

## Spotlight on a Veteran

An Interview with Steve Fanizzi, WWII Army Paratrooper by  
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Steve Fanizzi was just fourteen years old when his father was killed in a fire truck accident in 1939. His mother had died just two years prior and Steve and his four siblings were left under the guardianship of an executor of the estate. His baby brother was adopted by family members while Steve was left to become the man of the house and kept watch over the other children.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked in December of 1941, Steve was just 16 years old and active in sports in his high school. He held the fastest time in NY State for the 100 yard dash at 10 seconds and was a member of the championship soccer team. At 17 years of age, he enlisted in the Army because he was essentially the "bread winner" in the home and he shared with us,

"I heard that the Paratroopers made \$50 more than the regular Army soldiers, so I wanted to become a Paratrooper. I was sent to Ft. Dix, New Jersey for basic training in August. Then on to Camp Toccoa, Georgia for physical endurance training. I spent a total of 2 weeks in what was referred to as 'hardening'. We had a two-mile run up the side of the mountain before we even ate our breakfast every morning and when we finished, we did calisthenics. I told my children that I went in as a boy and came out a man. After Camp Toccoa, I was sent to Ft. Benning, Georgia to attend 3 weeks of parachute training. To obtain the wings that signify the Paratrooper, a man had to make five successful jumps. I made fifteen jumps in total. We went on to Camp McCall in North Carolina where we were taught how to jump with 75 mm howitzers. The gun disassembled into about nine pieces and we were twelve men to a stick."

### ***Did that prepare you for combat?***

"Actually, we had one more training mission simulation to make in Bowling Green, Kentucky. It was January 1944 and it had been raining for 29 days straight. We didn't have access to any vehicles and we had to pull a 1375-pound gun through the mud and muck. I had also been trained to be the switchboard operator. I had to carry a 30-pound receiver and telephone wires so that we could communicate with the front lines."

### ***What was the training preparing you for?***

"Well, we were training for a jump into Rome, Italy. Instead we landed in Naples because the Allied troops were already breaking through Anzio at the time. We were supporting the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division. Senator Bob Dole was a member of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division. Anyway, we were pulled back to Naples to prepare for the invasion of the south of France. I was told at that time that they needed a switchboard operator in Naples to teach Italian girls how to operate communications for the Port of Naples. The entire B Battery of the 460<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery received both the Bronze Service Star and the Battle Star (Rome-Arno Campaign)."

### ***When did you return to the United States?***

"I was sent back to America to Fort Jackson, South Carolina where I received a commendation in 1946 for completely reinstalling destroyed communications after a devastating fire destroyed telephone central. We completed that reinstallation in under six hours and I was promoted from Tec 5 to Staff Sergeant. I was really proud of that accomplishment. I was sent to Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island to teach switchboard installation and repair and teletyping installation and repair until I was discharged on November 23, 1946."

***Did you return to the Hudson Valley after being discharged?***

"Yes and I married my wife, Santa Jiunta and we were married for 45 years until she passed in 1993. I tried to get a job at both the NY Telephone Company and Central Hudson after the War but I was unsuccessful. Central Hudson told me I was too short and I thought, 'The Army didn't think my height was a problem.' But, in those days, there was still a lot of prejudice against Italians and I think that neither of them wanted to hire me. I finally found a job as a manager for Singer on Broadway in Newburgh. I stayed there for twenty years until they transferred me up north near Syracuse. After four years in up north, my wife wanted to come back to the Hudson Valley and I took a job with Sears & Roebuck. Eventually, I opened my own store, the Newburgh Sewing Center at the Mid-Valley Mall and stayed there until a fire in a neighboring store destroyed my store also. I moved my store to Broadway in Newburgh and I retired in 1983."

***Can you tell us a bit about your volunteer work?***

"During the 1950s I volunteered for the West End Junior Sportsman Club and taught archery and riflery. I was a qualified NYS archery instructor. For the past 19 years, I have been involved with VFW Post 1161. I was the WW Post 1161 Commander for one year in 1993 until my wife died and then I became the Quartermaster for the past 18 years." Steve met and married his current wife, Mary Grace, whom he had known since school and he shared with us, "I was lonely after Santa died and one day I saw Mary Grace at Price Chopper. We went out to dinner and just kept spending time together and sharing meals and we married shortly thereafter."

Steve and Mary Grace are currently residing in the Hudson Valley and Steve remains active with VFW Post 1161.

***The VFW Post 1161 meets every third Friday of every month in the City of Newburgh Post 973 Bldg. The meetings begin at 1:00 pm and you can call Quartermaster Steve Fanizzi at (845)236-7295 or Commander Donald Ruckdeschel Sr. at (845)562-7828 for more details.***