

## **Transcription: August Ciriello**

---

*Today is Friday, October 9, 2009, and my name is James Crabtree and I'm interviewing Mr. August R. Ciriello. Did I say that right?*

**August Ciriello:** Right.

*And this interview is being conducted at the William Courtney Veterans Home in Temple, Texas, and it is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time today to talk to us. This program is to record your memories of your time in the service for posterity. I guess the best place to start is to ask you to tell us a little bit about what your childhood was like and your life before you went in the military. Where were you born?*

**August Ciriello:** I was born in a little town by the name of Venzone in Italy, in the province of Udine, and I came to America and I was 7 years old. I came here and the first day I went to school, they put me in kindergarten at 7 years.

*Where did your family first come to? Did they come to New York?*

**August Ciriello:** No, Madison, New Jersey. My father had been here before and he worked in America, and he made trips back and got me and my sister, we were born over there, and then he finally come over and got us and brought my mother and my sister and me.

*What was that like as a young child coming to a foreign country, and I guess you didn't know the language either?*

**August Ciriello:** I didn't know one word of English.

*Was that scary to you, or exciting?*

**August Ciriello:** It was exciting, but a lot of kids made fun of me, and I've seen some guys in the same circumstances go exactly the other way. They got in a shell. Well, I started fighting at them and talking to them like, and I'd cuss with them just like they'd cuss.

*Were there any other Italian children where you were living?*

**August Ciriello:** There was lots, I'd say, a lot of Italians, a lot of Germans, a lot of Polish people, very few Negroes, in the little town we had. It was a bedroom community for New York City, that's what it was. There was no manufacturing there, anything like that. There was one little factory there, and it was there during the Revolutionary War, so it was still there, and it's still there. It's the only manufacturing deal in the whole town. I think they're keeping it just to make it historic. Of course I ended up, never finished high school. I had to go to work and help the family because it was during the Depression and stuff.

*How many brothers and sisters did you have?*

**August Ciriello:** I had two brothers and three sisters, and one sister died in Italy before I was even born. All of my relatives are still alive, my sisters and my brothers. No, I'm sorry, one of my brothers is gone. Just me and Jackie left.

*When you were growing up in New Jersey, did your family have much contact with any family back in Italy?*

**August Ciriello:** Oh yeah, my mother was real, she was so, not smart, she was learned and gone to school in Italy, and she used to write letters for all the neighbors that didn't know how to write. She wouldn't take any money, but people would bring her -

*So write letters back to the families back in Italy.*

**August Ciriello:** Yeah. And she'd read the letters for the people because half of those people couldn't read 'em, you know, read, and that's what she done. My father worked in a greenhouse, a great big greenhouse. Five big greenhouses they had 100,000 square feet. They'd grow mostly roses. Red roses, white roses, yellow roses, you know. And Madison was a bedroom community for New York City.

*I guess were you working when the war started? You said you'd dropped out of high school.*

**August Ciriello:** Oh yes, just before I went in the service, before I got drafted, I was working in a piston ring factory and we were making piston rings for the Air Force, airplanes, a great big old piston ring about that big.

*Do you remember where you were when you heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?*

**August Ciriello:** A friend of mine we called Bricks, he had just come home the day before. He was in the Navy. And he called the house and he says what are you doing? I said I'm just sitting here on my butt doing nothing. He says my brother let me have my car. He said you want to go have a couple of beers? I said yeah, I'll go with you. And so we got in the car and we went over to this little town by the name of Whippeny, New Jersey, and we walked in the bar and the guys, everybody was shut up, shut up, shut up. And Greg says what the hell is going on? And they'd say shut up, listen. And on the radio they were talking about Pearl Harbor being bombed, and they saw him in uniform, and he says you've got to go back to your ship immediately. He had just opened part of a beer and he took the beer and slammed it on the floor. He says you're kidding. They said every two minutes they announced all servicemen are required to be back to their stations. And so we had to go home, and of course his brother took him down to Newark and they put him on a train and he had to go to Philadelphia.

*When you heard that war had been declared, did you think it was pretty likely that you'd be going in the military yourself?*

**August Ciriello:** Oh yeah, I knew. I tried to get in the Coast Guard, me and my buddy, and we had papers and everything, but I was one of the guys, I was high in the numbers, the draft deal, and they told me that I couldn't go in the Coast Guard because they needed me on a levy of soldiers that had to go to Fort Dix, which was -

*Yeah, a big base there in New Jersey. So you were basically -*

**August Ciriello:** Drafted and went to Fort Dix, and from Fort Dix I went to basic training and Fort McLennan, Alabama. They screwed me up there, too. I wasn't supposed to go to Fort McLennan. I was supposed to go to Mississippi. I forget, it's the big equipment school.

*So you were supposed to be a cook at first?*

**August Ciriello:** No, I was supposed to go, they had this great big field, parade ground, and all GI's, that come in on three or four trains, not trains but boxcars, and everybody's name was called except mine. I was sitting out here in the open field and this lieutenant says what's your name, soldier? And serial number, because you had to learn your serial number real quick. And I told him, and he says you're not on this levy. Your name is not – I said all I did was follow orders. To make this long story short, I was supposed to go to cook and baker's school in Mississippi, and instead they shipped me to Fort McLennan, Alabama, and it was cheaper to take the papers from Mississippi and send them to Alabama than to take me and transfer me. So I ended up in basic training in Alabama, and Branching Material, something they called it. Anyway, I ended up at Fort Hood.

*What was your specialty? What was your designation?*

**August Ciriello:** Branching Material they called it. Anything you could need. I ended up in Fort Hood at the tank destroyers, which they don't even have anymore. I ended up as an assistant instructor in the tank destroyers which was a cush job. I didn't have no guard duty.

*Oh, that's not bad, yeah.*

**August Ciriello:** And the only thing, about once a month I had to stay with the gun shed, where we had the guns that we trained soldiers. We had a class of enlisted men, a class of officers, and a class of OCS students, and every three weeks we had it, and that's what I done.

*What was Fort Hood like then, I know it was a very brand new base at that point.*

**August Ciriello:** Fort Hood, it was packed. We had to sleep head to toe, and smell the guys' stinky feet, and we had to eat out of mess kits. We got there in November, and we'd eat out of mess kits until next May or April.

*So you got there in November of '42?*

**August Ciriello:** Yeah, November of '42.

*So what were the average troops like that you were with? What was the morale like? Did everyone want to go overseas and fight?*

**August Ciriello:** Hell no, do you want to go overseas and fight?

*I don't know, I'm asking what the guys around you were like.*

**August Ciriello:** Well, there was very few who were rah-rah guys. You have a couple of nuts like that in any group. We knew we had a job to do, and that's it. But as far as volunteer, I never volunteered for a damn thing, you know? It's like that's it. I had a cush job at Fort Hood for a long time as assistant instructor, and then of course they broke it up and I went up in Maryland

and I got put in a tank destroyer outfit that had towed guns, and Patton had no use for the towed guns. But anyway, we were supposed to get on a ship and they kept, put us back at Fort Dix and stayed there for four months, and then we went back on a ship and went in on a beach in France. Of course the infantry had already gone out.

*OK, so it was after D-Day, when you were brought in France.*

**August Ciriello:** Yeah, this outfit I was with, they put us on traffic control. We were like MP's but we had to stay at a certain crossroads and stuff to make sure that the vehicles that were going to the front took the right roads especially at night, and we had to keep the civilians off of certain roads. They like crossed it, I call it Interstate, they could cross the main road, but they couldn't go down a main road. They had to go around.

*What were the French people like when you were there?*

**August Ciriello:** They were friendly, most of 'em.

*I guess they were relieved that you and the American forces were there.*

**August Ciriello:** Though I didn't have much contact with the French because usually I was out on an outpost out in the boondocks to make sure that the guys in the trucks and stuff were taking the right road, the right turnoff, especially at night. Some of them ended up down in the river because the bridge was out, if you weren't diligent.

*But while you were there in France, did you have a pretty good sense of how the war was going?*

**August Ciriello:** We didn't have much information, but we knew that it was getting hot, and then just before the first week in Christmas of '44 I guess it was, or '43, I forget now, and I went in, Patton called for a levy of so many troops for all \_\_\_\_ outfits, and the way he done it, he was real honest. He said that everybody's name is supposed to go in a hat and if your outfit is supposed to have a levy of 15 men, well they're supposed to pull 15 men out. But I was in a, I call it chicken outfit, it was from Louisiana, and we were a National Guard outfit. And they had towed guns, and Patton had no use for the towed gun, and anyway they picked out 14 men and I was one of the replacements, and they took some of the, one guy had a wife and three kids, and he was a little bit squirrely, and he was one of the guys in that National Guard outfit, and they sent him in to go to the front and he was crying like a baby, but that's the way some of these outfits were. They took care of each other. And I volunteered to go to the 90<sup>th</sup> or the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored, because I had a good friend in the 90<sup>th</sup>. Yeah, and my cousin was in the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored, and I ended up in the 90<sup>th</sup>, and three days before Christmas, they were close to the Saw River in Germany, and I got put in the infantry. The first night there I had to go on a patrol and scared shitless, and two days later they said go down the street and go into this house and you are to report to Sergeant Patrick. You're going to a machine gun platoon. So I ended up in the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in a machine gun platoon, what they call heavy weapons. And that was in December. And by, just after we crossed the Rhine River, through a process of elimination, I went from a tail gunner to the squad leader, and then from then on I was squad leader until Czechoslovakia.

*You learned quick and you had to learn quick I guess. You had to learn quick what to do in the infantry even though you had not been an infantryman at that point.*

**August Ciriello:** You had to save your butt. And I got four battle stars out of it, never got a scratch, and that's it.

*Were there any particular memories of your time fighting in Europe that you would want to share with us? Like did you have much contact with any German POW's or that sort of thing?*

**August Ciriello:** Once in a while we'd run into, we were up at the front, and the Germans were running away from us, and a couple of times we had to run away from them, but as far as having a concentration of POW's to talk to, never.

*Did you run across many German civilians?*

**August Ciriello:** A few civilians.

*What were they like usually?*

**August Ciriello:** Very scared and they'd been told a bunch of lies, and we got along, a few civilians, we got along with them, no problem.

*What was your leadership like? Your platoon commanders and -*

**August Ciriello:** Well, Acton Matakko was a shit ass, he never went up where we used to set up the machine gun.

*He was never on the front line with you guys?*

**August Ciriello:** No, he always stayed in a house, and I've been to two or three reunions, oh no, I've been to about six reunions, but there has been two that he was there, and people would say aren't you going to talk to Matakko? I says I have no use for Matakko.

*Even today.*

**August Ciriello:** As far as I'm concerned he's a shit ass and if I go up close to him I'll end up slapping him in the mouth. He was just a little small guy like me, you know, but he was very arrogant, and like I say, I had no use for him.

*What about your platoon sergeant?*

**August Ciriello:** Oh, they're buddies. Done everything you possibly could to save you, your buddies. No, those rear echelon troops, like they are in any outfit, I mean you know. In a way you can't blame 'em, they're just saving their butts. But like one wrote a book, he's never been to a reunion, but yet he talks about all this war over in Europe. He was one of Matakko's little boys, you know, and I have no use for people that use their stripes or their friendships and take care of themselves. I had some good guys, I've got pictures of them, Jones and stuff.

*Yeah, you've got this scrapbook here that unfortunately people listening can't see it, but we can take pictures of it later. Tell us a little about some of these photographs in here.*

**August Ciriello:** They're self explanatory.

*OK. Well these are all different men here.*

**August Ciriello:** That's my jeep driver.

*Is it Meroni?*

**August Ciriello:** Meroni. The reason he's a jeep driver and had a trailer full of ammunition and stuff, is because his feet were so flat as this table, just like that.

*So he couldn't walk very good.*

**August Ciriello:** He didn't walk, he cocked.

*I notice in a couple of these photos there's guys wearing top hats. Tell me about the top hats.*

**August Ciriello:** Oh, all German families, that's my squad down there, all German men have a top hat for two reasons, for his wedding and for funerals.

*And so you guys found that in Germany, that top hat, and then would wear it? It looks like you guys are kind of clowning around having fun.*

**August Ciriello:** They'd horse around. Most of these pictures now are after the war. Both these guys are dead now. This is Horvat and that's Jones and he's got a top hat.

*I see a lot of them have the same top hat on.*

**August Ciriello:** This is all after the war.

*Did you bring a camera with you or did you buy a camera there in Europe? These are great photographs.*

**August Ciriello:** I sent one home.

*Yeah, these are great. A lot of guys didn't have the time or the where with all to take pictures.*

**August Ciriello:** I had a lot of loot and threw it away, but I had four cameras and they told me I could only carry two home, so I took this camera and they said I could take it home, so I kept it. This is Jones again. This is the guy just died two years, last year. Here's my wife.

*Oh wow, that's a nice photo. It says Temple 1945. So after the war did you settle here in Temple?*

**August Ciriello:** Well no, for a while I worked in New Jersey for 9-1/2 years until my kids got ready to go, one went to kindergarten, and then I told my wife we're gonna have to get out of this place, so we moved to Texas. I mean no drive, no nothing, just moved.

*You'd never been to Texas until you got to Fort Hood.*

**August Ciriello:** Oh yeah, I was in Fort Hood.

*When you were in the military you came to Fort Hood, that was the first time you'd ever been to Texas.*

**August Ciriello:** And we used to go to Cameron every weekend because the people there were real friendly.

*Now I see here you've got some currency, and this looks like Russian –*

**August Ciriello:** That's Russian, this is German. This is, you know what this is, you don't know what that is?

*Well I see Deutschland on it, but oh, that's French.*

**August Ciriello:** You mean to tell me you don't know what this is?

*I see this says France and that says Germany.*

**August Ciriello:** What kind of schooling did they teach you people? You mean you've been to college and everything and you don't know what that is?

*Well this looks like a French frank and that looks like a Deutschmark, but tell me more then because obviously I don't know.*

**August Ciriello:** It's a disgrace. I spent three months and 17 days in the service and you don't know what that is?

*No, tell me what that is, I might know.*

**August Ciriello:** That's money they issued the GI's.

*OK, so that was your script money.*

**August Ciriello:** That's what it is. Franks and German, that's what we used as GI's, and it's pitiful, you're a college graduate and you don't know, oh my God.

*No I didn't know that you had the script. I thought that a lot of places you'd use American currency.*

**August Ciriello:** Don't they teach you guys anything in school?

*I guess not enough.*

**August Ciriello:** My God in heaven.

*How did you get the Russian money?*

**August Ciriello:** Soldiers give it to me, German soldiers. Here's a Japanese one or two I think.

*Yeah, these are some great clippings. And where is this, what paper did this clipping come out of? The headline says 90<sup>th</sup> –*

**August Ciriello:** Stars and Stripes.

*Stars and Stripes, Nazi's found 90<sup>th</sup> Tough Hombres. What about these gentlemen in the photographs?*

**August Ciriello:** Two Germans that lived in this monastery that Germany had taken over a long time, a Catholic monastery, and the only part that they have left is this part here, that's all I got. And I was on the second floor.

*And this guy was one of the Germans –*

**August Ciriello:** One of the, he was a German -

*It looks like he was a Nazi officer at one point.*

**August Ciriello:** Yeah, here's the fleur de lis, all the German soldiers had that.

*So you got along with them fine after –*

**August Ciriello:** No, hell no, didn't get along fine.

*How did you get his photograph?*

**August Ciriello:** It was in the house.

*Oh, it was in there, OK. I misunderstood.*

**August Ciriello:** That's in the town in Germany.

*We're looking at a statue now and here's another one of a hospital.*

**August Ciriello:** That's a French, oh what the hell is his name, not Henry Ford, but another rich man built that hospital in France and I was in that hospital for a month before I come home.

*What were you in the hospital for?*

**August Ciriello:** I broke both legs.

*How did you do that?*

**August Ciriello:** Organized athletics after the war. We had to have organized athletics, bunch of bull shit.

*What sport were you playing when you broke them?*

**August Ciriello:** Baseball, big old drones, break both bones on my left leg.

*Geez, did they slide into you on a play?*

**August Ciriello:** Yeah.

*Who are these gentlemen here in this photo?*

**August Ciriello:** This would be my section sergeant and I don't know who that is. No, that's Veegel. He lives in Illinois. He's a big friend of mine. He writes to me.

*That's great. Here they are again in this photograph. Let's go back to the front here. This one mentions the Ziegfried Line, February of 1945. What are your memories of that place and time?*

**August Ciriello:** It's the same, it's day in and day out, the same old crap. Shoot at, shot at, shooting back and running between trees and in and out of houses. You just luck, lucked out. Because a lot of them got killed, a lot of them got broken legs and broken arms and I never got a scratch. And then I break both bones playing softball.

*That's kind of ironic.*

**August Ciriello:** It was sickening.

*With some of these other shots here, it mentions you were on the Czech border. What was the Czech border like when you were there?*

**August Ciriello:** It's just like going from South 37 Street and South 41<sup>st</sup> Street. That's it. It's different buildings and most of the towns over there, the little towns all clustered together, and then they farm the land around it. Most of this is baloney. Every once in a while we'd have, well what happened, we got into a store in one town in Germany, and Horvack said who, wait a minute he said, he looked at it, he said this is developing stuff. Oh wait a minute and he found some film and paper, and that's why all the pictures are there, it's because we all had a camera and Horvack used to keep the film in there and once in a while you'd get a break and he would develop the pictures.

*Wow, so he had a pretty good skill then because not everybody knows how to develop film like that.*

**August Ciriello:** Oh yeah, Horvack, he was a smart kid. He knew everything, I mean he would take a piece of machine and fix it, yeah, Horvack was a good man. I still write to his wife. She sends me a Christmas card and a birthday card.

*That's great. Do you remember where you were when you learned that the Germans had surrendered and that the war in Europe was over?*

**August Ciriello:** We were in this house back here, where is that house?

*The one that had been the monastery?*

**August Ciriello:** Yeah. Right there where it shows the floor, I was on the second floor.

*And who told you?*

**August Ciriello:** Somebody had the radio on and all of a sudden a bulletin come out that the Germans had given up, and of course everybody was hollering, yelling and carrying on and everything, and a movie truck had come up, not a jeep but a movie truck. Anybody want to go to movies the next town? And he's up there blowing the horn, you know. And guy opened up the window and says take your vehicle and go home! He says the war is over, and of course he did. He went back home. There was no movies that night. And bottles come out of everywhere and it was a bunch of drunk GI's, I'm telling you. That was funny.

*Did you at that point, did you think there was any chance they were gonna send you over to the Asian Theater to Japan?*

**August Ciriello:** No, I had too many, I had too much time in the service and too much time in battle. Before I broke my leg, I was supposed to go home and get discharged.

*So once you got healed up enough, then after having broke your leg, then they sent you back to the U.S.*

**August Ciriello:** I had six different casts, that's how long it took, and I didn't get out until June of '45.

*Yeah, that is a while. What was it like when you finally got back home to the United States again and you got to see your family and everything?*

**August Ciriello:** Same old stuff, had to find a job. I had a wife that was pregnant and she wasn't pregnant, but she got pregnant right after I got home from overseas and I had a cast on. My mother said I was a sputching because I got my wife pregnant when I had a big old cast on my leg.

*That's funny. Well I tell you sir, I really appreciate you letting us see all these pictures and sharing with us some of your memories. You mentioned you go to a lot of the reunions, or you've gone to a lot of the reunions? What have those been like? When was the first time you went to a reunion?*

**August Ciriello:** Oh my God, you want me to remember that?

*I was just curious if you went to one...*

**August Ciriello:** No, I don't remember which first one I went to.

*But it sounds like you've stayed in pretty good touch with a lot of the guys.*

**August Ciriello:** I tell you, the platoon, we've been pretty active in talking to each other and meeting and going to the reunion, and I've been to Pittsburg, I've been to Chicago, I've been to St. Louis, I've been twice to San Antonio and once to way the heck down on the border, can't think of the name – Corpus. And been to Galveston.

*That's great. So you've been to a lot of reunions.*

**August Ciriello:** Oh yeah, they're getting less and less though, I mean not the reunion, less and less guys.

*Sure, oh yeah, that's true.*

**August Ciriello:** I don't think I can go this, because I have to have an air tank at night when I'm sleeping. I don't want to go through all that damn trouble.

*Yes sir. Well I tell you sir, we really do appreciate your service for our country and the time that you spent fighting in the war, and just seeing this pictures and listening to your accounts I think will be helpful so that future generations will have an idea of what some of the things you and your comrades were able to do.*

**August Ciriello:** And make sure you find out.

*Yeah, I'll tell people about the script of those bills there.*

**August Ciriello:** Where are they?

*I think they're towards the back. Oh here they are -*

**August Ciriello:** Got 'em back there, it's pitiful, makes me sick.

*Well sir, I appreciate your time and let me snap a photo of you before you leave so we can have that, but we'll go ahead and turn off the recorder, but thank you again, sir, for your service.*

**August Ciriello:** OK.

*[End of recording]*