

**Sebastian Fasanello
Veteran**

**Mike Russert and Wayne Clark
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on May 6, 2008, 3:45 p.m.
Lyons Hall at Canisius College
Buffalo, New York**

Sebastian Fasanello: SF
Mike Russert: MR
Wayne Clark: WC

MR: Could you give me your full name, date of birth and place of birth please?

SF: My name is Sebastian Fasanello, and I was born on November 9, 1935 in Buffalo New York.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering the service?

SF: I had completed a year of internship in general medicine and also completed a year of internal medicine residency at the University of Buffalo. So I had already received my MBA and I was 2 years into my advanced training.

MR: Were you enlisted?

SF: No I wasn't, I was in the ROTC program at Canisius College and somehow ended up in what was called a Beary program at the time, which allows you to defer your army time as much as you can and get some extra training. I did that and then I was called up in July of 1964.

MR: You went in as an officer?

SF: Yes.

MR: Lieutenant?

SF: No, I went as a Captain.

MR: You went in as a captain because of the MBA?

SF: Yes.

MR: Could you tell us where you went when you went into the service?

SF: Initially, to give you some background, I was training at Meyer hospital. My wife was pregnant with our fourth child and I was informed that I was to enter on July 1st. Instead of

going to Fort Devens, which was where my post was, I went up to what is now Fort Drum. At that time it was a place where all of the reserves went for their summer training. There were probably tens of thousands of guys up there in the summer so they needed extra docks. So I was sent up there for the summer, and my wife delivered while I there. I ran home that weekend, and the Colonel who was in charge at the hospital said, "If i didn't send you home i would never be able to stand all the phone calls from your wife" so they sent me home. I stayed there until October, because the camp commander was a rather lonely guy and there were probably only about 15 people on base. So I hung out, but there was nothing to do. If you were there today, you could be a really busy guy and do some good, but I did nothing. In fact there were only four or five other officers and we just sat around and read books all day. I know that's not a great commentary on my time in the service but that's what we did, and I was very disappointed. I finally got back to Fort Devens, and I was the director of the Infectious Disease Unit. That was a great time.

MR: In what ways was it a great time?

SF: There were a lot of interesting cases. We not only treated GI's, but also families and Lieutenants. I had an adult unit, and I saw some cases I had never seen before. I saw my first and only case of trichinosis, which was very interesting. We also would rotate through the emergency room every third night, so we got to see children and young adults. That was an interesting time. One of my colleagues was sent to Alaska (this was at the time when they had the enormous earthquake) and I remember talking about his experiences with him. It became interesting later on when I was sent to the Dominican Republic, because they had somehow accumulated a lot of winter clothing. I opened up my knapsack and in there was winter clothing, instead of tropical clothing. We'll get back to that later on, though. Fort Devens was a very nice place, I did a lot of good work there and I was very happy there. I met a lot of good friends, in fact we still have friends from there who we now travel with.

MR: How long were you at Fort Devens?

SF: I was at Devens for about 8 months out of the two years. My wife and children were there for the full two years. I have to say the army experience for us was great. When you get on base and you're from out of town, everyone is willing to help. We had people more than willing to give us help with the kids and show us where to shop. When I left fort devens to go to the dominican republic my wife had no difficulty at all. People would come over, they would take her shopping, they would help with the kids, they did all kinds of things. They were just amazing. One of those friends we've been in touch with for a long time, in fact we've traveled to probably four of five places with them as I mentioned before. So that was Fort Devens. In May of 1965, you probably don't remember this, but the Dominican Republic was in a revolution. We started off by sending a few marines down there in late April. By May 1st they decided that it was a much bigger thing than they expected, so they send a second ripple down. Unbeknownst to me, I was attached to the second division going to a field house.

MR: I was going to ask you, did you ever do jump training?

SF: No I had no idea, in fact we were going on vacation. I had the car packed, and we were coming home because I had a week's leave, the dog was in the kennel. I went back to the hospital to check something and I hear my name paged. One of the silliest things I did was answer the page; I got called into the Colonel's office. He said, "You're leaving tomorrow morning" and I said, "For where I'm going on vacation." He said "You're not going anywhere, you're going to Fort Bragg tomorrow." So the next morning I left for Fort Bragg. I wasn't sure if we were going to Vietnam, which was just beginning to heat up. People were suspicious that was maybe where we'd be going, but it turned out we were going to the Dominican Republic. So we stayed at Fort Bragg for the day, and talk about confusion. Nobody knew what was going on; we just kind of sat around and postulated about the terms of what was really going to happen. All of a sudden we found ourselves on a C1-30 going to the Dominican Republic. That was interesting because when we got on the plane the pilot gave us this lecture on safety and said, "Don't worry about the airplane, these planes can fly on two engines, and they have four". So on the way down of course we lost an engine. We were all waiting for the second engine to go but that never happened. Then we landed in the Dominican Republic in the middle of the night, and we actually did land when they were shooting. I got out of the plane and there were these tracers, I guess you call them, and the sky was just lit up with all these bombs and stuff like that. You were just like "My god, what is going on here?"; it was really a war.

We went to the place where the hospital was supposed to be, but of course there was no hospital. It was probably 10 or 15 tents, a field hospital. When I reported to the commander of the hospital he asked, "What're you doing here?" and I said, "What am I doing here? Somebody sent me from Boston!". He said, "Well you're not supposed to be here!". Well I was there, and that happened to about the next 10 doctors that walked in. Apparently there was some confusion in terms of how many men they really needed, but we were there. I think chaos would be the best word to describe the situation. I'm sure things are a lot better in today's Army. We set up the field hospital in a place that at that time of the year was prone to flooding. Apparently they had been warned about this but everybody insisted that they knew better so we set up this field house. I actually have pictures of those guys walking to chow to get their sea rations in water waist high, it was a disaster.

Eventually we were able to get out of that situation and move into the old naval barracks of the Dominican Navy. That was a pretty nice situation. It was rather interesting though because I had never been in combat, I had never seen any war injuries, and all of the sudden, I see people with arms and legs, hurt, people dying. I think one of the most interesting things I saw was when I used to cover nights (there wasn't a lot of activity at nights). I went to the emergency room where I was called, and there was a young man there with his helmet cleaning his 45 pistol. Of course, it accidentally went off. He had his steel helmet on; the bullet hit the rim of the helmet and split in two. Half of it went in his head but fortunately because it had hit the helmet, it entered and went up his scalp, but didn't pierce his skull. This was one of the luckiest guys in the

world, I mean it hit him right here (points to side of head). I'll never forget I was fussing around and I said, "I found it, it's right here!". I made a little incision and out popped out a half of a 45 shell, which I think was one of the most amazing things I've ever done. This guy was just like, "I'm not gonna die, I'm not gonna die!" and I said, "No you're not gonna die!". That was an interesting story, we had a lot of things like that.

MR: Now how about your equipment, did you have up-to-date equipment that was shipped down there?

SF: I think it was as up-to-date as you could have in those days, I mean we're talking 1965. But we had x-ray stuff, nothing really fancy but we were able to whatever we needed to do. I think what we needed later, when they started making the big push to drive out the rebels in a certain section of the city, was a lot more surgeons. We didn't have enough surgeons. We didn't have a neurosurgeon and there were a lot of head injuries and such. But surprisingly enough, I think we were okay.

MR: Did you have enough equipment, enough medical supplies?

SF: Yes, there was never a problem with that. I think we had a problem with man-power because (I don't know much about this business) they underestimated just how bad this was going to get. I mean at one point they had 42,000 troops down there, but not enough man-power to cover the days, and there was probably a week when there was really intense fighting. There were a number of injuries and just not enough guys to take care of them. I'm not a surgeon but I did minor surgical kinds of things. When things settled down, it became fairly interesting because we ended up treating many Dominican civilians. In fact, we were getting bored so several of us went to one of the local hospitals and offered our services to them. That was great for about a week, and then several of the physicians at the hospital got kind of angry because Americans were in the hospital and treating their patients. We really had no intentions to take their patients, but they really became quite upset and the commander-in-office said "What're you guys doing?" so we had to stop.

MR: I want to ask, with you having a background in infectious disease, you must've found some really interesting diseases there.

SF: Yes, I was basically in internal medicine doing a lot of cardiology and pulmonary diseases. In fact since I was the only person there at that time with a year of internal medicine under my belt, I used to read all the expt of the hired hundreds of people from the area to work for the Army. Washing or making, whatever they did, they needed lots of people. Of course many of these people had Tuberculosis, and since I was the guy reading all of the expts all of a sudden I became an expert in Tuberculosis. I wasn't before I joined the service, so that was interesting. Essentially, the doctors didn't want us to go to the hospital, but we ended up seeing some of the kind of elite in the Dominican Republic. I had a small office in the naval academy there and I would see people periodically; they would come in with some interesting stuff. I still have a flag

that one of these women brought me, it was a flag she made as a kind of gift. So somehow these kinds of people got into the system.

What was really disturbing down there after things settled down was the poverty. We finally got a chance to run the helicopter and see what was going on, and the poverty was just unbelievable. They would take, in those days they called them sea rations, that came in thick cardboard boxes that we threw in the dump; people would come pick them up and you would be riding down the road and see them being used for walls for huts. They would stand them up and hold them with sticks. That's kind of an indication on just how poor they were. I think at the time, I may be wrong historically, but I think about 20% of the population was working in the sugarcane industry because that was the mainstay of business. They would work one or two days a week and then somebody else would work one or two days, it was really sad.

When we first got there I was good friends with three or four other physicians, I think all of them were from the south. These guys were all hunters; they all had guns, bows and arrows. So we get there and somehow they wouldn't issue us any weapons. They wouldn't issue us 45's because we were physicians. That was okay as long as you stuck on base, but they would also send us out to these outposts to cover on a weekend. They sent us in a jeep with a driver and they had tents set up, they had some medical stuff there, and you were supposed to stay there incase somebody came. I never saw anybody there, and we stayed all weekend by ourselves in this tent. These guys thought, "This is really kind of crazy". So they somehow had shipped from the States a shipment of five shotguns sent to the Dominican Republic. I still have the shotgun at home. Then we had our own weapons and we would walk around with them. Nobody would say anything because they were shotguns and not 45's, which I guess would've been against the rules. I have some great pictures of us with these shotguns; we never fired but we traveled some places where there was real fighting. It was nothing like Iraq, nothing like the amount, but I think there were about 20 people who died and about 200 injuries. Another significant event was when Tony Bennett came down to see us and brought, I can't think of the name but she was the epitome of dancing at the time. Anyway, Tony Bennett came to our hospital and-

WC: Was it Juliet Prowse?

SF: No, it wasn't Julia Prowse. Keep on thinking though maybe you'll get it.

The song, "I Left My Heart in San Francisco", he played in our hospital for the first time. He came down with a guitarist, and he was singing on the porch of our hospital to troops who were injured. I mean that was really unbelievable. Then they had this enormous show at the airplane base, which they finally had gotten control over, and they had thousands of guys there. They had this girl dancing, and I'll never forget this. They had MP's, there was a cord of MP's around the front of the stage. Somehow these guys would jump over the MP's or push them out of the way and get on the stage and start dancing. All hell broke loose. The MP's couldn't get off the stage, they had to drag her off the stage, because these guys hadn't seen this kind of woman in a long time. It's just unbelievable.

Let's see what else could I tell you about. I was there until November of 1965. We had gone through several commanders. Our first commander was relieved, I think because he really wasn't too sharp. The second commander was a superb guy, he used to play basketball with us. One hot afternoon we were playing basketball and he dies on the basketball court, and those are the days before we had defibrillators. So there are five doctors trying to work on their commander, and we were never able to resuscitate him. That was a particularly bad incident, and I'll never forget that. We wrote home to his wife that he was just a terrific guy and that he died on the basketball court. He was only about 55. If we had the equipment that we have today, he probably would be alive, but we just didn't have anything. In fact I can remember when I was in training before I went into the service we had one defibrillator for the whole hospital. As for other events, that was about it in the Dominican Republic. I learned a lot, I saw a lot. I think I really appreciated just how desperate people were. We went back to the Dominican Republic about three years ago, and as you know now it's really a place to visit with all of these gorgeous resorts. But if you go to the resort, and you leave the resort and go to some of the smaller places, even the road from the airport, you can still see that the level of poverty is just unbelievable.

So I came home in November. I think from that point out things were pretty quiet. I hurt my knee and had to have surgery and that was that. Then I was discharged in July of 1966.

MR: Those were the years you had to put in for your ROTC time?

SF: Yes, 1964-1966.

MR: Were you ever able to make use of a GI Bill out of all that because of your service?

SF: No, not really because I had actually finished all of my formal training so the rest of this was additional training and we were on a salary. As minor as it was we still got money. The GI Bill didn't really apply to postgraduate training.

MR: Did you ever join any Veteran's organizations at all?

SF: I never did. I didn't stay in the reserves, although I guess for a couple of years after service you're still in there. I remember one of my southern friends called me up one Sunday afternoon after we had been home for about 6 months and said, "Did you get your notification, they're calling us back in!" But this was a joke.

MR: You said you stayed in contact with some who served with you?

SF: Yes.

MR: So how do you think your time in the service had an affect on your life?

SF: I think it gave me an appreciation for trying to make the best out of every day that you can because you just don't know what's going to happen. I think that was a really important lesson. I really began to appreciate even more what this country has to offer and how lucky we are here. I guess those are the major things I learned from the service. I also had some good experiences

from a medical point of view. I guess also one of the major things was that when I went down there I was going to be an internist, and when I came back I ended up going into psychiatry. So that obviously had an impact.

MR: How do you think your time, since we're doing this at Canisius, how do you think your time at Canisius had an effect on your education and your life?

SF: First of all I think my time at Canisius was critical in terms of getting into medical school. I remember even at that time that people who had their undergraduate training at Canisius still did very well when it came to applying to medical school and being accepted. I think I was well trained for medical school, and I think just the general training we got here in terms of ethics, morality, etc. still helps. So I'm really grateful for that, and I think that's about it.

MR: Thank you very much for the interview.

SF: Thank you.