

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
Italo Bensoni
Army Staff Sergeant, 90th Infantry Division, WWII
1995

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Bensoni, Italo, (1919-). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (81 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (81 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Italo Bensoni, a Hurley, Wis. native, relates his World War II experiences as a Staff Sergeant with the 90th Division, 357th Regiment in the European theater, and his later work with Wisconsin veterans organizations. Bensoni addresses his pre-war work with the Civilian Conservation Corps which he credits with preparing him for military service. He discusses basic training at Camp Wheeler (Georgia), infantry training at Fort Benning (Georgia), joining the "Entry Academic Regiment" which trained South American military personnel, and joining the 90th Infantry at Fort Hood (Texas). Bensoni comments on the change in Army training after Pearl Harbor, regional differences and attitudes of the 357th Regiment, fighting Germans in France, and combat emotions. He mentions the lack of training for actual combat situations, deep appreciation for home front production efforts, troop respect for Roosevelt, and camp life in Europe. Bensoni recounts his experience in the Battle of the Bulge including disguises, and spying on Germans. He also mentions crossing the Moselle River where he was wounded and received a Silver Star. At the war's end, Bensoni and the 90th Division were in Czechoslovakia and he tells several interesting stories about U.S. encounters with Soviet forces. After returning to Hurley, Bensoni discusses the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) including interactions between World War I and II veterans, governmental influence of the group, committee work, and his reasons for joining. He relates interesting thoughts on veterans returning to society, applying it to himself and Vietnam War veterans. Bensoni also touches upon his work with the State Veterans Board, use of a GI home loan, experience with the VA hospitals, and the role veteran preference played in obtaining his job.

Biographical Sketch

Bensoni (b. 1919) served as a Staff Sergeant with the 90th Infantry Regiment in World War II. After the war, he returned to Hurley, Wisconsin where he worked for the post office.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs staff, 1998.

Transcription edited by David S. DeHorse and Abigail Miller, 2001-2002.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Today's date is June 6, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Italo Bensoni of Hurley, Wisconsin, a veteran of the 90th Division in World War II.

Mark: Good morning. How are you doing?

Bensoni: I'm fine.

Mark: Good. I like to start these interviews by having the subject tell me a little bit about where they were born and raised, what they were doing prior to their entry into the service.

Bensoni: I was born in a rural area outside of Hurley, Wisconsin in 1919, April 23. I attended all the local schools including the high school. I graduated in 1937. Several months after that, of course, pulling out of the Great Depression, I entered the CC Camp, if you know what that is.

Mark: Yeah, I do.

Bensoni: Corporate Conservation Corps.

Mark: What attracted you to the CCC camps? 'Cause you couldn't find a job?

Bensoni: There were no jobs available and what attracted me heavily was that it kept me occupied and it was one of the more attractive places for a youth coming right out of high school. There were no scholarships at that time. My grades were about a B+. Nobody knew what scholarships were about and the family had absolutely no money. My dad was working only two days a week in the local mines. That was just enough to support the food situation. So, we went in. I spent exactly two years in there and I enjoyed them very, very much. I consider those two years as a preliminary advantage to my entry into the military because of the discipline. Am I going off too long here?

Mark: No. Not at all.

Bensoni: Because of the military discipline and the barracks life and the mingling in with young people my age. 18 years old.

Mark: In the CCC, where were you exactly?

- Bensoni: I was in Clam Lake, that's outside of Glidden, Wisconsin in northern Wisconsin. All of the youngsters that were in there were from northern Wisconsin from Crandon, Rhinelander, Wausau, Stevens Point. A fine young bunch of individuals. I can make a comparison, I want to in fact, of the barracks life and the friendship and the comradeship between those individuals and those that I spent so many years in the service.
- Mark: What did you do in the CCC?
- Bensoni: Well, I started off working out in the forest building trails and after the counselor came out and said he had a better job for me, I asked what it was. He took me back into the barracks life and I ran the entertainment part. We had four pool tables and I ran the canteen where we sold beer, cigarettes, candy and everything else. I had to do bookkeeping. We were allowed not to make a huge profit, that's why beer sold for 7 cents a bottle.
- Mark: Which was a lot in those days?
- Bensoni: It was very attractive and enjoyable! We were given \$5 a month and the rest and the rest of the \$25 was sent home to the parents. Because my job had more responsibility, I was enjoying \$15 a month and that made me the best paying job in the barracks. I enjoyed it very much.
- Mark: So you spent two years in that?
- Bensoni: Exactly two years, yeah.
- Mark: What did you do after that?
- Bensoni: After that, this was the limit that you could serve. I came home after a couple of months I started driving a small school bus for the local school. After that it was watching the world situation and I was hoping to be drafted and entered in the military, which I did. Which eventually happened.
- Mark: In 1941.
- Bensoni: That was pretty early in the conflict before we actually got involved in it. So, I suspect your experiences during training were a lot different than some of the other veterans I've spoken to. Why don't you just tell me a little bit about your induction into the service? Where did you go to sign up and get the physical? Where did you go to basic training?
- Bensoni: I was inducted at Ft. Sheridan. Thousands of others were entered into that particular area. I was immediately sent down to Camp Wheeler, GA where I

completed my 13 weeks of military training. All infantry training. I enjoyed it because I had those two years experience ahead of me and out of 1,000 of us that were in this particular regiment, 19 were selected and I was one of them, to go to further infantry training at Ft. Benning which was very exciting for me. There also I was assigned to the Entry Academic Regiment, which was all on garrison. You want me to explain what garrison is?

Mark: Yeah, why don't you.

Bensoni: Garrison was the privileged group that were fed better, dressed better because of the 425 individuals in the Regiment were all top sergeants and I became a top sergeant immediately because of my two years in the CCC camp. The training, the discipline and I blended in so lovely that I was picked out as a sergeant. And we gave some extensive infantry training to a lot of foreign officers, especially from South America, even generals and other rankings such as colonels. Again, I was picked out to be the purchasing agent for this garrison unit, which involved that I'd go into town and buy all the food commodities and other items that were necessary for the function of that operation. We ate much better, much better and we enjoyed ourselves much better because of the elite group. I did real well. Then after about 30 months, I was in this particular area it was time to move along and I moved over to Camp Hood, Texas, where I joined the 90th Infantry Division.

Mark: That was about '42 some time or other?

Bensoni: No, later than that. '43.

Mark: I wanted to back track a little bit about your basic training. This was very early in the war and you sometimes see pictures or hear stories of guys training with broom sticks and trucks that say "Tank" written on them and all sorts of things. I was wondering if you could comment on some of the equipment that you had and were there equipment shortages? Did you find your equipment inferior?

Bensoni: No. We were training basically with rifles and submachine guns and mortars and a BAR which is a very heavy submachine gun. That was the extent of it. A lot of target training. I might just mention that I was on the Sunday of December 7, 1941 when there was an invasion of Pearl Harbor, we had one little dinky little radio into the barracks and I was in charge of the lower section, we listened very tentatively and wondered where in the hell is Pearl Harbor? Everybody knew that something was going to happen and it did. The following day, which was Monday, everything started changing.

Mark: In what way?

Bensoni: In the stricter discipline and better, improved training and also a lot of lecturing as to what could be in the future. I took in all in stride and so did everybody else. Nobody got really angered or excited about it, but we all knew that something was going to develop along the way. That was very exciting because I find a lot of veterans who were not in the service at that time, but I was.

Mark: That's true. Most people entered afterwards. So in Texas you hooked up with the 90th Division. You were an NCO by this time.

Bensoni: Yes, I had a little tough time there. In joining the 90th Texas Oklahoma National Guard. Coming from the north with a Staff Sergeant rating, I took a rating away from possibly one of their favorites that were going to be elevated.

Mark: That was a source of tension I take it?

Bensoni: Yes. You bet. But I held my own. I said, "No, you're not going to do that." So we took off from there, we went up to Boston where we waited for transport to Scotland.

Mark: When did you leave for Scotland?

Bensoni: September of '43? Or the latter part of August.

Mark: Why don't you describe your voyage overseas? I hear a lot of tales about the trip over.

Bensoni: We boarded the Queen Elizabeth with 19,000 soldiers. It took five days; we took the northern route unescorted because this had a pretty good speed, out speeding any submarine at that particular time. We were just crowded like into a sardine can. The five days were all spent by doing a little exercise, eating two meals a day and a lot of gambling and a lot of conversation. But nobody was getting excited, nobody was cursing or anything of that sort. It seemed as if it was just a big, big adventure. The Queen Elizabeth is a huge, huge luxury liner but it was converted into a--you can imagine 19,000 soldiers. We were sleeping on top deck and we just looked at it as a youngster. In fact, I was 23 years old and a little bit older than all the others.

Mark: Did you leave with the rest of your Division or did you go ahead or how did this work?

Bensoni: No. Of course, then you're assigned to a regiment. I was assigned to 357 Infantry Regiment. When you look at the route of the 90th through France and Germany and ending up in Czechoslovakia, you have to realize that the three regiments, 356, 357 and 358 you flank the lines either through the north or through the south. Sometimes on maps you show the route of the 90th Infantry Division, which was under the command of General Patton, basically that is the line showing the center part of the Division but these regiments flanked either one way or the other. I was a platoon sergeant, I kept my rank, and when we landed in Glasgow, Scotland, we were boarded on some small boxcars and went down outside of the London area to a staging area, Nottingham. In fact they told us that this was where Robin Hood used to do all the atrocities--helping the poor, stealing from the rich [laughs] Then we stayed there for a while.

Mark: What did you do there? Was there more training and that sort of thing?

Bensoni: Just exercise and lectures and just waiting for orders to hit the Channel.

Mark: Did you get off post much? Did you get to meet some of the English people? Did you have much contact with them?

Bensoni: Oh yes. When I was there on a three-day pass into London and I was with a few others invited into several families during that time to have a lunch with them. They were very kind, nice people, suffered a lot. While we were there, a buzz bomb hit London and killed 600 people working in a factory and there were a lot of youngsters that were attracted from school to work in the factory. I got to give the English people a lot of credit--they sustained the war very, very honorably. They were real fighters.

Mark: About some of the people in the unit. As time went on did the National Guard character of the 90th Division change? Did other people such as yourself start to enter the Division or was this more in Europe?

Bensoni: There were always what they called replacements as you proceeded through. Generally speaking, all those from Oklahoma and Texas were all southerners and there was some resentment there, that another would come in and mingling with the ranks. I'm very familiar with National Guard units because I joined one after the service, see. There is comradeship there that sticks closely to their localities. At my age now, I can speak out. I would anyway even if I was younger. I covered that hurdle, see, because in all units you find good people and you find also those that still are resentful. I did well.

- Mark: How would you characterize these guys as far as educational level for example, their economic status, were there a lot of poor people?
- Bensoni: I thought they were a bit less educated than myself. Completing high school, I found that a lot of them just completed grade school and some of them didn't complete schooling. I can picture a couple of them--they were still bitter. They would call us God darned Yankees or something of that sort. They drank a little heavier than we did.
- Mark: Is that right?
- Bensoni: Oh yeah. Then when they came down to being soldiers, they were brave. That's why I made that statement at the very beginning in the CC camp because we're all from the northern area of the country. The comradeship was always 100%, but when it came to in the military, up until we were up in the front lines, then the comradeship was 100%, but up to that point you would find some resentment.
- Mark: So I want to move on to the invasion of Europe now. What sort of preparations did you make for the invasion and did you know what was going to happen? How much did you know was going to happen?
- Bensoni: No. We just kept on improving our training and to be told that we're going to join the ranks in France and into Germany, we were never told that. We were never told that. We were never told all the dangerous it could be. We were just told to be brave and to follow the assignments that were assigned to us and I felt as if the American average soldier was a very good soldier, not trained as in the elite German soldiers. This was their life. The American soldier was a soldier as a temporary individual and he felt as if he had a job to do and he was going to do it and then come home and to Hell with the whole thing and that was it. The German was more of an astute, military minded individual. We could all see that.
- Mark: So when the actual invasion took place on June 6th, do you recall where you were and did you know about it and what sort of preparations were you making to go ashore?
- Bensoni: Well, I didn't go onto shore on June 6th. It was later. We were down in Texas at that time and knowing that we were going to be called and the reason why we were there in Texas at Camp Hood was for extensive training that we were going to be one of the units that was sent overseas. Nothing to be excited about. Everyone was glad. In fact, I looked at it personally as an adventure up to a point and I'll get to that point later on.

Mark: When did you go into France?

Bensoni: We went to France in September of '44 and we hit LeHarve, France and started walking through some of the smaller villages and as we proceeded easterly, we would encounter some resentment from scattered Germans because they were being pushed back already and I encountered my first contact with enemy fire.

Mark: Why don't you describe that experience to me?

Bensoni: Yes. Outside of Givet, France and the occasion there was that we knew there was a German machine gun there up on the top of a hill that covers a long view range in front of them and I was assigned with four or five individuals to go see exactly how they were entrenched. I found out how close I could get there. I got a little bit too damn close to one individual. I just noticed there were two encampments up there of German machine guns and a big huge German from one spot was running across to the other machine gun area. So I got up on my knees and I just fired five bullets into him. I dropped him down and the sixth one got jammed in my rifle. I immediately just pulled back underneath the little depth area and they just peppered that area (they knew I was there) with the machine gun but all the bullets couldn't hit me because they were flying over my head. So I stayed there for a good hour or so until the Captain, Captain Purcell from Pennsylvania, was spotting me with his field glasses and they ordered mortar shells up there that were hitting kind of close. Only then I signaled to the other fellows to run back to the area where the Captain was watching with the rest of the platoon. My heart was pounding!

Mark: I was going to ask, what's going through your mind as this is going on?

Bensoni: That's a very good question because that was the initial encounterment. After that you're the bravest guy in the world. You're just a big, cocky soldier like a western cowboys after you plugged the first one. In seconds that would go through your mind, should I or shouldn't I? But something tells you should because if you don't somebody is going to get killed. If you have a bad heart, it would just break in two. But after you come back and everybody praises you--can you imagine? They're praising you! That builds you up like a big hero. Now that you look at it it's almost a silly thing but that's what war is all about.

Mark: As time goes on, do you get used to combat? Is there any such thing as getting used to it? Is there a point where you can't take anymore? What was your personal experience?

- Bensoni: Mine was that I thought I was getting used to it but I could see friends of mine that had had it. They just couldn't cope with it anymore. Especially when we went through the Battle of the Bulge. Two especially, they were both from Pennsylvania especially said they were going to let their seats freeze so they could get the Hell out of there and go back home. They said they didn't "give a God darned if they cut my toes off--I've had it--I can't take it anymore!" They were big fellows too, but the bigness doesn't count much. I'm not trying to protect myself because I'm a little fellow, but I just took it in stride, that's all. You get to be brave and you pass that bravery on to somebody else and the experience because if you're going on patrol with twelve and you come back with five, and then you get replacements you talk to the replacements as if you were a professional, you get it? It's a hell of a way to put it but. Then you weren't scared anymore.
- Mark: Now you were a platoon sergeant and I was going to ask you about leadership in combat and what it takes to lead men into combat.
- Bensoni: Well, they look at you like you know what you're doing. Especially after you've had a few attacks with the enemy. You get replacements come up, young kids, 18-19 and they just look at you and think, "Now there's the man I gotta follow." Nobody--ever--disobeyed an order. I have never seen from the Captain down or the Captain up, incidentally, they're not up on the front lines, see, the sergeants and the soldiers are the ones that are doing the work. They're taking the orders, I can tell you later on some of the assignments that I had, especially in the winter during the Battle of the Bulge, they were the most scary things. But you take it.
- Mark: It's important to be brave for the men?
- Bensoni: Oh, yeah. Very important. The American young man was brave. He was not the most elite trained individual, but he had a lot of guts. He wanted to be 'gutty' because he didn't want to tell them that he was a scardy cat, see, and it works. Especially when you get a young kid up there you can preach to him a little bit, like I'm talking now, I was 24 then and they were looking at me as a elderly.
- Mark: As time went on and as American forces went closer into Germany, did the combat change at all? Did the Germans stiffen their resistance? Did it get easier fighting them? Did they get war weary? Can you comment on how the battle went progressively?
- Bensoni: Yeah. As I entered Germany, I entered Coblenz which was a very large town and a nice town and the resistance there was not just house-to-house and we would settle in a house overnight to rest up. The big resistance was

when our unit went a little south from there, see. Then as we were staging ourselves, we are talking about the Battle of the Bulge, and I went through that whole area of the Battle of the Bulge when we were told to get ready, that we were going to take the southern flank of that particular area. Up to that time, we did a lot of walking from LeHarve, France all into Germany. Never rode a thing. All walking. Through the rainstorms soaking wet and I got people that asked me how did you dry your clothes. The heat of the body dried your clothes. There was times when I was up in the front line for three or four weeks just eating canned eggs and cheese and then we'd come back for a clean-up job and I used to smoke cigars and they'd all give me their silly cigars and then we were given a hot meal everybody would get diarrhea because your stomach couldn't take it. But, we'd laugh about it. We'd say, "Well, I gotta go toilet again" and scoot over in the woods and boy that must have helped those trees grow because there was a hell of a lot of debris thrown in those woods! You encountered the enemy careful, there's a degree of carefulness. There was also a degree of knowing what the hell to do. When you hear a mortar shell or an 88 shell coming in. After experience, you can always tell by the intensity of the noise where it's going to land and if that noise gets a little stronger, you get your tail out of there because it's coming a little closer to you. I can remember one incident with an artillery observer. We went up to about two miles closer to this little town because they were shelling the hell out of our unit and he carried a radio and I was to protect him. We knew that the Germans were stationed in the temple in a church. They knew that somebody was close to them because we were sending back signals. All at once one shell comes in a little closer to us and then another even closer so we got our tail out of there because the third one if you're experienced enough, is gonna flop right into your lap. We ran back just puffing like crazy, all the way, all the way.

Mark: As you look back, did your training prepare you for the experience of combat?

Bensoni: Oh, not to that extent, no. I want to be honest with you. Just the rifle, the mortar, the two types of machine guns, the light and the heavy and the BAR, which was a very heavy shoulder weapon, we always gave that to the bigger fellows. It really never got down to the basics like what to do if you were actually captured or "This is what's going to happen. They are going to shoot at you and you are going to have to shoot back again." That developed after you encountered your first attack.

Mark: Do you think there is a way to train someone for the combat experience?

Bensoni: Oh, I think they're doing that now. I think units like the Green Beret, like over in North Carolina, they go through that extensive training now, but I

think we learned a lesson because we were all recruits, all civilians with no military experience before and drafting millions and millions of these individuals and we did well! We did real well.

Mark: Yeah. Well, we won.

Bensoni: We won. We gotta give credit to the home front. They were supplying all the products to us. I wanted to make that statement. I'm jumping around a little bit. But you gotta give the home front credit too. Especially all the ladies that were working in the factories like Rosie the Riveter were turning out airplanes and tanks like crazy, we couldn't believe it. Whoever Roosevelt, FDR, appointed as the productive management did a tremendous job. Maybe it was Harry Hopkins, I don't know. It probably was.

Mark: I think it might have been.

Bensoni: He had a brain trust with him that knew what the hell they were doing. We haven't got those people any more. That's my opinion. We haven't got that class of people anymore. Politics has changed. We were so united on the home front that we produced for England, we produced and maintained the battles over in the west against Japan, the island hopping, and we supplied \$11 billion dollars worth of equipment to Russia and it all came from the cooperative home front that just produced and produced and produced.

Mark: As a combat soldier at the front, at the time did you appreciate what was going on the home front? I'm interested in the combat soldier's perspective on the home front.

Bensoni: It didn't bother me that much. When I say these things, I can almost reflect the sentiments of the other individuals. We never swore that somebody should have been here and they were not here, as long as we had enough equipment we felt as if we had a duty to perform and there was not much time to spend in our mind. To think that much about the home front. What was the most disturbing thing about the home front is when word came later on that FDR died. Then we started wondering "Now what? Who is that Harry Truman? What's going to happen?" Then we were concerned. And we cried.

Mark: Was Roosevelt popular among the troops?

Bensoni: He was our hero!

Mark: I suppose he was the only President they knew huh?

- Bensoni: Well, yes. I think that they admired him very much. I never heard anyone cursing him down "Look at that dirty son-of-a-gun sent me over here" Whatever goes wrong, you always blame the President. Nowadays too. If a battleship sinks, it's the President's fault. I never head of anyone cursing him. It was a sad, sad, moment when the word came, by a runner. A runner is one of those individuals that are young enough to come up and give you a message. When you're up on the front line, there is a lack of communication. You gotta have a runner that comes up and tells you something. He was well respected.
- Mark: Now when it comes to the actual battles you were involved in there were quite a few of them. I was looking over the record of the 90th Division. Which was the worst? You seem to indicate it was the Bulge.
- Bensoni: Oh yes, yes. It was December 16 that we started walking forward and we rested in a little farmyard. It was very cold, maybe 10 degrees below 0. My unit encountered quite a bit of resistance there and we shot up quite a few too. I can tell you that I was selected to go on patrol. Why, I don't know. But I would select about ten individuals to come with me and this particular morning, at 2:00 in the morning, the runner came over and said that the Captain wanted to see me. He was in another house and they had all white uniforms there and we were to dress in those white uniforms to see if we could infiltrate the German lines. Before, I had a lot of map reading experience. We were to follow a line of wooded area and then rock fences and there was a hell of a lot of snow, our rifles were painted white, and our faces were sprayed a little bit and the assignment was to go to that hilltop to see if there was any Germans settled up there. So, at the bottom of the hill, we could see a lot of footprints and we were a little careless and I led the whole thing way up top and then across an open field and we settled on the other side. We had a radio operator with us who called back "All Clear." So, the company starts coming forward following our path. At the bottom of the hill we overlooked a German machine gun in place. We didn't look that good. Up on top we didn't notice any way out in the open in the rock pile there was another German machine gun all settled and waiting for us. They were going to have a hey day. So, when the company came up the hill and crossed this open field, this one machine gun left open at the bottom of the hill and the one on top was cutting us down to pieces, see. Of course, we were pretty well protected, these ten individuals, and we flanked over and threw grenades at the machine gun nests and we destroyed them. But, in the meantime quite a few American soldiers were shot and our medic, who carried a bag of morphine and other medical supplies and he had a big red sign on his helmet, you know, the cross, he went up to administer a little morphine to a soldier who was screaming out in the open field and they shot him. He got the Medal of Honor.

Mark: That was the worst?

Bensoni: Oh, no. Then I would take off also with our white uniforms, they gave me a German Jew fellow who could speak and understand German from Brooklyn. He was married and we would have to get as close as possible during the night to where we felt as if there was a German unit and that particular night we got a little bit too close, he could understand what they were saying. They were saying: "I think I hear somebody coming." So we quietly go from one tree to the other to cover ourselves and when we returned back to the company, we reported to them. He begged me not to pick on him anymore because he was a married man and he said he was too scared and that he couldn't do this anymore. That was about the only soldier that ever told me that he was scared and he had a wife back home. He begged me. So I said, "no, that's ok." Anyway, when the company came up to that point, there were still warm spots that we seen the Germans knew that we were coming and they took off. But, there wasn't any shots fired whatsoever. In that same particular area afterwards, I have to confess that I shot an American soldier. It was cold and our orders were getting all screwed up. We got the base of the hill and on top of the hill was another company from our same unit. And the American Lieutenant, he was just a "shave tail" coming out of West Point, a young man. He was running down from the top of the hill down to our unit waving and everybody thought he was a Heinie. Everybody wanted to take a crack at him with the rifle. I said "No, this is mine." I hit him right in the mouth. He came down with his hand over his mouth, bleeding, froze and oh, did we feel foolish. My God! Orders were all messed up--we were getting too excited around there.

Mark: I want to save the surrender from the Germans for a little bit yet. I would like to get on to some topics as to what you did when you did have free time in Europe. Did you get to go to Paris like a lot of GI's did for example? Did you have much contact with the French or later with the Germans? What sort of activities did you do in camp when you weren't fighting?

Bensoni: There really was no camp during the war. It was just a matter of coming back to a staging area with these portable kitchens set up. We're talking miles and miles up to 8 miles and you have to come back to clean up a little bit.

Mark: To get a shave and that sort of thing?

Bensoni: Yes, and also to eat some warm food. There everybody talks about their episodes and everything else goes along with it. When you pick up a souvenir, I picked up some souvenirs and we gave some to a man who runs

the jeep and told him to make sure and hang onto it and he hung onto it for themselves afterward. It's all nice and restful as much as possible and you talk about the things that you did up in the front lines, the danger spots and whatever happened. When you're out in the forest, we were going through the forest and there was Germans shooting these tree burst shells. When the shell hits the tree a piece of shrapnel would swivel around and come down and just rip you apart and they did. Some of the soldiers screamed because of the pain and we'd go over and on two occasions we had to hit them in the head because they were giving our position away. We didn't knock them out kill them, we just knocked them out a little bit. There are so many, I'm just jumping around from one experience to another. I got a hell of a lot to tell you after the war was over with. Then of course, I was wounded too, crossing the Moselle River in Germany. This was after the Battle of the Bulge. There were more incidents in the Battle of the Bulge. We got into a little community we knew the Germans were in there but we thought maybe they pulled out. We went to this farmyard and I assigned two individuals to go outside to be guards while we just rested up inside. It was a long hallway there and I thought I heard a door slam so I went out and I thought it was one of my guards that I told to go out to guard the outer area and it was a big German and he hollered out a name in German. "This guy is gonna walk in on us." So I just opened shots at him. That opened all the others who were coming back into the town and we had a scramble there. But, you take it. You feel sort of proud of yourself that you're accomplishing something and now that you look at it all you're just so God darned lucky to be back. It really, really never bothered me. When I came back I went into my Monsignor, at my Catholic church and I give him the whole story. He told me to forget it and I did.

Mark: That was good advice you think?

Bensoni: Well, yes. Otherwise--he was trying to be a good counselor that's what he was trying to do. When we get together, even right now, we play cards once a week in our group most of them never had the experience that I did on the front lines, but they enjoy the conversation. They all have their little incidents that they like to refer to. I haven't heard one of them yet and I have a very extensive a lot of experience in veterans organizations, ever curse out because they were called to service.

Mark: I was going to ask about your sleeping accommodations. On the front do you sleep and if so where?

Bensoni: Well, we were trained to dig a foxhole and they gave you a little shovel, I could do better with a big spoon, and during the Battle of the Bulge, which was just loaded with snow, we kicked the snow over our feet and just lay

down into it. One guy would stand guard for two hours and you'd try to get a wink eye and then you'd alternate and everybody else would do the same thing. Sometimes you're so damn tired that you just lay on top and to hell with it. I mean as a young person you can get that tired. Not really disgusted, but tired. Then the lines of communications said that we were going to stay there for a couple of days, you're not always moving, and then orders come how to read your map and we're going to advance to this point, going to a little community. We've been to a couple of actual large towns and there is a house-to-house movement that you can see on TV sometimes and you encounter some snipers. Sometimes you put yourself up in the barn. I got an incident later on as I crossed the Moselle River, we invaded a farmhouse.

Mark: If you like we can talk about it right now 'cause I'm going to move on to where you were when the war ended.

Bensoni: As we proceeded south after the Battle of the Bulge, the Moselle River is a spin off from the Rhine River and we got up through this town by the Moselle River and we were ordered to stay there while a Battalion came up to put up bridges that we were going to cross. We were pinned down with heavy machine gun fire there. Their machine guns were mounted on motorcycles, by the way, facing the rear. Quite clever. I had a very bad experience there. I was pinned down all night in back of a huge tree and they were just peppering that tree to get a hold of me but I stayed there and when it got to be early in the morning before the light came up, I pulled back into the farm yard and we took orders that we, during the night, a battalion set up a pontoon bridge and we were going to run across one by one to get over to the other side because this was the Moselle River. So we did that. Meantime, they were shelling this bridge with mortar but they never did hit anything. Later on, they expanded so tanks could come across. As we got over on the other side, I'm talking on a very high hill, almost a mountain, they were pinning us down with these machine guns again mounted on the motor cycles and we flanked one and we got rid of him, and up on the top, with my 12 guys, we seen a farm house. We went over there and much elderly people were caressing us and telling us the "Bosch was here the Bosch was here. Gone. Gone." That was about all we could understand. We took a couple of dozen of their eggs and a piece of lard and a frying pan and we were going to have fried eggs. I was assigned to a cross road on the map. We were a little bit cocky because the resistance subsided there. We went down there and we were going to set up a little fire to cook our eggs. Well, the Germans were watching us out in the woods and they opened up with mortar, machine guns and artillery. I lost all but three [of my men]. There is where I got the Silver Star. I crawled under their machine gun fire to salvage these individuals to pull them back. I was shot in the arm and I

was peppered with a mortar shell. Not even realizing it. I had no pain whatsoever. People's legs were blown off and arms--they just zeroed in on us like crazy. Bill Taylor who is from St. Marie, upper Michigan and I survived pretty well and we pulled back three of them that were badly damaged and they all died right there. We salvaged them for a moment. Then we stayed there for a while, hidden in back of a wood pile and we had our radio still intact. We called back. Our artillery and mortar were shooting into the wooded area where we suspected everything was coming from and that was the end for me for a while. I went all the way back to Memphis, France to the hospital. I was told that I could fly home afterwards and I refused. I wanted to go back to my unit. Bill Taylor and I both. I'm talking of the last two weeks. We did go back. We rode a tank into Pilsen, Czechoslovakia.

Mark: That's where you were when the war ended?

Bensoni: Yes. I got pictures right in front of me. There was a big sign. I'll read what it says. "I was the first American soldier to meet the Russian in Rabbi, Czechoslovakia." It was the first unit found lots of good beer and we used it that night. I have a picture here of the American soldiers hugging the Russians and those Czechs put up a big sign that is in the Czechoslovakia language that is still pretty clear. How could I get the picture? I captured the camera in Coblenz that I kept with me and I have these pictures. They're originals. Yes, Sir. They are originals.

Mark: What did you think of the Russian soldiers?

Bensoni: They greeted us with a bottle of Vat69. Do you know what that is?

Mark: No.

Bensoni: It's a brandy that is bitter than all hell. It would take the paint off of your house. I don't know where in hell they ever got that but they had a couple of quarts of that Vat69 and we all took a swig of it. Of course, they are heavy drinkers anyway. And they were happy as hell. They suffered possibly more than we did. The comradeship was very good. That evening we were looking around lustily for beer because Pilsen, Czechoslovakia is the beer capitol of Europe. I and a few others wondered about a doorway. It led into a long descending rock steps area--way down--maybe 100 feet. Down there were barrels after barrels of beer! We found a spigot so we could tap into the heavy oaken barrels. They are underground because that's their refrigeration system. We all got cockeyed drunk. We got also bawled out from the Captain that we failed to put our guards out. He said there were

still snipers around. We said we didn't care. We were still living. We enjoyed it all. I developed a bad case of appendix.

Mark: Oh, really.

Bensoni: Oh, geez, I was in pain, very, very badly. They put me on the jeep and traveled 60 miles up to Wesbaum, Germany where they were setting up a hospital tent--maybe you don't want to hear this part.

Mark: They were setting up a hospital in where?

Bensoni: Wesbaum.

Mark: I don't know where that is.

Bensoni: It's way up north, 60 miles north of there up by Bonn, Germany. They operated on me and the doctor, a young doctor flown in from the United States had very little experience and when I show my stomach now to a doctor, they ask who in the hell gashed me there--about 8 inches across. I said I had my appendix taken out on a box in Germany. Oh hell, he said, now we cut two inches. But I recovered and now I can go into what I referred to before. After I recovered, I was transferred down to Stuttgart, Germany to join in with many other soldiers that had a lot of points. We were discharged by the point system. I had enough to give extras on to other individuals. We were to fly home. We stayed there and stayed there. Now I'm talking about June and all at once we got orders to get on box cars to go up to Reims, France, we're going to fly out of Paris. That was a long trip. All the way up to Reims, France. Lived in tents, no electricity, two meals a day, that's all you could do is play cards and just walk around and do exercise. The company commander was always drunk. He said, "Sgt. Bensoni, you're in charge." I didn't like that too much.

Mark: I'm sure you were very anxious to get home.

Bensoni: Oh, yeah. After staying there a couple of months they decided that we had to travel by boxcar from Reims, France all the way down to Marseilles, France on the shores of the Mediterranean. A long way. Down there we're set up in tents again and I had to supply the soldiers in our unit, I'm talking about the whole company now. The company commander was either shacking up or finding a lot of booze. He was a big Texan who didn't care. I did care. It got people yet from Stevens Point that will write to me and say "Italo, if it wasn't for you we would have been in a disaster place." I got these people that I meet occasionally. This is a little humor attached to it now. These soldiers of ours would go into town, and all at once they were

missing a blanket and their overcoats. When I asked what they were doing, they said they traded them for cognac. I said, "But, you'll need the blanket." Found out there was a huge American depot in Nice, France--big--you'd never believe it was real. I can't explain to you how huge it was with supplies. Tried to get a 6x6 truck and go down there to replace what these fellows were selling in town. There it was all operated, with supervision of course, by German soldiers. I had a hell of a time getting a blanket. The one German soldier said, "You got American cigarettes?" Can you imagine, a couple of months afterwards. Next time I came with cigarettes and I could get all the blankets, all the overcoats, all the food cartons and rations I wanted with a pack of cigarettes. It's amazing. Bribe the enemy. Get it?

Mark: Yeah.

Bensoni: I was a king when I came back with this truck full of stuff. I was king to those fellows. We finally boarded a liberty ship that took us 19 days to get from Marseilles through the Straights of Gibraltar and 19 days on high sea with only 600 of us on this liberty ship. We landed in Boston and I wasn't feeling too good at that time. The shrapnel that I had inside my stomach was working and I didn't even know it. I was shipped to Ft. Sheridan and I stayed there for three or four weeks in the hospital and I was finally discharged January 1946.

Comment [JDG1]:

Mark: And you went back to Hurley?

Bensoni: I went back to Hurley, it was cold. There was no fanfare. I wasn't looking for any either. I stayed home for a while and drank some beer and visited some friends, thought that was getting boring and I applied for a job in a mine and I was hired.

Mark: Did you have any trouble finding work? Was it as simple as going down and applying for it and getting it? Some veterans had trouble finding work apparently.

Bensoni: No, I didn't because my two brothers were working there and one was the head of the union so he peddled a little influence around so I got hired. The captain who did the hiring was a World War I veteran who was a very good legionnaire and he catered to veterans. He did, he was honest about it. He said "You can start tomorrow." I said, "No, I'm not going to go down and do heavy mining. I can't do it. So they gave me a sort of a lighter job and I wasn't happy about it at all. I worked for three and a half years and then I took a job as a rural mail carrier and got appointed. I couldn't take that anymore.

Mark: When it comes to veteran's organizations, you've been quite active in that way.

Bensoni: Well, I've been active in Veterans of Foreign Wars for 50 years.

Mark: So was it right when you got home you joined the VFW?

Bensoni: I joined the VFW and I'm sure you're going to ask me why I joined the veteran's organization.

Mark: You bet I am!

Bensoni: I joined because I felt as if there was a need to join to keep my memories alive, to discuss or to carry on conversation with other individuals in that organization that possibly had the experience that I did and also to keep people that are promising us, the politicians happy, that they were going to keep us happy with promises. This was the avenue to keep their promises by being active in the veteran's organization. I just felt proud of the fact that here in the VFW we could have this comradeship that we had when we were soldiers.

Mark: In 1946 when you joined the VFW there were a lot of World War I guys and then the World War II guys were coming back. Did you have much contact with the World War I guys and how did the different generations--

Bensoni: Yes. I had contact with a couple of them that gave me some tremendous, useful advice. You can form an organization, find the men of our choice, but I have to give those old timers in the American Legion at that time, they were dedicated and they wanted to help the World War II members.

Mark: So there was no tension between the World War I and World War II guys.

Bensoni: I didn't find any, no.

Mark: Were you what you'd call an active member when you first got home? Did you attend the meetings, did you socialize at the Post a lot or was it a passing kind of thing for you right after the war?

Bensoni: I got to be interested and it's like any organization, if you're interested in the organization, there are those who figure "We're going to give this guy some responsibility." So the night of--three years after--I got to be Post Commander and shortly after that I got to be District Commander which covers all of the northern State of Wisconsin. Then I got appointed as State

assignments by other State Commanders and I got elected as State Commander.

Mark: Is this American Legion or VFW?

Bensoni: VFW all the way through. I did join the American Legion but my interests are in the VFW and I did real well, I got to be appointed as All American, which means that National is watching you and you've met all the requirements to be an outstanding State Commander and they appointed me to National office for seven consecutive years and brought me into Washington, D.D. and Kansas City and Indianapolis and Seattle, Minneapolis, Detroit, I enjoyed traveling for them on these assignments. I got to be very, very interested.

Mark: As sort of an active commander in the VFW, what, from your perspective are the problems facing veterans and how did that change over time?

Bensoni: Well, you got those veterans that are not entitled to any entitlement, such as compensation; I'll refer to that. Because they were not wounded, so their interest in the organization is more of a combat-social status than protecting what they were promised that was going to be given to us. You got a mixture there. I've studied the membership very closely even to this very, very moment the VFW is more of a social thing. If it wasn't for the National and State offices using the lobby system to protect the entitlements program which includes the hospitals and everything else that goes along with it, I think we could lose our pants. I was active because of my, I was an active union individual when I worked for three and a half years in the mine. At the age of 28, a couple of months after, they elected me as one of their leaders in the union and I enjoyed that. I enjoyed meeting with the high brass of the company in Cleveland and Duluth, MN, sitting down at the round table let's say and discussing these things and not being fearful of losing my job because I was a good worker. That's the number one thing you always want to be, a good worker. Then you shouldn't be fearful of losing your job. So I used that same policy, let's say, into the VFW. Even to this very day I feel as if the VFW is a place where a veteran can express himself and they keep the movement alive. If it wasn't for the veterans organizations and the patriotism that's involved in all of these, DVA, American Legion, you name it there's a lot of them, I feel as if in our society that the development of something that would be unpatriotic. I really do. You can be over-patriotic; some historian once said that some of the faults in the whole world is that we got too many patriotic individuals. Well, that's what Hitler operated on. He enticed the soldiers to be very patriotic and they went out and they fought for Germany come Hell or high water. That's one of the main reasons why I wanted to be active in the VFW. To

this very day, I'm a very good promoter of membership in veteran's organizations.

Mark: As far as the veterans from the Vietnam conflict are concerned, did they change the organization much do you think? Did they have sort of different problems than you had or do you think they're pretty much the same?

Bensoni: I was appointed on a Vietnam Post Traumatic Stress Committee for the State of Wisconsin. I was a World War II member on that particular committee. All the others were Vietnam veterans and I remember we had a lot of meetings, and they asked me how did I cope with blending back into society and that they were having problems. I said when I got home, I said this before to you, that I drank my good share of beer, enjoyed going into taverns, what else, just walking around meeting old friends and then I decided after my mother, my dad was dead, my mother told me it was time to settle down and she bawled the Hell out of me. I decided she was right. So I settled down and took it in stride and got out of my head that things of the past and flash back in my memory some times, but it wasn't going to drive me off my rocker. I told this group that and they all listened and asked if it was easily done. It was just a determination in your own mind to get it out of your system. I enjoyed meeting with those veterans. I want to say something else about the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was a different style war than we had. You were fighting people that you didn't know if they were your enemy or your friend. I have to give them a lot of credit.

Mark: Those veterans you mean.

Bensoni: Yes. Yet now that I see the hardship they're having trying to establish themselves with some compensation cases or other benefits. Some of the promises were not being held up to them and you find that a lot of them are resentful. We have about a dozen of them in our organization. They're good fellows, but they're still resentful that they fought an unnecessary war. Something else flashes though my system. "You know what? Maybe we didn't have any business over there." And, after this book comes out from the Defense Secretary, geez, what a timely thing to tell these fellows that they goofed off and the veterans did goof off, that were over there. Bad situation. I want to back up a little bit. After World War II, I was convinced in my system, my mind, this was the end of all the major wars. It had to be because if all the youth of the world had to go through this again, somebody's crazy. We all learned a big lesson. All the countries in the world learned a big lesson. They would never be a conflict. Boy, was I wrong! Then there was the Korean War and then the Vietnam War and then all these smaller wars and the Gulf War. It's got to come to an end some

place. Whether it's through negotiation or whatever system, but even the brains that we supposed to have, don't know the real answer.

Mark: I just have one last area I want to cover. Then all my questions are done and that involves the veterans benefits and the ones that you were able to utilize. After World War II there was the GI Bill. According to my data sheet here you didn't use it to go to school, but I was wondering there were other aspects of it for example there was unemployment insurance, there was the home loan type of thing. Did you use any of those benefits?

Bensoni: Let me refer to the GI Bill. I classify it as the second most important piece of legislation Congress ever passed in the history of our existence because it educated so many people. I took one half hour not too long ago on the anniversary of the 50th anniversary of the introduction of the GI Bill. I spoke for half an hour on the radio station. I got a lot of good comments on it. I used the home loan. After I got married I applied for a home loan for \$5,000 for 15 years and built a new home for \$8,500 complete. A beautiful home right in Hurley. My payments were \$36.98 a month. Can you imagine? I paid it off in ten. I was scared of 15. I couldn't imagine paying that amount of money in 15 years. I paid it off in 10. After that I used a couple of the State Economic Assistance loans, \$300 ones to surround our house with sidewalk and other improvements and so forth and so on. A very good program. GI Bill of Rights is a very, very good program that helped out so many that I am very happy and proud of that structure. Naturally, it was passed because if you're going to bring back 18 million veterans, you're going to have chaos in the United States. You would probably have a revolution. It's a strong word to use but with the brains that we had at that time could see that we had to educate those that were denied education at the age of 20 or 21. Those that took the opportunity to have that education under the GI Bill did real well. That is a product of the United States of America right to this very time. They educated themselves - doctors and you name it, engineers and it helped the American economic situation tremendously. Then of course I got to be on the State Veterans Board.

Mark: I was going to ask you about that. I was going to ask when did you get appointed to the Board and--

Bensoni: Initially, by Governor Lucey and I served for six years and then Lee Dreyfus was in and he didn't reappointment me. Then when Tony Earl got in, he said he had a vacancy to finish some expired term for two years and I took it. So, I have a total of 8 years on the State Veterans Board, and I was Chairman for two terms through some stormy sessions of course.

Mark: What made them so stormy and what were the contentious issues?

Bensoni: Governor Lucey wanted to get rid of John Moses. John Moses was well qualified to be the Secretary. John felt as if that if there was any publicity come out, he was going to capture the publicity instead of the Governor. John knew what he was doing. John always told me, I'm very close to John even today. I was the only individual that voted to retain John and the rest of the Board voted "no"--to fire him. We won out because of the State Supreme Court ruled that the firing of John Moses was illegally done. Well, when I say that during my term on the Board, things were more exciting at that time because there were more veterans using the State benefits, the first mortgage loan business was going into effect, the interest rates were still low--in the 6.4% area and there was more interest on World War II veterans because it was mushrooming up at that time and there was more movement and more statewide interest from all those that were scattered throughout the state. Now, I find the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs is a very capable man with John Maur and Ray Boland, very capable but we're into a different phase of the benefits.

Mark: Which is what?

Bensoni: Well, to help the homeless, that's one of them that's developing, the home first mortgage loan is still in effect by the way, but it simmered down and the need isn't there as much as before. We had at one time \$1,200,000,000. out in personal mortgage loans. Now the last issue was another \$30,000,000 at a 7.45% interest rate, which is still attractive. But, all in all, all the staff members that are working for the Department of Veterans Affairs and I've been into this for twenty years now, are all capable individuals. I have to give Ray Boland a lot of credit. He kept all the staff members that John Maur had--he kept them intact. Because they were dedicated, hard working individuals and that kept the movement going instead of coming in to--sure a lot of them are still civil service status but they could be strictly his appointments. "I don't like you. I'm going to get my friend over there." He didn't do that. I have to give him credit for not doing that. As long as a man is doing his job, keep him.

Mark: A couple things to go back on here. After the war you worked and you were a union official and then on the data sheet you filled out it said you had to find other employment due to your Army disability?

Bensoni: Well, I was wounded. I couldn't work in the mine because I had a gunshot wound in my arm and then I had a serious operation and lost 1/3 of my stomach in 1963, because as I told you I suffered during that long period of time. I had a growth and that was removed, I had a bleeding ulcer, I had a attacks after attacks and then I had shrapnel that was effecting everything

and it all came out. Oh, I felt good after that! I had my operation at Iron Mountain Hospital.

Mark: This is almost 20 years after the war then. Still taking shrapnel out of you.

Bensoni: 15 years. I suffered all during that period. I was in and out of that clinic like crazy. I finally said "Do or die. Something has got to be done." I was in the VA Hospital, I went to the Duluth Clinic, to Madison and Marshfield and they all told me the same thing. "We got to get in there and explore." I was scared. I finally made up my mind that I wasn't scared anymore that I had to do it. It was a damn good move on my part.

Mark: I was going to ask if you had any contact with the VA medical system and if so, what you thought of it.

Bensoni: The service that I had there was excellent. The doctor was a very good doctor, they called in Dr. Peters from Green Bay to do the surgery. They operate this way. If there's something more serious, they'll call in a specialist. I was there for almost two months. At that time they kept you in a long period of time. You get these veterans that were more or less in there for a resting period, they wouldn't treat the doctors well. They'd call them "quacks" because they were in a VA hospital and the doctor would come over to me--I respected the doctor. He said, "Listen, he wants me to go over and take care of him but I'm going to walk down the hallway because he's not showing any respect." Get it? That was the feeling amongst the veterans. That the VA Hospital was a second rated service to the veterans. I didn't have that feeling. I thought their services were good. Even to this very day, I have contacts with the VA, I'm getting compensation, and I feel as if I'm entitled to it, so are all the others because of my disability. I have my limitations because of that disability. The VA has never shown any sign to me with my contacts, that they wouldn't give me good service. My contacts with other individuals in the locality and won our State Commander and even serving on the Veterans Board, generally speaking, you'll always find those two or three bitches in there but, generally speaking I find that there is a degree of good satisfaction with the VA services. The hospitals, the clinics. This clinic up in Superior that carries 100 people every day. That's a lot.

Mark: Yes, it is.

Bensoni: What hospital will go through 1,000 people every day--average. You'll find some of those that are leaning on services, but you show me where there isn't that kind of a problem. Personnel in our society, always will be.

- Mark: One last thing about benefits. You worked for the Post Office and I'm wondering if there was a veteran's preference, if that came into play for getting you that position there.
- Bensoni: Yes. There was. That came upon in 1948 when things were still warm. It wasn't denied to me. I passed, not with the highest grade, but I passed with a fairly good grade and then my 10 points were added and that threw me into a higher position. I'll consent that I had to use some contacts, political contacts, which I did and it all helped. I was hoping that I didn't have to do it, but people who were up on this sort of maneuvering said it doesn't hurt so I did it. I served for 33 years. I enjoyed the job very much. Servicing the people and doing a lot of favors for the elderly and right now, I'm president of the elderly association of our county with 225 members. It's a service that I'm giving for their interests and their production as much as possible.
- Mark: You're very busy.
- Bensoni: Yeah!. Oh, Jeez! Can I take another few minutes?
- Mark: Sure. Absolutely.
- Bensoni: I served on the Hurley City Council for eight years, on the Iron County Board of Supervisors for 16, I was its chairman for 12 years and I was chairman of the mental hospital Board of Directors in Ashland. I was chairman of the Criminal Council for Northern Wisconsin. How the hell does a little fellow like me get to be chairman? All deputies and sheriffs. They couldn't abide the laws that sent out. They couldn't be the chairmen, so I was elected chairman. I was chairman of an industrial development group here in the county. I got plaques on my wall galore. I did real well for the community.
- Mark: Do you think that your military experience had something to do with your success in that area?
- Bensoni: Oh absolutely. I learned some lessons. Regimentation has a lot. People like the people up until you find that it doesn't work anymore and of course you don't shoot them then. If you're going to be the chairman of a thing, like I was the Chairman of the County Board of Supervisors, we had 21 supervisors. You're the chairman, you want to be chairman. The only buildings that were ever built around here, was in my term that I kept the lead on--built a new courthouse and jail, new senior citizens center and I managed to Senator Gaylord Nelson, I was a friend with him, to build a apartment place for the elderly. Nothing since has ever been built because

nobody takes the lead on it. If you're going to be the chairman of something, you gotta get in there and push with a little finesse.

Mark: You've exhausted all of my questions. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Bensoni: Back to the Vietnam War. I feel as if the Vietnam War conflict has a lot to do with the problems that we presently have in the United States. The crime, the violence, everything else, street gangs and everything else, the TV violence showing and everything that goes along with it. Incidentally, I am not a ultra conservative individual, if I may make that point, I'm not. I'm a moderate. I'll lean this way and I'll lean this way. I'll lean more my way than I will toward the conservative side because I feel as if everything that was to my advantage in my lifetime, all came from a liberal philosophy. The GI Bill of Rights was a liberal move wasn't it?

Mark: Yeah, it sure was!

Bensoni: OK, good for you! I'm going to through in a little politics now. Your staunch Republicans want to get rid of it. It was the greatest help to American returning veterans. They promised them something and they gave them something.

Mark: I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me.

Bensoni: It was enjoyable.

Mark: You have an extremely busy schedule it sounds like.

Bensoni: Oh, no. I like to fool around with the garden. I have a big beautiful lawn it's one acre. I moved out in the country out in the country twenty years ago. Built a new home out here and I think I got one of the best flower gardens around. I'm planting some more flowers this afternoon.