

**Augustine John DiFiore
Veteran**

**Mike Russert and Wayne
NYS Military Museum
Interviewers**

**Interviewed at the Comfort Inn, Brooklyn, NY
20 March 2003**

MALE VOICE: Interview at the Comfort Inn, Brooklyn, New York. It is the 20th of March, 2003, approximately 1:30 p.m. The interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clark.

Give me your full name, date of birth, place of birth, please.

JOHN DiFIORE: Okay. My name is Augustine John DiFiore. I was born in Yonkers, New York, June 1st, 1924.

MALE VOICE: Okay. What was your educational background prior to entering military service?

JOHN DiFIORE: I graduated high school --Yonkers High School like a general course and then I was one of eight children. I was one of eight children, the fifth one, and I came from I came from a very poor family. I lived in a cold-water flat. At that time with eight children, my father was working for the (inaudible) and his earnings were \$25 a week. With that we had to survive.

My two sisters dropped out of high school to go to work. They were the oldest, and I had an older brother. He dropped out of high school when he was about 17, 18 years old, and he joined the Army, the First Division, 16th Infantry, 1939.

Then my other brother, he joined the CCC. He was 16 years old. (Inaudible) and he was sent to (inaudible) in Montana, and then when I

graduated high school at 18 years old I tried to join the Coast Guard or Air Force, but I was rejected because of my eyesight. So I found a job (inaudible).

So I worked there until I was drafted in the Army. That would be March 11th, 1943 when I was 18 1/2 years old.

MALE VOICE: We're going to go back for a second. When you heard about Pearl Harbor, where were you and what was your reaction?

JOHN DiFIORE: Well, I was in my house. I remember it was a nice sunny day, and I heard it on the radio, and there really didn't -- I really (inaudible) and I really -- it didn't weigh on me that much like, you know, because maybe I was ignorant or something, you know, on all this, but then as the days went by and I seen everybody was getting excited, and most of the guys, and they were joining the service. They were joining the Army, the Navy, Marine Corps, young guys.

They all wanted to go in.

I had a very close friend, and I says, "Come on. Let's go. Let's join." Then we go down to Whitehall Street in New York City to join the Coast Guard or the Air Force and got rejected by both of them. He was accepted, my friend, but I was rejected on account of my eyes. So he says, "I'm not going in if you're not going in." So we waited. Then we got drafted.

From Yonkers we were shipped out to Long Island to (inaudible). It's way out in Long Island, (inaudible) and over there they gave us different tests (inaudible). They gave us our uniforms, and (inaudible) old 1917 (inaudible) rifles, you know, with the bayonet and everything, and that's when I started to feel I was in the Army, you know.

We were there a few days, and then we boarded to train a locomotive train -- that's all there was in them days, traveled north, and then after an hour or two hours of traffic, one of the officers (inaudible) insignia on

there, and they talked to us. They told us that we're (inaudible) battalion, the 204. We're going up to Port (inaudible), Massachusetts for basic training, and that's where we were for — I was anyway.

We didn't see much of basic training there. I was a squad leader. I really loved it. I was a kid. I was very strong. I could run. I was up in the front with the captain all the time, you know, on the (inaudible) and all that. I ate it all up, especially the food because there wasn't much food at my house. We only got one dish of food and that was it. Most of the time when we went to bed we were hungry.

So I really enjoyed what I was doing in the Army and I did good. I was squad sergeant for three months, and then after we had -- we were inspected, and they said we need another three months of training, the battalion, so we stayed there another three months.

When I first -- the six months of basic training, my platoon officer (inaudible) came to me and said, "John," he says, "I see by your records that you have" I think have 120 and something. "Looks like your IQ" I don't know. They had a special thing for it.

They says, "You want to go to Officers Candidate School or do you want to go to ASDP?" So I said, "What's ASDP?" He says, "It's a college course, an engineering course, two and a half year course." He said, "We'll send you to Harvard." I (inaudible) Harvard, you know. I was a poor guy. I couldn't afford to go to college. So I jumped on it. I said, "I'll go."

I went there and I met all these young fellows. A lot of guys were older than me, and much, much smarter than me. So we had a great time at Harvard. My roommate, we lived in a suite like three or four bedrooms, two guys in a bedroom. Still we had a study room, and one of our roommates was a guy named Hal Holbrook, 19 years old. You ever heard of him, the actor?

MALE VOICE: Yes.

JOHN DiFIORE: Well, he was very -- let's say nobody liked him. He walked straight as a pole, and he was like very what would you say? Like --

MALE VOICE: Arrogant?

JOHN DiFIORE: Well, a little bit like that, yeah. I was going to say something. I don't want (inaudible), but we I got to be good friends with him. I think I was the only guy who was his friend, and his mother -- his parents -- he came from Ohio.

His parents were divorced, and he had a grandmother that lived near Boston, and we were always broke because we used to go out with a girl from Radcliffe or (inaudible) on Friday and Saturday night, and we danced around a little bit (inaudible). We were only making \$50 a month, and we had to pay the cleaner bills, you know, to clean the uniform. We had to clean the (inaudible) all the time.

We did good. He used to (inaudible) his grandmother (inaudible) and we used to meet her in Boston, and she'd take us out to dinner. She must have given him a few dollars, and I remember one time we went to the Boston Symphony Hall. I don't know (inaudible).

It was things like that, and after nine months, the invasion of France was going to -- was in the future there, planning for it. They needed replacements, so they took me and a lot of guys. We went to the (inaudible). We wound up in (inaudible) after New Jersey. From there you get all your equipment and everything like that. They put you on a train and take you to Jersey City and get on a ferry and cross the river, and you get on the boat (inaudible).

It was the George U.S. George Washington,

and we left and we had a 75 ship convoy. It took us 14 days to get to Liverpool. When we got to Liverpool, we took a train to Chester. It's in (inaudible). We trained up there, you know, marched around and stuff like that.

Then we got shipped out to Winchester, where they had the invasion. That's where all the foreign troopers were. After they moved out, we moved in, and then from Winchester they shipped us out to Southampton, and waited a day or two to get on a ship.

It wasn't a big ship. It was an English infantry ship (inaudible), and it took us a couple of days to cross the channel. The channel was full of (inaudible) and I guess they had these airships with the cables on them so the planes (inaudible). So it took us about two days.

The next day we got to off the French coast on a ship. They loaded us into the landing craft boats. They loaded us into the water. We went to the (inaudible), and we tried to get off the beach as fast as possible. We were loaded down with all the equipment. We had a (inaudible).

We finally made it up the hill to -- the top of the hill where the trucks were waiting for us. MALE VOICE: And when was this? JOHN DiFIORE: August 1st.

MALE VOICE: August 1st. What division were you in?

JOHN DiFIORE: I was put in -- I went over as a replacement, so it was the 19th replacement depot. They called it the 19th replacement depot, and it was in the (inaudible) country. That's where we (inaudible). They had so many in each (inaudible). We had to (inaudible) or foxholes and we put our pup tent or raincoats or whatever on the bottom. We slept two or three guys together. We (inaudible), but we slept in the (inaudible), you know, with the (inaudible) like a square block, and there was only one or two (inaudible)

there because the (inaudible), and have a little (inaudible) and a two wheel (inaudible) and she used to milk the cows (inaudible).

So we stood there until the -- I was assigned to the 166th (inaudible) Engineer Battalion, and the man that I replaced was a young kid, 19 years old. He drowned on the coming back from river crossing. My battalion made a lot of river crossings. They were always up in front. Always up in front. It was an outfit that (inaudible). We had a lot of -- we were up always up at the front.

MALE VOICE: How were you accepted as a replacement?

JOHN DiFIORE: (Inaudible). I was like, forget about it. You know, like a little lost stuffing. They didn't bother with me. They didn't they wouldn't extend their hand, you know, buddy, buddy. They were a very close clique. They trained in the States, down in Mississippi, Missouri. Half the guys were from New England and half the guys were from like around Mississippi, and I guess they cliqued up like, you know, and they didn't know me, you know. So they didn't put too much faith in me in something like that. Everybody was assigned. Who was assigned to bazooka, who was assigned to machine gun, you know.

(Inaudible) details like for instance, when it was guard duty time, I always got like the 12:00 to 4:00 shift, and there was another guy in my squad. They called him the sad sack. I got a picture of him, and they used to (inaudible). What was good about him, he knew his weapons, he knew his bazooka, and he knew his machine gun (inaudible), but he used to put us on the 12:00 to 4:00.

If I could tell you a little story what happened, see usually when we go on guard duty, when we're assigned an outpost or something, we try to get to the town in daylight so they can show us the area where we're going to be.

So this one night the whole battalion was meeting there -- meeting in this town, (inaudible), and we got there late. We were -- there was a tank (inaudible) that got held up because the Germans they had airplane engines in wooden boxes, and they blocked the road. This was a farm country, and we our squad truck had to go up there to check the booby traps because the tanks (inaudible).

When we were crossing this farm country, it must have been a mile or two wide, a plane came over, a fighter plane. Everybody got scared and the truck driver just stepped on the gas and we did like 50 all the way, and then when we got up to the front of the (inaudible) we seen the (inaudible) in the middle of the field. One of the guys told us it was a B-51 that got shot down. The guys on the tank (inaudible).

We got up there. We couldn't find no booby-traps, so we pushed all the boxes out of the way, and the tanks kept going, and we came back -- when we got back to our outfit it was dark. We went into the town. We were in a house. Our squad was in a house. (Inaudible).

They said, "Okay, you and" -- I forgot this other guy's name. "You got to (inaudible)." What am I going to say? So I said, "Okay." I just sat down and tried to snooze a little bit. Then about maybe a quarter to 12:00 or something, two guys (inaudible) somebody else and took us out. We walked in the dark. No it was really pitch black. We walked for I don't know how long until we came to these two guys (inaudible). They were laying on the grass with their machine guns. So he says, "Okay." He says, "We'll be back. We'll be back to see you in a couple hours."

(Inaudible) to be like a roving guard, going around and so about 2:30 in the morning I hear footsteps -- heavy, you know, footsteps coming. We were on the grass. It was like a dirt road, you know. I thought it was the

guards, right. (Inaudible), you know, so he kept walking, and something so I yelled,

"Halt. Who goes there?" and then he started running, so I -- meanwhile I was laying on the ground with my rifle (inaudible) and he kept running. I just let out three shots. I just shot in front of (inaudible). I couldn't see nothing, and my friend who was at the machine gun says "Hold it. Let's move out of here."

So I helped him with the machine gun, and we moved maybe about a hundred feet away. We waited and nobody came. About 4:10 in the morning we hear the guys coming. I told you (inaudible). They came a half hour (inaudible). That's the way it was. You know, no concern.

So we went back, but then the sergeant said, "What happened, DiFiore?" I told him the story. He said, "Okay. The captain wants to see you in the morning. He wants to get the story," and I told him. I said, "You think we (inaudible) .¹¹ He said, "Well, go see." So I walked out there, and what it was we were on the grassy plain and about ten feet below us was like a (inaudible) and then to the left of that was the (inaudible), whole lot of trucks and vehicles and everything.

So what happened, I happened to keep going straight but on a little angle so I didn't hit the trucks. (Inaudible) the trucks. I said, "Let me (inaudible)." Nobody came out to see what was going on.

So that was one story, and then I had another story. We were coming to Frankfurt. That's like a (inaudible) city in Germany, and it's on the main river, and we parked our trucks -- our truck, it was our platoon. We parked our trucks and we walked down this wide cobblestone boulevard and a bridge. It looked like it was the main bridge going into Frankfurt. It was a stone (inaudible) pavement bridge, but stone columns, you know, that go in the middle of the river.

When we got there we had shovels and picks. They told us we're going down there to fill in the pavement because it was blowing up. When we got down there it was a mess. We could never (inaudible). I mean, they really blew up the bricks. It was so bad that I know when I was on the left side waking down and I seen a couple of infantry guys, they were walking down underneath the bridge on the rocks that were blowing up because I guess they couldn't walk across the top.

I seen a couple of guys there, so no sooner do we get on the bridge (inaudible) I'd say about 8:30, and then a couple of mortars start falling on the bridge. So I get to the ground. I stood there. I think about maybe three or four mortars hit (inaudible). So I looked around and I didn't see nobody. So I got up and I didn't see nobody.

So my rifle was there, so I picked up my rifle and I start running back the way we came. I ran across the opening of the bridge until (inaudible), but meanwhile the Germans, they must have had somebody --there was a big apartment house with (inaudible) they must have somebody there, and the Germans start shooting 88 artillery on the (inaudible) because as I was running on the sidewalk, these rounds were just ricocheting and (inaudible) off the cobblestone streets, slamming into the buildings. You can't believe it, and I didn't count them.

There must have been at least a dozen of them, but I just kept running. Something told me to keep running. So I got halfway down the block and I heard heavy footsteps behind me. I turned around and there was two German soldiers. They had their hands up in there, and right away I seen that they didn't have their (inaudible) helmets on. A German does not take off their (inaudible) helmet.

MALE VOICE: (Inaudible).

JOHN DiFIORE: Something told me just keep running.

(Inaudible) a hundred something feet, and that was the (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: The guy who was going after you earlier, did he find you?

JOHN DiFIORE: Yeah. My platoon sergeant was there. "DiFiore, where the hell have you been?" (Inaudible).

MALE VOICE: (Inaudible)? Do you have to put them on the floppy and then (inaudible)?

JOHN DiFIORE: (Inaudible) they followed me (inaudible) and all the guys (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: What was (inaudible) what made things worse, when we (inaudible). Well, it wasn't it was a Queens Village address. Queens Village is part of Queens, but it was like 20, 24 miles from where we were in Brooklyn, and you know, (inaudible). They were (inaudible). I mean, people driving (inaudible)

and Mike was (inaudible), and I said, you know, (inaudible).

Well, look at this guy. This guy was, when he went (inaudible) college prep school, Harvard, and his roommate was Hal Holbrook.

MALE VOICE: The actor?

MALE VOICE: Yeah. They were good friends years ago, and we (inaudible) Hal Holbrook's grandmother (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: (Inaudible)?

MALE VOICE: No. This was in a hotel room. I mean, the last place we were at, the Comfort Inn, the rooms were really small and like, you know, (inaudible) sit on the bed, you know (inaudible). We were just sitting on the ice chest, the guy that did the interview, and he's sitting on the bed (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: Normally the Hampton Inn (inaudible) chair or a couch, you know, and it's a cleaner room, but from what I've heard there's basically (inaudible) and then there's the Marriott (inaudible). We didn't know it until we got down there (inaudible).

If they were smart (inaudible) some place else where they're not expected (inaudible).

JOHN DiFIORE: We got on the beach (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: Well, the thing is (inaudible) somebody say somebody decided, you know, to blow up a car on one of the bridges or something, and that would shut everything down, you know. (Inaudible) each and every car

JOHN DiFIORE: They let those guys (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: -- and traffic would be backed up for miles.

MALE VOICE: Yeah. (Inaudible).

JOHN DiFIORE: Run like hell and then he took off (inaudible) and came down (inaudible) the Rhine River (inaudible). That's where we slept for so many weeks. Then they finally (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: And it was funny, while we were looking down there (inaudible) and pictures in the window and (inaudible) two or three small rooms (inaudible).

JOHN DiFIORE: (Inaudible), well anyway (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: I went to the dollar store and bought those rabbit ears (inaudible) and I guess it's (inaudible) get one channel.

JOHN DiFIORE: You had to strip down to your jockey pants and shorts. They had a (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: I don't understand (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: Well, I think probably, you know, (inaudible) the helicopter (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: Where was the concentration camp?

JOHN DiFIORE: No. I didn't see any.

MALE VOICE: Is Greg still down there?

JOHN DiFIORE: Otherwise it was (inaudible). They stuck like two people in a bunk. One was (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: I'll ask him what he's there for. I'll say (inaudible).

JOHN DiFIORE: They were very, very (inaudible), and I was in another city where you come in and the people -- there was displaced people. They were (inaudible).

After the war (inaudible) because after the war the German soldiers, they couldn't walk the streets unless they had (inaudible). So this (inaudible) lots of German (inaudible). There were German and Hungarian prisoners.

My job I had to (inaudible). That was my duty after the war. That's when I the end of August, I think it was a Sunday (inaudible) and the next day, Monday, we were shipping out (inaudible) and the train, the box car, the same box car that carried the Holocaust victims (inaudible) four days and three nights (inaudible).

I did have a good experience on the box car. (Inaudible) the engineer was (inaudible). He was very slow. (Inaudible).

MALE VOICE: Where were you before (inaudible)?

JOHN DiFIORE: Maybe because I didn't know politics and nothing like that. I was 19 years old and I tell you one thing. We got a lot of (inaudible). We went up to the (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: What was your reaction when (inaudible)?

JOHN DiFIORE: (Inaudible). See, he believed (inaudible). You know something? When we were in Germany, he (inaudible). We thought very highly of

him, especially when (inaudible). Some guys had a (inaudible).

Our job was to get sand and put sand on the (inaudible). He didn't take (inaudible). He really took care of his (inaudible). We just kept going, yeah. (Inaudible) he gave me \$300 for (inaudible) so they had (inaudible).

I went down to the (inaudible) why don't you find a job or go to school or something (inaudible) from college (inaudible). My father (inaudible). At the end of the war he got hurt (inaudible) and my two sisters, they worked at a factory (inaudible), one brother was married, and he left. The other brother (inaudible). So what can I do? I had nobody (inaudible).

After the (inaudible) a lot of guys (inaudible) so we went down to (inaudible). We were paid \$35 a week for 45 hours. (Inaudible). I didn't (inaudible) never seen a lamb chop or a steak. You know what I mean? I said, "Okay." So I went (inaudible) had four children, three girls and a boy. The (inaudible) 54 (inaudible).

JOHN DiFIORE: (Inaudible) three children

(inaudible) in 1957 so there was (inaudible) living room, dining room, big kitchen with a garage, nice (inaudible). We lived in a beautiful neighborhood. (Inaudible) nice Catholic church there with (inaudible) shortly after (inaudible) once a year.

MALE VOICE: Did you ever (inaudible)?

JOHN DiFIORE: (Inaudible) to Grand Central Station, put you on the Amtrak or whatever it is. You take the train up there. (Inaudible), and these guys they started from the beginning (inaudible). So I'm (inaudible) my family (inaudible). (Telephone Ringing)

MALE VOICE: New York State Military Museum. Yes. Okay.
Great. Thank you. Bye.

JOHN DiFIORE: (Inaudible).

(Telephone Ringing)

MALE VOICE: New York State Military Museum. (Inaudible).
Can I help you? Yes. Yes. Are you (inaudible)? Okay. Can you wait like five
minutes? Okay. Because I'll have (inaudible) sent for you. All right. Bye.

JOHN DiFIORE: (Inaudible) were given to me for marching in
the (inaudible) and this medal was given for marching in New York City 50th
anniversary (inaudible). This is the overseas medal. The two (inaudible). This
medal here was given to me this year by New York State (inaudible).

MALE VOICE: Why do you think your military service
(inaudible)?

JOHN DiFIORE: (Inaudible), the experience gave me so much
confidence in myself, made me independent until today (inaudible). I'm
happiest when I'm in a VA (inaudible).