

This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Mr. Elio Grandi on March 3, 2015 in Springfield, Virginia. Thank you very, very much, Mr. Grandi, that you've agreed to meet with me today and to share some of your experiences during World War II and to explain a little bit about those circumstances. It's very much appreciated.

And I'll start, as I mentioned before the interview, I'll start with a lot of questions from before the war in order for people to get a better sense of what your life was like-- what were your young years life-- what was the pre-war life like, and a little bit about you. So I'll start at the very beginning. Can you tell me your name at birth? Was it the same?

Cornelio Giacomo Emilio Grandi.

And when were you born? What was the date of your birth?

[SPEAKING ITALIAN]

And how--

April 9, 1924.

1924. And-- there was a noise that just started. Hang on.

Just started. OK. Now there's no noise. And we know your name was quite long at birth, a very long one. And then your date was April 9, 1924?

Correct.

Where were you born?

In the city of Boston.

Of Boston?

Yes.

In Massachusetts?

Massachusetts. Massachusetts General Hospital. Really?

And I got a story to tell about it.

Tell me about it.

It is now run by a doctor who is the son of my godfather.

Really?

He's a manager, managing doctor at Massachusetts General.

Had your family been in the Boston area for a long time when you were born?

No.

Tell me about that. When had they come to the United States?

My father came for the second time on the 19th of the month. I don't know the day. I know the year.

What was the year?

1919 19-1-9.

So it was 1919 when he came.

Right.

Five years before you were born.

Right.

OK.

Nine years after my birth he sent the family to Italy. He lost 2,000 dollars when the banks closed.

Oh, you mean after the crash?

After the crash.

After the-- uh-huh.

So he decided to return to Italy where he was from.

OK. We'll talk about that. But now I still want to talk a little bit about Boston. Where did you grow up in Boston? What were your early-- where were your early years spent?

I was in Boston until I was 10 years old.

So did you grow up in the North End?

Yes. Commonwealth Avenue.

Oh, you grew up on Commonwealth Avenue.

Yes, but I don't remember. The only thing I remember is when my mother told me that I had pneumonia twice in 10 years. That's the only thing I remember.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

A twin brother, a sister, and an older brother.

What was your twin brother's name?

Silvio.

Silvio.

And the reason he had such a queer name for an Italian father was because the consul of Italy in Boston was a friend of my father. And he kept saying that my mother was expecting twins.

And one day my father told him, OK. If they're twins, I'll name the second one Silvio. Are you happy? He said, yes. The

second one, Silvio. So my brother carried that name to his death.

And that was after the consul in Boston? That is-- was Silvio the name of the consul?

Yes, of course.

Yeah. Yeah. How cute. [LAUGHS] He was very prescient that he predicted twins.

That's right. Well, in those days, they went by volume. And there is a picture of my mother which was a few days, I guess, before the birth.

So she must have--

It's enormous compared to what they do now.

Yeah. And were your brother and yourself the second oldest? Or were you the youngest? Where in those family of siblings--

The one before the youngest.

OK. So your--

My daughter-- my mother had a daughter finally.

So three boys and then a girl.

Right.

OK. What was your sister's name?

Paola. That's because my father's name was Paolo. My father was very difficult to get anything from him. If there was ever a plus for him, he was all over you. But unless there was something for him to gain. It was immaterial.

Also with his children?

With the world.

Oh. That must have been quite difficult for you.

Well, he wasn't the easiest father to live with.

What did he do in Boston? What was his work?

He sold Italian-- what you eat.

Foods?

Food for the largest Italian sales company.

So imported food from Italy, he would sell?

Mostly.

And can you describe a little bit about your home on Commonwealth Avenue? Or do you have any memories of it?

No memory.

No memory. At home, even in Boston, what language did you speak?

I don't know. I don't remember.

OK.

But I assume Italian. But I don't know.

Was it your first language, by the way, Italian?

Oh, yes. Don't forget, I was 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 years old. At 10, you don't get on a pedestal and start speaking a foreign language, or any language.

Did you go to schools? Did you start school in Boston?

I don't know. I don't remember.

OK, OK. Tell me a little bit about your-- hang on a minute.

What was your oldest brother's name?

[? Castoni. ?]

[? Castoni. ?]

Gaston.

Gaston.

I don't know how he got his name. But I think it was from some prominent figure in the newspapers at the time. Actually, he was born during the First World War.

Oh, really.

He was born in 1917.

In Italy?

Yes, in Padua.

So when your father came to the United States, did he come with a wife and a little baby? And that was it?

No, he came alone. For the second trip-- he came the first trip-- there's no record of his coming the first trip, because he was a stowaway.

He was a stowaway.

He was a stowaway to come to New York and made his way to Boston. I don't know why, but somebody had a friend. And he went to work for this firm of Italian goods, Italian foods. Mortadella.

Mortadella?

Yeah.

You mean making mortadella? Making the food?

I don't know whether they made it or not. But Italian-Americans in Boston ate a lot of Italian food, among which is mortadella, which I like tremendously.

Me too. Me too. [LAUGHS] Tell me a little bit about your mother. What kind of a person was she?

Remissive.

What do you mean by that?

Anybody could say what they wanted about what they believed, and she would say yes. She had no opinion of her own. She was a wonderful housekeeper.

Was she an influence on you?

Not directly.

I see. Was your father an influence on you?

The wrong way.

How would you describe that?

Oh, he wasn't supportive. He bought the books and the long line of must read books, a hundred volumes. He never read the first page.

Really?

On any one. He just bought them to show. Because he had people come for dinner at the house. And they had to go by where the start-- where all the books were.

Was he an educated man?

Well, he had a degree of-- that you-- you call-- what is it when-- I can't think of the word.

He had a degree in-- was it higher education? A degree in higher-- did he go to college or university?

No, he went to a high school where he learned how to be a bookkeeper.

I see. A vocational type of school.

Right. But he did have that degree. So he could have been a keeper--

A barkeeper, yes.

A bookkeeper, technically.

But then he did--

He never practiced.

OK. So if I understand correctly, you don't really have many memories of Boston at all as a child.

The answer is yes.

Oh, you do?

I do not.

Oh, yes, you do not have memories, yes. So can you tell me about what some of your earliest memories are? They must be back in Italy.

The earliest memory is the day I left New York on board an Italian ship with my mother and my older brother, my sister, and my twin brother. And I was on the ship looking down. And I saw my father waving goodbye. And I had a play camera that I was playing with.

And I made believe that I took a picture of my father. And I clicked the thing. And off came the snake, which was the game of the--

Of the camera?

--camera that I-- so my best toy fell in the water.

Oh!

And my father was waving goodbye. And I remember distinctly what I said to myself.

What was that?

I'll be god damned if I don't come back as soon as I can.

Can you repeat that for me?

I can. I said, I'll be an S.O.B. if I can't come back as soon as I can.

I don't understand, I must say. You were happy that if you could-- if you would be able to come back? Or happy if you would never have to come back?

No, that I was going to find a way to come back as soon as I could. It was 17 years.

That's a long time. That's a long time.

I lived in Rome throughout that period.

OK. So now I'll come to this. Did your father stay in the United States?

He had things to clear up before coming back to Italy. Two years later, he came back.

And when you returned to Italy, did you go back to Padua? Or was it to Rome?

That's another story.

OK, tell me about that story.

It was a town where my father was born. It's called Este, spelled E-S-T-E. It's a famous place because in the Renaissance period there was a queen who's part of our history.

A queen who was part of history?

A queen who's history involved Este.

I see.

Because a castle of Este was in very good shape.

Where in Italy was this town?

Not far from Padua.

I see.

Which is a main town. It's a head town of one of the sections of Italy.

So what--

I'm having a hard time--

Talking?

--pronouncing the words.

That's OK. Do you want to stop a little bit?

Yes.

Sure. We'll stop.

All right, so you remembered-- we were talking about where in Italy your family returned to.

Este.

Este.

Which is in the province of Padua.

Right.

Which is a main city because of its university.

And what was your life like in Este? Did you go to school there? Did you have a larger family from your father's side who looked after you?

We were given to be housed with my father's stepmother. My grandfather on my father's side was unique, because he had 20-- I forget how many-- 30 children--

[GASPS]

--with two wives. The second wife was his maid. His first wife had 11 children. And his second wife had 13.

Oh my goodness.

He was a very religious person.

Did you know him?

No, he died long before I was born. But I told you this story because my grandmother, my step grandmother, was on the list of the poor people of Este which was on the list of the poor cities of Padua.

Oh, I see.

And she was given the chore to look after my older brother, my twin brother, myself. Not my sister, who went back to the United States.

Oh, she went back?

Yeah, to live with my father for those two years.

Where he stayed before coming back, yes.

Before. When he came back, we moved to Rome, almost on the very same day. I don't remember Este with my father in it.

But you do remember Rome?

Of course. I lived there 18 years.

Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. So how old were you when you ended up in Rome, when you moved there with your father?

I was 11 and a half-- 12 years. 12 years old.

So this was 1936?

No.

'35?

19-- was '33, how--

Oh, at 1933 you would have been nine years old. Because if you were born in 1924, 1933 would have made it nine-- you would have been nine years old.

So when I went to Rome I was-- I was either 11 or 13. Anyhow, two years after my father came back from Boston, I was living in Rome.

Had Mussolini already come to power?

Yes. He was in power 1923, '24.

And did your father or mother-- I mean, did they have any kind of political leanings? Did they have any kind of political views?



My mother didn't. My father was a relatively good fascist.

Really?

Yes. But he used it in business. I have pictures of my father-- I have a picture with my father following Mussolini in Naples.

Really?

Yeah.

Excuse me. so your father-- you have a photo of him following Mussolini in Naples?

Right. And he acted as a-- what is it when one-- stop it.

Sure. He acted as a reporter.

Your father acted as a reporter?

For the Italian newspaper of Boston.

What's it called?

The newspaper of Bo--

Of Boston?

No-- yes.

Oh, so he would write articles about Mussolini and send them back to Boston to be printed there in the Italian newspaper?

No, he would write articles of Boston. He would write articles on what would happen in Italy.

This was a disaster in Naples where Mussolini was going. So he was following Mussolini. You could see the picture. I have the picture. I can show it.

OK, later when we're finished with the interview.

He would send the picture of himself and Mussolini to the company.

Where he worked?

The newspaper, the Italian newspaper of--

Of Boston?

--Boston.

I see.

Partly because my godfather was a contributor to the newspaper. So I assume that he was sending it to his buddy who would put it in the paper, so that when he got back from his trips to Italy, he could prove that he was with M-M-M That's the kind of person he-- you couldn't change him.

So it sounds like you're saying he was an opportunist.

Yes.

In that he may not have been a real believer, but he followed along because it was beneficial.

Right.

As you-- I have a couple of questions I want to make sure I don't forget. Number one, when you were born in Boston, does that mean you had a US citizenship, from birth?

Up to a point, yes. But I would have to research and find out what the Italian attitude towards dual citizenship was. Because it changed several times, both in Italy as well as--

The United States.

--the United States. Today's day, yes. Definitely one who's born of Italian parents, no matter where he's born-- he can be born on the moon. There's one who's about to be in birth in the moon. Well, citizenship is--

Automatically granted.

Right.

OK. OK. So you knew you were definitely an Italian citizen.

It didn't even register at 9, 10, 11, years of age.

OK. I just wanted to understand that. And the second question is a bigger question. And that is, it sounds that your parents never-- you were never close to them for different reasons. Is that true?

Tragically, yes.

So who was the biggest influence in your young life? Who would you say you were close to of those who were surrounding you?

Nobody.

So you were very lonely.

I had a very close childhood friend that became my only real attachment to any one person, was Johnny Marzano.

Johnny Marzano?

Right. And he died three months ago.

Oh. What a loss.

But he was my-- I have a picture of him.

And what about your twin brother?

We never were close.

I see.

He had his own life. He married at 19 because of his son.

So he had a baby. And he married the mother.

Right.

As things progressed-- I'm talking about the late 1930s and so on. You were still-- not a boy anymore, but a teenager, and not an adult yet. Were you noticing what life was like in Italy, political life and what was going on?

Not at all.

What were you interested in those days?

Girls.

[LAUGHS]

Strictly and almost only. That was untouchable on the part of your parents. And the only thing touchable on the part of those young children, youngsters, that you-- you were part of the life. Because I don't remember having any friends outside of schoolmates of some sort or another.

I remember for a short period I had a budding friendship with the son of a minister.

Oh, really? A protestant minister?

No, a minister--

In government.

--in government. But I don't know, it lasted, I'd say, three months, six months. For me, it was touching heaven with my hand. For him it was no big deal. Probably thought I was a jerk.

Was it because you came from different social classes?

Mostly. He had a chauffeur come and pick him up from school. It was a very brief period of high school where my father went overboard and spent the money to send my twin brother and myself to private school. That's how I became friendly with this kid.

But when I quit because my father didn't have the money to pay for private college, that was the end of the relationship.

How did your father support the family when you were in Rome?

He became one of the best, if not the very best, salesman for the soap manufacturing company of Milan.

Milan, yeah? So were the finances, then, reconstituted? You said he had lost \$2,000 during the crash.

Oh, well, he never made that money back. Think of what happened to the United States in November, October of last year.

Of 1929, yeah.

Yeah, if you lost money, that's it.

Yeah. But I meant by reconstituted in the sense that-- were you comfortable? Were you--

Oh, yes.

OK.

He sold commercially the best soap in Italy to stores. And he made quite a substantial commission.

Tell me this then. In your schooling, whether it was in private school or in public school, did you ever meet any Jewish kids?

If I did, I wasn't aware.

Did you know anything about Jews?

Only that my mother's mother was a Jew.

Oh, really?

Yeah.

Your grandmother?

My grandmother that I saw maybe four or five times in my lifetime.

Was your mother's family also from Este?

No, Padua.

Ah, they were from Padua itself.

Right. Her father was a local government employee. I met him only once. He was in bed. And I went to see him at home, because he was sick. I never saw him again, because he died soon after.

Do you remember 1939 when World War II broke out, when Germany attacked Poland?

No.

No. It didn't affect Italy, did it?

Not to the extent that it would affect me.

OK, so life went on pretty normally? It didn't change much, even though the war started?

It didn't for me.

Did it for other people in Italy?

Probably. The people that lived close to Padua had to move South when the war came close to Padua.

When did the war actually come closer to Padua-- come close to Italy? When did Italy feel that there's a war on?

Well, Italy felt the war the day it started. I didn't feel it, because I was a kid. Nobody told me what politics was. I had no

concept that I should be aware what's going on.

Did your older brother-- what was his name-- Gaston?

Gaston.

Did your older brother-- he was old enough to be military age and--

He was in the military. But he was a father of two children. So they dispensed with him.

So in other words, they let him go?

Yeah.

And of course, Silvio and yourself were the same age. And you were 15 years old, 15 and 1/2, when World War II starts.

Right.

What were those early war years like? Did you continue going to school?

I did.

And Silvio?

Yeah.

OK.

He went to a private school because there was no other school for him to go to. He wanted to become like my father, a bookkeeper, because that's where the money was.

What about yourself? Did you know what you wanted to do?

No. I wanted to come to America. That was my goal.

Did other people in your family feel like going back to America? Or were you the one who really wanted it?

I'm the only one. I was an influence on my twin brother who was lucky enough to meet a Jewish American who was touring Rome. And he did him a favor by interpreting for him when he was buying an art piece in Rome. And the man, to thank him, said, if you ever get to Boston, let me know. So thank you very, very much for what you did for me and my wife.

And then--

He kept the card, wrote him when he decided he was going to come to the United States. The man sent him the money--

Wow!

--to come to the United States. And he was Jewish.

Wow. Was this after the war?

Pardon?

Was this after the war?

Yeah.

Yeah, OK, OK. So that's how you-- and first your brother came back, and then you came back?

Right.

OK. So let's stay with the war a little bit. Tell me how things progressed and developed for you during the war.

I'm sorry to have to admit that I have no recollection of the war years.

Well, I thought that you had been drafted. Is that correct?

I'm talking about the First World War.

Oh, I'm talking about the Second World War.

Oh no. The Second World War.

Yeah, the Second World War.

When I was drafted.

Were you drafted in the Second World War?

Yes.

How did that happen? Tell me about that experience.

Well, at age 19 I was drafted by law. I was sent to Milan from Rome. Checked in with the company of Versagleri.

Of what?

Versagleri. V-E-R--

Versagleri?

Yeah. V-E-R-S-A-G-L-E-R-I.

And what are the Versagleri?

It's a special arm of the infantry. Call it fast infantry. My father was a Versagleri in the First World War. And he wanted me to become a Versagleri.

I see.

So he came to the draft board with me and my twin brother. And he was dressed in high uniform as a major.

Was he a major?

Yeah. So he was right behind when the sergeant was enlisting me. Says, you have a right, says, because you were born in Boston.

My father said, give up the right. Versagleri. I want the Vers--

So in other words, you had the right not to be drafted or not to be fighting, because you were born in Boston?

Correct.

But your father said, no, you should be drafted, and you should go to the Versagleri.

And he was a major in full uniform.

So what was that sergeant going to do? Of course.

So that's why I spent three months as a soldier.

What happened during that time?

I was in Milan. And I was supposed to be in the infantry. But I wasn't. I was really doing for service to protect two factories. One factory, telephones. And the other one I don't know.

But there was a group of less than 50 soldiers that took over a house. And we sat there guarding these two companies. The eighth of September--

Of September.

-- the telephone-- the radio is talking, by General Badoglio. The war is ended. Go home.

8th of September?

Yes, 19--

'43?

I think it was '43 or-- I would have to look at it. The minute we heard that, the other 50 soldiers disappeared. I was the only one left with the lieutenant and a sergeant.

Hang on. OK. But this is not the end of the war. If it's 1943, it's not--

For Italy it was.

Really?

Yes.

OK. All right.

For Italy it was. And I was left with a musket that I was given when I enlisted. And I went and told the lieutenant in charge, this is my rifle. I'm living. Where you going? I'm going to Rome, get my documents to enlist at Padua University. Goodbye. Said, Grandi, come back here. Goodbye. Come back! You will regret what you're doing. I said, goodbye, from a distance.

I spent the next week and a half I went from Milan-- no, we weren't in Milan. We were in Treiso. Anyhow, I had not a dime in my pocket. I went from outside Milan to Milan to take a train to Rome.

Got to Rome. Got my books. Got the papers from the college. Took a train back to Italy.

To Padua.

To Padua. By the way, I went to Padua because my father had moved to a famous villa. Because it's narrated in a famous book.

He had moved there why? Because-- to a villa in Padua?

Not in Padua. In a town.

Another town.

Not far from-- because my father had moved there. And he was never there, because he had gotten the area in Padua and other parts of the Veneto region as a territory to sell soap. So he was selling soap.

And this was a place for him to stay to be while he was selling soap in that area.

Well, he moved the family.

He moved the family there. So that became home.

It became home.

Ah, OK.

But temporary.

Got it.

Because he was in Milan looking for a home. And he did find it. Because I visited him when I came by way of Padua. Spent the day with my--

Mother?

--with my mother. Never saw my father while I was there.

At that house?

I have a space of time that I don't remember. Where I was was Arsiero.

Arsiero.

A-R-S-I-E-R-O.

Arsiero. So did you go to university? Did you enroll at university in Padua?

Yes.

OK. And what were you going to study?

Letters and philosophy.

Philosophy and what else?



Letters.

Letters?

Yes.

So linguistics?

Yes.

OK, OK.

Which I did. I went back. But I can't remember what I did at--

Arsiero?

I know my mother was scared to death that the Germans would find out that I was there.

So had it been illegal for you to leave your post? Was that the reality?

No, the post in Milan, that was not illegal.

OK. So then why was she scared that the Germans would find you?

Because she was dumb.

[LAUGHTER]

She was young.

She was frightened. She was frightened.

Frightened. The worst came when they moved to Milan. And I escaped.

You escaped from where?

From where I-- it's a long story. If you want, I can tell it.

Well, does it have to do with the war?

Yes.

Then I want to hear.

Why I don't remember meeting my father in Arsiero is because I never met him. And I don't remember when I left Arsiero. I tried with my twin brother to go up in the mountains and work it out when the rest of the world would have said the war is ended. But we went-- my twin brother and I went up in the mountains. And it lasted three hours. And we came right down. It wasn't for us, living--

In the mountains.

--in the mountains. That's the only thing I remember about Arsiero.

Arsiero. Yeah. But tell me the story that you say has to do with the war. It sounds like it's a little complicated. What happened?

My family, my mother and father and their daughter moved to Milan. I had been-- I had to-- near Arsiero. There it comes back. Near Arsiero was a town where the Germans were collecting people, youngsters like myself. Not to fight on their side.

To fight on their side?

Not to.

Not to fight on their side.

Just to go to work and dig ditches, do menial jobs. And I became a member of one of these crews.

Here I'm looking through your file. And I'm going to repeat a few things. I'm going to read a few things that are out here. In July '43, the Allies land in Sicily, in early July. In 24th of July, Mussolini is deposed and apprehended. And that's on the 24th. On July 23rd, your family moves from Rome to Arsiero. So a day before Mussolini is deposed.

No relation.

No relation, I understand. And then on July 29th, Otto Skorzeny liberates Mussolini?

Yes.

And then you leave. In June '43, you leave from Milano to report for military, which you told me about. June and July, you're in boot camp at Varese. In August you move to Milano for police duty at Musocco. Is that when you're guarding those two buildings? This police duty in Musocco? Musocco?

Musocco.

Yeah. And then there's the heaviest bombing of Milano from nearby. In September 8, which is what you told me, General Badoglio surrenders the country.

Yeah.

Who does he surrender it to?

General-- what was the name of the general in charge of Milan? I forgot the name.

Is that Badoglio?

No, no. Badoglio is the Italian general who had been named president.

So in other words, he surrenders the country to the Germans?

Yes.

Not to the Germans, to the Americans.

To the Americans?

Yes.

In 1943?

Yes.

OK. And then you leave for Musocco for Rome by way of Varese, always in military attire. And it says you're stopped twice on a 24 hour trip. That is on September 11, '43.

That was the train. The train was stopped, not me.

I see. OK. And September 21, 1943, you arrive at Arsiero with one suitcase full of books and still in uniform.

Right.

OK. And then in October, November, you were inducted into todd and traveled to Antrodoco in Abruzzo.

Right.

What is todd? T-O-D-D.

That's German for-- the work they do is they dig holes.

I see. Because the word in German for-- todt--

Todd.

--means death. The word T-O-D-T means death in German. Todt.

Well, it is the same.

OK, maybe I'm wrong. It could be spelled a little differently. But todt, I believe that's what it is.

It's the name of the organization that works--

To dig these holes. To dig--

Right.

OK, to dig trenches.

To dig whatever is-- we went all the way to [INAUDIBLE]

It says from December '43 to May '44 you're working at the Gothic Line in Abruzzo.

Right. And Abruzzo is at the height of Rome. They were building the line of defense.

So there are parts of Italy that are occupied by the Allies, the Americans, and other parts that are occupied by the Germans.

Right.

OK. And you were in the part that was occupied by the Germans.

Right.

OK, OK. So you're working up until the Gothic Line in Abruzzo. And then in late 1944 it's says you leave for Rome to buy supplies for German officers.

Yeah, this is almost impossible to believe.

Yeah, tell me about it.

I'm working as a ditch digger. Actually, I never did one digging. Because in order to reach the place where we used to--

Dig.

--dig the hole, we had to go up the mountain. And they put us one after the other, 10, with a Jerry in the front and a Jerry in the back.

I was in the middle. I would throw myself to the side, stand still, let them pass, stay there with my book--

And read?

And read.

[LAUGHTER]

Stay the whole--

Day?

--after--

Afternoon?

Wait for the group to come by and--

Join again?

--and join again.

Oh, that was clever. Risky, but clever.

But I got away.

You got away with it.

I got away. I can remember distinctly what I did. I was being liked by the Germans because I spoke broken German. And they used me as an interpreter.

So one day, a lieutenant called me. He said, we got you to do a special mission. Did you say you live in Rome? I said yes. Where I used to live before the war.

So what did they ask you to do?

Can you go to Rome and buy--

Shaving cream?

--shaving cream. I said, sure. Said, you sure you can come back? Where would I go?

So in other words, they sent you to Rome. And were you in like a forced labor battalion? Is that what you were in, that they let you go out of it? Or why would it have been complicated for you to go to Rome when you were at Abruzzo, which is so close to it?

It wasn't complicated for me to go to Rome. I knew Rome well enough to go and do some shopping. But why I would do shopping for captors?

OK, so the question is, they were your captors.

Of course.

Got it.

I was working for them.

And you were doing it not out of your own free will.

No.

I want to establish this. Were you forced labor?

Technically, that's what it was. Technically, I was forced to do it. I did it on my own advice. The guy asked me, would you be willing to go to Rome and do some shopping.

Excuse me, I was talking about before about digging the ditches. When you were a part of this group, was that something that you volunteered for or that was forced?

No, forced.

It was forced, OK. So you were a forced laborer. And you were going to Rome to do shopping for your captors. Is that it?

Technically, yes.

OK, all right. That's what I wanted to understand. So you go to Abruzzo-- you go to Rome to buy these supplies for the officers.

And I got a whole bag full.

Of shaving cream?

Of the things that they wanted. The bag was full with my clothes as well.

Now, this is unbelievable. The 3rd of July I finished my shopping.

3rd of June. You have it as the 3rd of June you finished your shopping.

And I go to where I know my company is. I'm driving on a--

Hitchhiking?

Hitchhiking. There was a landing, a special landing where they checked everybody that was going through on the way

north. I got to that point. And I put the rucksack on the ground, because I was tired. And I saw a car-- not a car, but--

A truck? A jeep?

A truck. I saw a small truck, which had nobody in it. And I dashed to the place where they were showing their documents to continue.

So that you could get onto the truck?

Right. And they said, no, we're going north. We're not going south. I said, but I'm not going south. Sorry, can't take you.

They leave. I turn around. There goes my sack. Lost everything.

What happened to your sack? That is if--

They were sto--

It was stolen?

Yeah, the whole thing. Now what do I do? I don't know what to do. The only thing to do is go back and tell them, sorry, this is what happened.

I did. But I never got to find them. Because they had left--

Abruzzo?

They had left Abruzzo. And they ran for their life north, because the war had ended.

Well, the war had-- I'm confused by that. Because at that point, if it was the Allies in Italy going northwards-- and we're talking in 1944, the war had not ended yet. But as far as Italy being on its own, that had ended. Is that correct?

I'm not sure. I'm not sure I have it all.

That's OK. That's OK. What I'd like to then to find out is, when did the American troops liberate Rome or take over--

Well, that's the point.

I see, so it ended in Rome. So the war ended in Rome, because the Americans came in.

Right.

Got it.

The day after I left. Had I known that the war had ended, I would have just marched onto the American side.

To stay in Rome.

Stayed. Like an idiot, I would all the way-- went through the problem of losing 2,000 lira worth of goods that I could have used myself. Found out that the people that were waiting for me forgot about me. They couldn't care less.

Because they were--

They were saving their life. And here I was, alone with no money, with nothing to put in my mouth.

What did you do?

Hitchhiked to Milan. Reached Milan several days later.

And then what happened?

My mother was frightened that her husband was going to be taken away from her. My father-- she said, your father isn't expected tonight. So you better leave. And she gave me the address of-- I guess he-- I don't know. He was a high ranking officer of the Italian--

Military?

--military, who was in the First World War with my father. My father gave me the address of a caserne where this friend of his was--

A caserne, is that the same thing as a barracks?

As a what?

Barrack. Is a caserne a barrack?

Yes. It's a big barrack, many barracks.

Many barracks.

Many barracks.

OK. So he gave you the friend's address.

And I went to see him. He said, I need just a man like you. You're free to go. Just mention my name.

And so what did you do?

Believe it or not, I was given the opportunity to do to others what had been done to me. Convince them to go back to work for the Germans.

Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness. So that was your job, is to convince them to go-- to convince former Italian military people?

Right.

Or if not to convince them, to tell Germans where they were so they could go and fetch them.

What a charming position to be in.

I caught zero persons.

[LAUGHTER]

I had the general on my side. So I couldn't care less what anybody thought.

So in other words, it says, thanks to a colonel friend of your father's, he puts you to work looking for draft dodgers. And this is what you're talking about.

Right.

And then you transfer to Torino. What's going on in Torino? Oh, then it says you're forced to join the German anti-aircraft? Tell me about that. What's that mean?

The general-- I call him general. Maybe he was only a colonel. But the general had an assistant, a lieutenant, and had two secretaries. One was young and cute. And I made some propositions.

So you're still thinking about girls?

That's right. He didn't like it, the young one. So one day, I go back to the office. And I go by the office where the general sits. And the lieutenant comes out. Hey, Grandi, come here, hurry up. Go get your stuff and come down as soon as possible. Yes, yes, sir.

I go upstairs, go get my stuff. I used to have to sleep downtown. I come down. And he says, go down to-- in the yard there was a whole group of young people like me ready to move to get on trucks. They put us on trucks. And that's the end of my freedom.

So what does that mean? It means German anti-aircraft. What does that mean? So what does that mean by the end of your freedom? What happened to you afterwards?

What I say-- read right here--

It says, you're forced to join the German anti-aircraft--

Right.

--artillery. And is that what happened?

Right.

So what did you have to do?

That crew then moved from the caserne. Moved to where--

It's right here. To Torino?

No, that's after.

OK, it doesn't say where it moved to, where the German anti-aircraft place was.

Well, it was north of Milan.

And what did you do? What was your experience there?

There was a camp where they prepared the people they got to go out and do the ditch digging.

So more ditch digging?

Yes.

And this time did you have to dig the ditches? Could you get out of it, or not really?

I keep telling people I'm lucky. I was born lucky. So there's no question about it.



From there, I was put into a group. And the group moved all the way from northeastern Italy all the way to Turin, northwest Italy. I didn't lift anything, because I was new.

Because you were new to it?

I was a youngster compared to some of the old timers. Anyhow, this-- I forget how long the train lasted. But we got to Torino. And we got ready to shoot airplanes coming over Turin.

I never shot a--

A gun.

--a gun. I was being used near the railroad station to keep an eye on people that tried to burn the railroads. That's where I spent most of two or three days.

My knowledge of German saved me again, because all of a sudden, they tell me, you go with Sergeant Whatever His Name. He and five of us get on a train to go down southern Italy in Ora. I don't know if I-- Ora is a small town next to the head town-- do I mention?

Well, here, before we get there, you say, you escaped to visit a girlfriend in Milano. And then you returned to the company. And you appeared before a judge and were given 30 days of solitary confinement--

Yeah.

--served while the company was moving clear across Italy to Vipiteno near the Brenner Pass. So you had escaped from this unit that was fighting guns to visit your girlfriend. And is that so?

Yes.

OK. Hang on a minute.