelli: Up in Brest, in a basement. I found them, I grabbed them, and had them ever since.
- John: Okay, you said, you mentioned you had been to a couple of reunions.
- Martinelli: One in--the President, two years ago. This was when he just went into office.
- John: Bush.
- Martinelli: Him and a bunch of freshmen.
- John: [reading] "Eighty-first Annual Convention of the 29th Division." A flyer. Where? Oh, Orlando. October, 1999. And you went to another one, you said? You went to two?
- Martinelli: Virginia. Well, the one with the President was in Virginia. Orlando was the other one.
- John: I see.
- Martinelli: But after that, I'm staying home. But my daughter, she is a sweetheart, she says, "Dad, if you go, I'll--" Her husband is a corn breeder. He works for this company, but he is busy. He's over in Germany, he is all over the joint. And she says, "Harry won't be around. I'll go down with you." "If you go down with me, that is great."
- John: That is a great offer. This is the 29th Infantry Monument, where?
- Martinelli: That is in Orlando. They didn't have anything down in Virginia. You ever been to Virginia?

John: Oh, yea. I lived there for ten years.

Martinelli: Oh, Lord. You ever go to the mountains, and stuff?

John: Oh, beautiful.

Martinelli: Scares the hell out of me! As you went down, it was like this.

John: That Shenandoah Valley is just--

Martinelli: It's very nice, but I don't like heights.

John: It says here on the marker, "The 29th Division stormed ashore on Omaha Beach, to win a beachhead and to win undying fame." Wow.

Martinelli: We lost a lot of people.

John: Yea. Oh, yea. You know, you were fortunate. You never think of cracking up a Jeep as being fortunate, but--

Martinelli: At that point! I mention it many times, to many people. And after I got out of the re-hab center, I was out somewhere, and a couple of guys stopped me, medics. "You know what, Martinelli?" They found me. I busted one guy's nose. I got out of my head, you know. When they dug me out of that Jeep.

John: This is a fabulous collection.

Martinelli: Well, it explains--here is when we were down in Orlando.

John: At the museum.

Martinelli: Are you a traveler?

John: Yea.

Martinelli: I'm not much of a traveler. My wife wasn't, either. We just loved to be around the house. We had a lot of, all the family, Martinelli in Madison, we were invited to a lot of parties, always. We went all the time.

**[End of Side B of Tape 1.]**

John: Sure.

- Martinelli: During the war, he got a "Dear John" letter from this girl.
- John: Selso did? Oh, that's bad.
- Martinelli: And I am sure that happened to a lot of guys, you know. Yea, I don't know if he married her afterwards. I can't remember that. She met a sailor.
- John: I knew a guy I was in the service with that got a "Dear John," and he went around to the guys and got as many girls' pictures as he could, and sent them to her, and said, "I got your letter. I am sorry. Here is a bunch of pictures. Pick yours out and send the rest back to me."
- Martinelli: Sure.
- John: I'm sure. So, then you were in the grocery business?
- Martinelli: Thirty years, thirty-five years.
- John: In Madison, here?
- Martinelli: Yea.
- John: Where.
- Martinelli: Olin Avenue. Where the Fairgrounds is. Right before the bridge. And I was still living in Sun Prairie at the time. I remember, I put that store up. I had that store built. And it had a compressor, that had all my equipment outside. And it was summer time, and when the compressor would work like hell if it was real hot in the sun, I'd get a call, "Frank, this is Joe Blow. Would you take a look at the compressor?" I worked all day. I worked till eight o'clock at night. I had to come home. I says, "Okay." My wife, I says, "Honey, let's get back in the car." We had a brand new car. The reason I am saying this, we had to pull along the side of the building. I opened the door to get inside. Checked the equipment. I got it going. We both went outside. "Where is that car?" That is a little bit of a road there. It was about eleven o'clock when we got out there. It went across, jumped the curb, went between two posts, didn't hit nothing. And we looked like this, we could see that dog-gonned post across the street. Eventually, I had to do something about it. Good and embarrassing.
- John: You had the GI Bill from your service. Did you ever use it, Frank? I've talked to a lot of guys who just had it and they--

Martinelli: I don't know how it would apply.

John: Basically, college.

Martinelli: I never went to the University. I was right near Wisconsin, and I never went.

John: When you came out, any medical problems? Or that?

Martinelli: I said, I didn't have any problems at all.

John: You got the Purple Heart, for getting--

Martinelli: I still got a scrap in my side.

John: You still have a piece in you?

Martinelli: Yea.

John: Were you laid up a lot with that?

Martinelli: No. Are you kidding? We were up in Brest. They sent us back to a re-hab. The doctor looked at it, gave me a penicillin shot, that's all there was to it.

John: Sent you back?

Martinelli: Right here. I can feel it right there. But it wasn't very important. Couldn't have been.

John: Okay. Lower left side of you back.

Martinelli: Yea.

John: I talked to a fellow, who was a doctor at Iwo Jima. And they had terrible, terrible losses there. And they sent him back from the beach to the hospital ship, and told him to go to the mess hall, because if they could sit up and eat, send them back to the beach.

Martinelli: Halelluia, huh?

John: Yea.

Martinelli: Well, I suppose they know. They are smart.

John: So, you've stayed in touch with some of your friends, especially Santos.

Martinelli: Santos, he was a peach of a guy.

John: It would be great if you could get together with him.

Martinelli: If he comes this way, I'll call those guys up. You talk to him. He'll never come, though.

John: Well, you never know.

Martinelli: He's the same age as I am, you know. We don't travel too much, I am afraid.

John: I can't think--this is a fantastic story. And I will get a copy of that book from the library down there. Especially with your name mentioned right there. That is great.  
As a mortar man, as a member of a mortar team, you carried a carbine? An M-1?

Martinelli: Pistol.

John: Okay. What kind of a radio was it, do you remember? SCR--

Martinelli: I know it worked. It better work.

John: That was my job, to keep them working.

Martinelli: Is that right? Well, yea. You would probably get, well, you are too young.

John: A lot of the radios we had were, this was the mid-'50's. They were World War II units. That Marine Corps, they are so cheap.

Martinelli: Oh, I imagine so.

John: Okay. Anything that you want to add to this? Sort of a wrap-up? This is just a fantastic story.

Martinelli: This helps a little bit.

John: Oh, the book?

Martinelli: You know. So, that is why I thought, these are my kids.

John: That is a remarkable family you have got there.

Martinelli: All self-sufficient. They never cost me a nickel.

John: That is magnificent.

Martinelli: My one son, my oldest boy, I can brag about my kids, you know.

John: Sure.

Martinelli: My oldest boy runs the City of Madison's Forestry Department.

John: Okay. That's great.

Martinelli: Besides that, they open him up here a couple of years ago and when he talks, he has this gadget here. And I say to him, he's a knuckle-head, though, he is, he is self-sufficient. We taught him that. There were seven of them, you know, we taught. "Mike, I told you that I will pay for it." The doctor gave him--

John: Yea.

Martinelli: He uses it. Because he is going to get every bit out of it that he can. Didn't cost him nothing. I says, "I'll pay for it." It would cost me about \$800. I can afford it. "You go pick one up that you want, and I'll pay for it." Mike Martinelli. Peach of a guy. He stops in three, he lives out toward Middleton, so he comes this way. And every night, he stops, maybe three, four times a week. You know.

John: I need a release that will allow the Museum - - and I got a copy for you - - to put this in their files.

Martinelli: Okay, sure.

John: We sign this and, I don't know why, but I keep forgetting to get this signed, so I do an interview and the next day I come back and say--

Martinelli: Well, you know, I am right here, so why not?

John: This will be your copy of it, and, it just says that, do you know, copyright--Hey, that is something. The 29th Division--

Martinelli: They were passing them out down there.

John: Aw, that is tremendous.

- Martinelli: The President was there. So, you know, I keep it. I can use this. Right here?
- John: This allows the Museum let students see the interview, or do whatever they do with it. Being a writer, I am familiar with copyright law, and right now you own your half of the tape, and I own my half of the tape, and this allows them to let people study it, and so.
- Martinelli: Yea, okay. You don't mind if I put my initial? You know why I do that? Because, if there is never a J in my checks, and stuff, they are never going to cash them. I told the bank that.
- John: Okay.
- Martinelli: Frank J. Martinelli, my personal identification.
- John: I have a son. He is a great guy. And his name is James. Well, his name is Reggie. Okay. But anytime I write him a check, I write it to James.
- Martinelli: That is all right. To each his own.
- John: Here is something on the Museum. Here is something on, about this program, what they do with it, and all that stuff. And here is something, I'll just leave this with you. If you ever want to donate any of that, of course, you probably want that for the family, but if you ever want to donate that, they would love to have that. And what I will do, when this is transcribed, I'll make a copy and send it to you.
- Martinelli: That would be nice.
- John: Sure, I'll stick it in the mail. I'll probably do the transcribing.
- Martinelli: How did you get going in writing, and stuff like that?
- John: Well, I am going to shut this off.

**[End of Interview.]**

