



## Interview with Eugene Dente

Under the Auspices of the  
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125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, N.J.  
Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator

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**Name of Interviewer: June E. West**

**Premises of Interview: Mr. Dente's home, West Long Branch, NJ**

**Birthdate of Subject: August 1, 1908**

**Deceased: June 13, 2003**

**Ms. West:** Mr. Dente was affiliated with the INS, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, in Ellis Island, New York, from 1934 to 1941. He was also affiliated with Fort Monmouth from 1942 to 1972. He held the position of Interpreter of French, Italian, and Spanish languages for the INS, and he was an Electronic Technician at Fort Monmouth. Mr. Dente, when did you first come to Monmouth County?



**Mr. Eugene Dente as a special police officer for Long Branch, 1970**

**Mr. Dente:** I came here May 22, 1942, and America was at war with the Axis nations. I came here for employment at Evans Signal Laboratory, as it was known at that time. It was one of three satellites under the command of Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. The other two satellites were Coles Signal Laboratory, Squire Laboratory, which was located in Fort Monmouth itself, and Eatontown Signal Laboratory, which had to do with weather conditions and things of that sort. When I came here in 1942 to accept employment at the Signal Laboratory, Monmouth County was not as large in population as it is today. Evans Signal Laboratory at first was the headquarters of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph. It was a receiving station because of a strategic situation. I believe there are still towers in that area. Then it was sold, and part of it became a Ku Klux Klan installation in King's College. It was a Ku Klux Klan area known as Hiram Park. Then the government purchased the land to conduct radar experiments. This was a very integral part of World War II, contributing many factors to the War in

personnel and equipment. Camp Evans, at that time when I came to work, was nothing but a mud hole. It was all just dying. They needed help in such a bad way that they recruited almost every man who knew anything about radio. Ham operators were hired right from the street because of the urgency of the situation. Camp Evans played a very, very important part in the welfare of the War, developing many experiments. The last of these experiments was the contact with the moon. After the War ended, one of the colonels associated with the labs had permission to experiment with contacting the moon. It was called the Diane Project. The importance of this affair was that it went through the outer sphere, therefore making it possible for space programs later on. There were many scientists at Fort Monmouth and also at Evans Signal Laboratory, as it was known at that time.

**Ms. West:** You have mentioned Fort Monmouth and Camp Evans. Could you tell us where Fort Monmouth is located?

**Mr. Dente:** Fort Monmouth is located in the area of Eatontown, Little Silver and New Shrewsbury (now Tinton Falls (ed.)), between Highway 35 and Oceanport Avenue. Fort Monmouth, incidentally, was the home of the United States Air Force. They had no room to put the planes after World War I, so they made the installation at Fort Monmouth the headquarters for the United States Air Force. That you might say was the birthplace of the United States Air Force.

**Ms. West:** Where was Camp Evans located?

**Mr. Dente:** Camp Evans was located in Wall Township by the Shark River Hills. It's located a few miles from Belmar, I believe on Belmar Boulevard. It was a beautiful place at that time, all countryside. There were no houses there as there are today. Gradually it became very famous with the developments of many factors contributing to the War effort. Towards the end of the War, there were many German scientists who were caught in the Operation Paperclip. They came over and did their part in contributing to the War effort. Camp Evans I believe also had something to do with the experiment of laser. We did have some dealings there. Later on, after the end of the War, the Hexagon was built in Eatontown, New Jersey.

**Ms. West:** What is the Hexagon?

**Mr. Dente:** The Hexagon was a large building built to consolidate all the laboratories. Most of Evans, Squire Lab, and Eatontown Lab were all consolidated into this Hexagon building located at Eatontown, on the outskirts of Tinton Falls, which at that time was known as New Shrewsbury.

**Ms. West:** What type of laboratories are we referring to?

**Mr. Dente:** I am referring to the Coles Signal Laboratory and the Eatontown Laboratory, which had to do with forecasting weather conditions. But Evans still was active for awhile. During the War, the United States Air Force became very large and productive. They wanted a laboratory of their own, so the Air Force chose as its laboratory an area in Rome, New York. All the laboratories associated with Fort Monmouth were instructed to give up some of the key personnel so that they could form a laboratory exclusively for the U.S. Air Force. I believe that laboratory is still in existence in Rome, New York. And let me say something about the conditions of Monmouth County when I came here. Monmouth County was a very, very beautiful county at that time. Highway 35 at that time was just a two or three-lane highway. In order to pass, you took your life in your hands because it was so small. Highway 34, which ran from the Amboys down through Monmouth County, was a two-lane highway. There again, you had to be very, very careful. During the War, in the midst of the War, the U.S. Navy acquired a site off Highway 34, which was called Earle Ammunition Depot at that time. It was for the purpose of storing ammunition. It was a very huge undertaking. Then they built a pier at Leonardo, New Jersey. And many, many homes had to be displaced because the government took them over to build the road from Earle Depot to this pier at Leonardo. That pier extended into the Raritan River. It was about a mile long, and there they loaded ammunition on Navy ships to keep the Navy supplied with ammunition. It was a real hardship for the many people who had to give up their homes. And in those days, homes were very, very scarce because of the shortage. It created a very acute situation.

**Ms. West:** Area-wise, you say homes and things were scarce. How else was the area at that time?

**Mr. Dente:** The area at that time was a wooded area, but there were quite a few homes in Middletown that had to be absorbed by the government so they could build that road from Earle Depot. They were near Delicious Orchards, and I forget exactly what town was located there. Now it's Colts Neck, I believe. They built storehouses for the ammunition. And people were afraid that they may have stored nuclear warheads. But we were told not to worry by the War Department, as it was known at that time. They built many storage areas, and people were quite afraid. And at one time, they did have a fire in Leonardo, I believe. People became rather alarmed for fear that some nuclear warheads might go off. But fortunately, nothing happened at that time. And let me say something about Monmouth County itself. Monmouth County was a very beautiful county at that time. It wasn't as populated as it is today. I would say Monmouth County at that time had a population of about 200,000 offhand, and that's pure conjecture.

**Ms. West:** When you say "at that time," what year are we speaking of?

**Mr. Dente:** I am speaking of 1942 to until the Garden State Parkway was built in the 1950s. Then the Garden State Parkway played a large part in the growth of Monmouth and Ocean counties. It opened the way and relieved the traffic. In

order to get to New York, you had to go through Highway 34 or 35 and over the bridge at Perth Amboy. And the traffic was very, very slow and even hazardous.

**Ms. West:** Hazardous back then? There weren't as many cars as there are on the road today?

**Mr. Dente:** There weren't that many cars, but there were a lot of cars going home at night. To get across the bridge over the Raritan River, it was just a matter of stop-and-go. The Parkway somewhat relieved that congestion.

**Ms. West:** You mentioned many cars going home. They were going home from where?

**Mr. Dente:** Going home from the shore. They had come down to the shore, which was an attraction for the people from New York and upper New Jersey. The water at that time was pure. As a matter of fact at the Long Branch Pier, before it burned down, you would be afraid to dive into the water because it was so clear you thought you would hit bottom. But it was deep. But unfortunately the Pier burnt down several years ago, and it's no longer in existence. But Monmouth County consisted of many, many farms at that time. Mostly they were tomato farms. I am not saying this as an exaggeration, but I lived in Red Bank back then. In order to get to work from Red Bank to Camp Evans, we had to go down through Highway 35, and sometimes Highway 34. Now from Eatontown, past Eatontown and Broadway, there was a building on the left-hand side called Moulin Rouge. It was a café and sort of a hang-out for GIs at Fort Monmouth. And there was a motel across the street, Gloria's Motel. Those were the only buildings on Highway 35 until you came to Deal Road. If your car broke down, it would take two hours before another car came along. And I'm not exaggerating! That's true. The other side of Highway 35, from Eatontown all the way down to Deal Road, there was a large tomato farm. All that area, which is now built up, was wooded. And there was a big tomato farm. The name of it was Johern, for some reason. Where the Monmouth Mall is now located, there was a farm by the Eatontown Circle. It was the Davis farm, and that land went begging for quite some time. At Thanksgiving time and Christmas time, you could buy one of their turkeys. They had a turkey stand right there past the Circle. But that didn't remain there for long when that area was bought to put up that mall.

**Ms. West:** Do you recall what year that was?

**Mr. Dente:** Oh yes, that was about the late 1950s or into the 1960s. Then of course, they built the entrance to the Parkway into Eatontown Circle and then across Highway 35 and on towards the ocean.

**Ms. West:** Let's digress a little bit. When you first came to Monmouth County in 1942, where did you live?

**Mr. Dente:** At first, because of the War and the development of Evans Signal Laboratory, there were not enough buildings going up in Evans. So Fort Monmouth had an agreement with the War Department to use Sandy Hook for some of its buildings to conduct their radar experiments.

**Ms. West:** And were you married at this time?

**Mr. Dente:** Oh yes, I was married in 1933 in New York, in Staten Island.

**Ms. West:** So this is where your family lived?

**Mr. Dente:** Believe it or not, we were married ten years and had no children. When I came to New Jersey for this job, it was like being paid for a vacation. That's how beautiful this place was. As the buildings were going up at Evans Signal Laboratory, some of those sections would come down into Evans Signal Laboratory. When I came to work there, I was a draftsman. Then I was made an instructor. What we did was to supply draftsmen to replace the boys who were being drafted into the Army. Evans Signal Laboratory had an engineering department, and they needed personnel badly, particularly technical personnel. One of our jobs was to train these graduates who were taken from Asbury Park High School, Long Branch High School, and the high school in Manasquan. All the graduates were somewhat absorbed by the War Department, girls and boys. We had to train them as draftsmen, and I was an instructor. My specialty was submachine design, gears and cams, because while I was at Staten Island at the outbreak of War, the government had defense courses to train men for war preparation. So I took advantage of some of those courses, and I learned a lot of drafting. Besides that, I had had some math in high school and college. And that all helped me to get appointed as an instructor.

**Ms. West:** So your education was received in New York State?

**Mr. Dente:** Yes, I spent a year at NYU, and I never stopped studying. I took correspondence courses in the ICS, which were very, very helpful. They helped me a lot.

**Ms. West:** ICS is what?

**Mr. Dente:** International Correspondence School. I took some of their courses, which were very, very beneficial. And then Fort Monmouth also had courses there, technical courses, even manuals. And these were a tremendous help, too. Anybody who wanted to advance themselves could do so. A young man or woman could go to college, and the government paid their way and gave them a job after they graduated. And that's how good Fort Monmouth was. They were very liberal and cooperative in the War effort.

**Ms. West:** Speaking about yourself now, can you tell me about your ancestors?

**Mr. Dente:** My ancestors were Italian. My mother and father were born near Naples, twenty-eight miles from the Province of Avellino. My father came here in 1900, and my mother and two sisters came here in 1906. They came here because the economic conditions in Italy were not good, and the political system was still a residual from the Feudal System. In Southern Italy, the illiteracy rate, I regret to say, was almost 99%. The only ones who had an education were those who studied for the priesthood and the military. They had to be sons or daughters of the wealthy people. I regret to say that some who studied for the priesthood, before they became ordained, left and went into other fields because they had a good education. When my father came to this country, he couldn't get over the freedoms that they had here. He knew the opportunities they had, and he appreciated this country so much that he became a citizen right away. In spite of the fact of the illiteracy, my dad knew how to read and write. He learned that from a priest, fortunately. Then little by little, by association, he learned more. I'll be frank to say, he was in prison for some time for something he did, which was not his fault. But he learned how to read and write. Believe it or not, while my dad was in prison at Naples, he read the *Count of Monte Cristo* in Italian. He was very proud of that. The immigrants that subsequently followed came to my father for him to write letters for them to their friends back in Italy. But later on, literacy in Italy became more universal. Mussolini, for all the discredit that he had, did try to increase literacy in Italy. What he did was to send teachers from Northern Italy to Southern Italy, and from Southern Italy to Northern Italy. And this did not meet with favors with some of the people, naturally. One of them was Carl Levi, a Jewish teacher from North Italy, who was anti-fascist. Mussolini wanted to punish him and sent him to a town in the Province of Salerno called Eboli. There he wrote a book called *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. I won't go into detail what it was about, but it was a bestseller at that time. But I will say this about Mussolini, as bad as he was, he did try to eradicate the Mafia in Sicily. In the early 1920s, he sent a man by the name of Mori to Sicily. He gave him a freehand to clean out the Mafia in Sicily. Well the man succeeded. In 1927, for the first time, Sicilians were able to go to court and say, "I accuse." And quite a few of the accused did go to jail. But somehow or other, when the Americans from Africa landed in Sicily in World War II, some of the information they received was from some of the gangsters who were deported from the U.S. into Sicily, and they knew the landing places of Sicily. And it was very helpful to the Americans landing in Sicily. But unfortunately, quite a few Mafia got out. And then the Mafia began to grow again from then on. Then Mussolini was arrested, and he met with his downfall when he tried to escape after Italy surrendered in September of 1944. She didn't have to go to war on the side of Germany, but Mussolini forced them to side with Hitler. And the Germans occupied Italy. But anyhow, somehow the Italians managed to get a surrender. They surrendered Italy to the allies, and some agreement was made for Italy to do its part on the side of the Allies. They gave up their fleet to the British, thank God for that. There was fear among the Allies that the Italian fleet, small as it was, was still powerful enough that under the command of the Germans, it could have been disastrous. But anyway, to make a long story short, King Victor Emmanuel III had Mussolini arrested. He was put in

jail somewhere in the middle of Italy. As fate would have it, Hitler sent a group that landed on the roof of the jail, and they succeeded in taking Mussolini out of the jail. So Mussolini became an ill-fated partner of Hitler and met his end towards the end of the War. The War was waning, and the Allies had practically won the War. Mussolini got away and attempted to go into Switzerland with this woman, but he was spied or caught by the anti-fascists. I don't know whether they were Communists or not, but they did capture him and this woman, and they were executed right there on the spot. What happened next was his body was taken by the people of Milan, and they strung him up feet-first and they all took pot shots at his body because of what he had done to the Italians during World War II. But anyway, that's what happened.

**Ms. West:** You mentioned you had two sisters. Were they your only siblings?

**Mr. Dente:** No, I had three sisters. One sister's name was Carmella, and she came here around 1904. My dad came in 1900. He thought it would be a good idea to get one of the daughters to come here and learn the trace of America. That way when my mother and other two sisters came here, they would be familiar with how things were in America. But my dad was very happy to come here because he knew the difference between democracy here and the political system in Italy. And he urged everybody who came here to become a citizen. He was very adamant about that. And he wanted them all to vote, because voting was very important. He became an employee of the Health Department in New York City, and he was connected with mosquito extermination. Staten Island was very rural then. They had many ponds and lakes. And I'm sorry to say that New York City had disposed of its garbage in Staten Island, in a very beautiful waterway. But today, I am sad to say, it is a mountain of garbage. Why they picked Staten Island to dump their garbage, I don't know. But that's what happened.

**Ms. West:** As a youngster, did you have any heroes?

**Mr. Dente:** Heroes as a youngster? Oh yes, I had heroes. My dad always saw to it that I went to school, and he made sure I got a good education. I graduated from grammar school, which was very rare for boys in my time. At fourteen, I went to high school. There I learned Spanish, and I learned Italian dramatically. My dad, who knew Italian, wanted me to speak real Italian. And he helped me, and it was very important to me. At that time, Teddy Roosevelt was just about building the Panama Canal and had run for President against Taft and Wilson. This made it possible for Wilson to be elected. Well, my heroes really were sports figures. Jack Dempsey was a hero of mine. But my real hero was Babe Ruth, of whom there is no superior in my book. And then there is Lou Gehrig. He went to High School of Commerce in New York City, and I was going to Curtis High School in Staten Island. I often read about the exploits of this boy, Lou Gehrig, but it was at Columbia University. He was a pitcher and a hitter at that time, and he got a scholarship at Columbia, I believe. But he did not graduate from there,

he signed up with the New York Yankees in 1922. Then I became a baseball fan of the New York Yankees. At that time, Babe Ruth had come to the Yankees from Boston for the sum of \$125,000, which was an awful lot of money in those days. Jacob Ruppert was a very wealthy man, and he bought the Yankees. He was a part-owner and then became the sole owner, eventually, of the Yankees. He saw the value of Babe Ruth in Boston, who by the way, was a very, very good pitcher. He held record for consecutive scoreless hitting in World Series 26, until it was broken by Whitey Ford later on. But Babe Ruth came at a time when there was a baseball scandal. The Chicago White Sox were bribed by a gambler from New York. The Chicago White Sox and Cincinnati Reds were in the World Series at that time, which was in 1919, I believe. It was at the end of World War I, about which I'll talk later. One of the players on the White Sox squealed.

**Ms. West:** White Sox or Black Sox?

**Mr. Dente:** They were called the Black Sox, because of that stigma. But there were about six or seven White Sox players who were involved in that scandal or bribery. They were bribed to throw the game away to the Reds, which they did. And the Reds won the World Series at that time. The owners of baseball became alarmed because the people had lost so much faith in baseball, even though the Giants in New York were still very popular. So the owners chose a Federal Judge by the name of Judge Landis, who had fined the Standard Oil Company seven million dollars for breaking the Antitrust Laws in 1907. So the owners decided this was just the man for them. So this Judge decided to take the job under one condition. He would be the sole boss, and he wanted to run both Major Leagues. So the owners agreed.

**Ms. West:** And he was...

**Mr. Dente:** The Commissioner of Baseball until he died around the 1940s. The salvation of baseball was due, in large part, to Babe Ruth because of his home run hitting and this Judge's strict rule over the baseball team.

**Ms. West:** Tell us about Babe Ruth's nickname.

**Mr. Dente:** Babe Ruth got his name because he was born in Baltimore, Maryland, and when he was young, his father was a bartender at a saloon. He was of German extraction. Because he was a wayward boy and hard to manage, it was decided to send him to a Catholic home. It was called Saint Mary's, I think. Babe was a student there, and they had two Brothers there. One was Brother Gilbert and the other was Brother Mathias. They nurtured Babe and took care of him. And he was a very great athlete. The two Brothers saw the possibility of him becoming a baseball player. They called Jack Dunn, the Manager of the Baltimore Orioles. It was an International League team that had won so many championships in the International League. At that time, the International League was the supplier of ball players for the Major Leagues. The owner of the Orioles

took Babe from the home, and because he was a young boy, the players called him Jack Dunn's baby. So that's how he got his name. His real name was George Herman Ruth, and then he got the name "Babe," and it stuck until he died in 1948. So those were my heroes. And of course I have been a Yankee fan since 1918, and I follow the Yankees. They went on to win many, many pennants, and they had great teams. Another hero at that time was Enrico Caruso, a tenor. He had a magnificent voice. He was an opera singer with the Metropolitan Opera, and he was born in Naples. He came here at the turn of the century, I believe. He became a very famous tenor, and he had one of the greatest voices. At that time, he was supposed to be the greatest tenor voice in the world. Caruso got associated with Victor Records, whose headquarters were in Camden, New Jersey. In order for him to make those records, he had to sing into the horn. Phonographs had a large horn that flared out to a big mouth. In order to make records, singers had to play or sing into this big horn. Acoustics at that time are not what they are today. And by the way, in 1900 sometime, Marconi developed the wireless telegraph. They received a message at Nova Scotia from England. Marconi was from Italy, also. He got the idea from throwing a stone into the water. He thought if he could throw a stone into the water and have it conduct waves, he could do the same thing with air. So he hooked up a gadget and sent a message across from England somewhere, and it was picked up in Nova Scotia. And that was the beginning of electronics, because from that the radio was born. Now Marconi did not invent the radio, but he made it possible for radio to be developed. Marconi lived here in Monmouth Beach for awhile. He had a station down here in Evans, as I stated before. The radio got developed by the head of the RCA Corporation, and I can't think of his name right now, I think his name was David Sarnoff. Very few people were saved from the Titanic, but there were quite a number saved from the Lusitania, and they were saved by means of the wireless telegraph. When the survivors arrived in New York, they went and thanked this man, David Sarnoff, who received the message in New York City. And then from radio came television.

**Ms. West:** Now speaking of radio, do you have any favorite radio programs from when you were a youngster?

**Mr. Dente:** Ernest and Billy Hare, Jack Benny, and the Happiness Boys. And then there was Amos and Andy. Amos and Andy were a very popular team, but I understand the NAACP objected to the show because it stereotyped African Americans. But they were very good, and very popular. And then for some reason, it was taken off the air.

**Ms. West:** Amos and Andy was taken off the air? I don't think so.

**Mr. Dente:** Yes, it was taken off the air.

**Ms. West:** Well they were on television after they were on radio.

**Mr. Dente:** Yes, they were on television for awhile. But if I'm not mistaken, the NAACP objected, and as a courtesy to them it was taken off the air.

**Ms. West:** But that was one of the famous radio programs that you liked?

**Mr. Dente:** Let me say something else about Caruso. Caruso sang for the Liberty Bonds in Central Park, and he raised a lot of money for the war effort there.

**Ms. West:** For World War I.

**Mr. Dente:** Yes. At that time he fell in love with Dorothy Benjamin, the daughter of Park Benjamin, who was a magazine publisher. He was very wealthy, and he objected to the love affair. They lived in Spring Lake, New Jersey. Park Benjamin objected to Caruso marrying his daughter because he was Italian. That was the assumption at that time. But in spite of her father's objection, Dorothy married Caruso, and she was very happy. They had a daughter named Gloria. So Caruso sang in a Jewish opera called *La Juive*. During the performance of that opera, Caruso broke a blood vessel in his throat and started coughing up blood. He recovered for awhile, but then in 1921, he went back to Naples. He died there in August of 1921, and the world was very saddened by his death. He was irreplaceable. Well, World War I broke out in 1917 after the sinking of the Lusitania, and President Wilson spent his summers at Shadow Lawn here, which later became Monmouth College and subsequently Monmouth University. And I'll speak about that later. But President Wilson made a speech urging America to go to war with Germany, because of the violation of the freedom of the seas.

**Ms. West:** So you are saying that President Wilson was once a resident of Monmouth County?

**Mr. Dente:** He spent his summers here at Shadow Lawn.

**Ms. West:** Where is Shadow Lawn located in Monmouth County?

**Mr. Dente:** West Long Branch. And there were other presidents who spent their summers in Long Branch. President Garfield died in Long Branch.

**Ms. West:** Oh really?

**Mr. Dente:** Yes. President Garfield was shot in Washington by an office seeker. He didn't get the job, so he shot President Garfield. And Garfield came here to recuperate.

**Ms. West:** Do you know what year that was?

**Mr. Dente:** I would say after the Civil War.

**Ms. West:** Who is the first President that you remember?

**Mr. Dente:** I remember William Howard Taft. He became President of the United States, and he was from Ohio. Teddy Roosevelt became Vice President, but he didn't sit well with the Republican Party in New York State. Teddy was too liberal; he was like Franklin D. Roosevelt. He was against the big business, the corporations, and all that. Teddy was the forerunner...

**Ms. West:** Do you remember the New Deal?

**Mr. Dente:** Oh, definitely. I'll speak about that later. I'll tell you about the Depression, if you have time. Do you have time? So President Theodore Roosevelt didn't sit well with the Republican Party in New York, so in order to get rid of him, they put him on a ticket with McKinley. McKinley was in office, and he got shot by an assassin. Then Teddy Roosevelt became President. And when Roosevelt became President, he initiated the Panama Canal. And then he really got on the backs of Standard Oil, U.S. Steel, and all those big companies. In 1914, Taft was running for reelection, and Teddy Roosevelt wanted to run for President. So he got on the ticket for the third party, and he made it possible for Wilson to be elected.

**Ms. West:** Are there any newspaper headlines that stand out in your mind through the years?

**Mr. Dente:** Yes. On Good Friday, April 1917, War was officially declared on Germany. And then there was Peace on November 11, 1918. Of course that was a big headline. After that, there were the Presidential elections like Harding, who became President in 1921. And there was a big scandal, the Teapot Dome Scandal of 1921. Coolidge became President because Harding died in office. Then Coolidge didn't choose to run for the third time, so Herbert Hoover ran against Smith in 1928. Smith was a Catholic, and the feeling was very high against a Roman Catholic at that time. He lost the solid South, which had been Democratic since the Civil War because of Lincoln. But he lost the South, and the only states that Smith carried were Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Then in 1932, President Roosevelt, who had been Governor of New York State, was nominated on the Democratic ticket and defeated the current President. And then the New Deal was his motto. Under Roosevelt, the banks were closed when he became inaugurated. On the day of his inauguration he said the only thing we had to fear was fear itself. And he closed the banks for ten days, because banks were failing as a result of the Depression. There was a very bad Depression then, and God forbid we would have anything like it ever again. After that, confidence came back. Then Roosevelt initiated Social Security and Medicare, and other factors of the New Deal.

**Ms. West:** What would you say was your greatest achievement in life?

**Mr. Dente:** My greatest achievement in life is my family and helping the War effort, what little I did.

**Ms. West:** Were you a veteran?

**Mr. Dente:** I was 4F twice. I was rejected. But I did receive a medal at Fort Monmouth in 1967, I believe. The highest Second Army Civilian Award. I have a picture over there of me being decorated. That was very nice. I was very proud of that, and here is the certificate I got.

**Ms. West:** Oh, back in 1967.

**Mr. Dente:** There was a big parade at Fort Monmouth that day.

**Ms. West:** How did you become interested in electronics?

**Mr. Dente:** I studied that, and then I took those defense courses.

**Ms. West:** Oh, the courses that you were telling me about.

**Mr. Dente:** Yes. I took drafting courses and defense courses. As a matter of fact, we even built a twenty-six foot Coast Guard boat in a defense course. But then I had to file for Civil Service as a draftsman, and then I came to Fort Monmouth and took courses there. Anybody could advance themselves there.

**Ms. West:** Did you ever have any hobbies?

**Mr. Dente:** Yes, gardening was my hobby. I also like classical music, and I like gourmet cooking. And I used to love to go to the opera. We used to see the ships go by, big liners. In those days, they didn't have the airplanes that supplanted those big liners. For example, I saw a German ship confiscated by the Americans during World War I. It was called Vaterland, or the Fatherland Laterleviathin. That was one of the ships confiscated by the Allies. Then I saw the Normandy, a big, French boat. It was the biggest in the world at that time. It came to America.

**Ms. West:** This was between what years?

**Mr. Dente:** Between 1936 and 1941. The Normandy was supposedly the biggest ship of that time. On its last trip, it was during World War II, it stayed in berth and in the harbor. But somehow or other it caught on fire, and it turned over on its side. But the Navy righted the ship by sealing all the holes, and it took all the air out of it. Believe it or not, this righted the ship. But then it was taken away for junk. But it was built for national prestige. France vied with the Cunard Line, which had two ships called the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth. They helped them bring the American troops over to Europe.

**Ms. West:** I am looking at a picture. Is this your wife?

**Mr. Dente:** Yes, that is a high school picture. I met her in high school.

**Ms. West:** What year were you married?

**Mr. Dente:** We were married in 1933, but that was her high school graduation picture. She was in my Spanish class. This is our wedding picture.



**Eugene Dente and  
his wife, Elizabeth,  
in 1983**

**Ms. West:** Oh how beautiful! And you are handsome, too.

**Mr. Dente:** Oh, I was twenty-five years old at the time.

**Ms. West:** Now is this some of the flowers that were in the bouquet?

**Mr. Dente:** No.

**Mr. Dente's Daughter:** Daddy has some interesting stories about people he put through Ellis Island. He met Maria Von Trapp.

**Mr. Dente:** I met the Trapp sisters at Ellis Island. They are the ones responsible for *The Sound of Music*. But they were not like the girl on that movie, they were real, big, husky, German women. They were big, tall women with long hair. (laughter) Every once in awhile, they would get up and sing songs in German, and they kept the people entertained there. I met opera singers, prize fighters, and "the lady in red." She was the girlfriend of the gangster, what was her name? He was the gangster that got shot by the FBI, and she was Romanian. She was promised that they wouldn't deport her, but they did anyway. She was held on Ellis Island because she was deported.

**Ms. West:** Do you mean Al Capone?

**Mr. Dente:** No, John Dillinger. Monmouth County was full of farms when we came there, with many, many cows and dairy farms. The place at the mall where Foodtown is in Ocean, there was a dairy farm there. The farmer had Jersey cows there. Before the end of the War, he knew it was going to build up. Monmouth County was very beautiful. There were farms, vineyards, apple orchards, peach orchards, and there were fishermen. You could buy a filet of flounder for fifteen cents a pound back then.

**Ms. West:** Try to get it at that today.

**Mr. Dente:** It's five or six dollars a pound now. And who knows how old they are. And then Ocean County, going on Route 9, wasn't then what it is now, either. All

you could see was cranberry bogs on the side of the road, and you could go for miles before you would come to a stop. Lakewood was a haven for Jewish people from New York back then. They had a hotel down there by the lake. Lakewood had many pines, too. And that is where they got the name "Pineys." The air was supposed to be exhilarating. Whenever anyone had an operation in New York, he would be sent down here to that hotel to recuperate, because the air was so fine. John D. Rockefeller had an estate in Lakewood, off Highway 88, I believe. Jay Gould, the financier who had a very notorious history on Wall Street at the turn of the century, had a place in Georgian Court, which is now run by a Catholic organization, Georgian Court College. But it was a beautiful place with statues and a lake. But then it was taken over by the nuns, and it is now a college for girls, and maybe even men now.

**Ms. West:** What do you think is the most unusual thing about you?

**Mr. Dente:** Gee, I don't know. I love history very much. As a matter of fact, I wish I had followed up on that because I wanted to teach it. And I love languages. I love the French, Italian, and Spanish languages.

**Ms. West:** You were a great reader, then?

**Mr. Dente:** Oh yes, I was a great reader. I was an admirer of Dante, and he lived in the thirteenth century, I believe. He was born in Florence, and he was the father of the Italian language, because the languages spoken in Europe at that time were all dialects. The Latin language was mixed up with the Italian language. But Dante seemed to be a very smart man. He wrote this book about the Inferno, about visiting hell. It was about hell consisting of so many concentric circles. And there was a famous saying that he wrote, "All ye who want to lose all hope, enter here."

**Ms. West:** Was he your favorite author then?

**Mr. Dente:** He was my favorite author, among others. And I liked the English authors very much, like Charles Dickens. He criticized the English school system, and even Oscar Wilde was good. Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote a masterpiece. And by the way, King Arthur never existed, you know. King Arthur was maybe a Roman General. Tennyson wrote about King Arthur, and it was very, very beautiful. It was a great story. And I like dates, too. 1588 with the Spanish Armada. And Columbus was a hero of mine. He was a dividing part between the old world and the new world. In Europe, this new world was unknown. Civilization was located in the Mediterranean in Italy because of its strategic position between Northern and Southern Europe. They attracted the students there, and they were very rich. Florence was very rich at that time, and the Medici were the richest family in all Europe at that time. And there were two Italian cities which were at war with each other, Venice and Genoa. They had fleets fighting each other, and they wanted command of the Mediterranean to get that eastern trade

to the Orient. But of course, they had to fight the Turks. The Turks at that time were coming in from Turkistan, and they conquered Turkey, which was under Rome. They got Jerusalem and then the Crusades started. But then Columbus was from Genoa. He figured that there was some way to sail to the east. There must have been another side to Japan and India. It just couldn't be reached, he figured. But the theory existed at that time that if you went on the ocean and got to a certain point, you would fall off. And another famous man I liked was Galileo. He didn't originate the idea of the Earth revolving around the Sun. The Earth revolving around the Sun originally was thought of by the old Greek philosophers, but it had lain dormant until a Polish scientist by the name of Copernicus wrote a book. But he did not make the facts known until after he died. And thereby Copernicus expanded on that theory, but Galileo unfortunately became a victim of the Roman Catholic Church. They called him a heretic, because they still believed that it was the Sun that moved around the Earth. But the findings of Copernicus, as I said before, were made known after he died. So they couldn't do anything to him. But Galileo was about to be burned at the stake by the Catholic Church, and he had to recant. So he was put under house arrest, and the poor man died. Galileo invented the telescope and the pendulum. And he also designed the Tower of Pisa. Now the Tower of Pisa was built on solid ground at that time. But unfortunately, the solid ground was weak, and that's why it leans. Until this very day, it still leans. But all these centuries, they have tried to right it, but to no avail. But now they have taken some steps to right it gradually. Galileo was a professor at the University of Padua. It was a very learned institute at that time, but unfortunately the man was placed under house arrest. And there was another Italian, Giordano Bruno, who also believed that it was the Earth that moved around the Sun. He was from a town Nola in the southern province of Naples, not far from my mother and father's hometown. And that man was actually burned at the stake.

**Ms. West:** Where was your mother and father's hometown in Italy?

**Mr. Dente:** Montefredane, the Province of Avellino. It is part of a region with Naples, called Campania. Italy was divided into regions, and Campania was one. Dente means tooth in Italian. That's where your word dentist comes from. The word barber, where do you think that comes from? And it means beard.

**Ms. West:** Alright.

**Mr. Dente:** Have you ever had spaghetti 'al dente'? That's the best way to eat macaroni. A little chewy.

**Ms. West:** Barely cooked. Let's see now. If you could live your life again or over, is there anything that you would change?

**Mr. Dente:** No, that's about it.

**Ms. West:** Is there any particular place or location here in Monmouth County that has any significance to you besides Fort Monmouth and Camp Evans?

**Mr. Dente:** Freehold is of significance because they had the Battle of Molly Pitcher near there.

**Ms. West:** Besides Freehold, are there any other places in Monmouth County?

**Mr. Dente:** They are all important. I guess Sandy Hook, because I worked there. And it's a park now. And then the Twin Lights are nice. That park overlooks the Bay, and they have a very great history of Marconi up there. If you ever have time, please visit it. They give you a story about Marconi, about how he got the wireless across and how he used it for certain events. That was a good place to visit.

**Ms. West:** And Marconi once lived here in Monmouth County.

**Mr. Dente:** Yes, in Monmouth Beach.

**Ms. West:** Is there anybody in Monmouth County who made an impression upon you?

**Mr. Dente:** J. Russell Wooley was a Republican leader here in Monmouth County. He was the Chairman of the Republican Party.

**Ms. West:** What year?

**Mr. Dente:** When Goldwater ran for President in 1965. And that was a mistake he made. That's when the Republican power was somewhat broken in Monmouth County. That's when we elected James J. Howard for Congressman. He came in when Lyndon Johnson swept the election. He brought James J. Howard in with him. James Howard stayed there until the poor man died.

**Ms. West:** Who was James Howard?

**Mr. Dente:** A Congressman. He succeeded a Republican, Auchincloss. The Republicans ruled Monmouth County, but James Howard, a Democrat, was a very good Congressman. He was the man that put through the highway that is 195, because he was Chairman of the Appropriations Committee in the House. He became very powerful.

**Ms. West:** Do you feel that there is something that you would still like to accomplish?

**Mr. Dente:** At ninety-two, what else can I accomplish? How much time have I got left?

**Ms. West:** Just yesterday I saw, on Channel 2, the man who was 102 years old from Texas, who had just written a book. So ninety-two years old is a lot younger. As hardy as you appear to be today, you have a lot of years ahead.

**Mr. Dente:** If I had the gift of writing, I could write a book of what happened. I used to like to read the *New York Times*. It is the most wonderful paper, to me, in the whole U.S. because it covers almost everything, and it's very intelligently written. It has very good writers, and it leans in accordance with how I feel. I used to love to work their crossword puzzles because I learned a lot from them.

**Ms. West:** Could you finish them?

**Mr. Dente:** Oh yeah, but not totally. I finished them mostly, but then I waited for the answers the next day. But what was valuable about that was that I learned a lot because I had to look up words in the dictionary and the encyclopedia.

**Ms. West:** I used to love to do the Times crossword puzzle, too. But I could never finish them.

**Mr. Dente:** Especially the sections on Sunday.

**Ms. West:** Well, that was the one I would try to do.

**Mr. Dente:** They weren't so bad in the beginning. But lately they have become very, very difficult. Sometimes they use foreign words. Of course if they are French, Italian, Spanish or maybe a little German, I could understand some. But the reason I gave it up is because I had to wrap the papers up for recycling, and they got kind of cumbersome. So I had to cut it down. I get the Asbury Park Press, which doesn't cover everything. The new owners are not as good as the old ones, and I think the reputation has fallen down. It's a good paper, but not as good as the old one.

**Ms. West:** What would you consider is your milestone in life?

**Mr. Dente:** When I started working at Ellis Island. That was an important event, although I didn't stay there because the War broke out. Another milestone would be living here in Monmouth County, which is where I raised a fine family. And I like to see my grandchildren. Unfortunately, I lost a grandson in 1992. He got hit by a train at ten o'clock at night. He was on a bike, and they lived in Allenhurst. He was about to cross the railroad track, and the gates were down and the bell was ringing. The train went by, and the bell kept ringing. And for some reason or another, he decided to cross, but a train was coming northward bound at fifty miles per hour, and it didn't stop at the station. And my grandson got hit. And he was a very, sweet boy. To this very day, I grieve over him. He would have been twenty-three years old now. He chose Allenhurst to live, because he wanted to

be with the young boys with whom he grew up. But to this very day, I grieve over him. My wife and I were very fond of him.

**Ms. West:** What would you think is the most important legacy that you would leave to your family?

**Mr. Dente:** The love of this country. I tell them not to do anything to hurt this country. It has been very good. Maybe this country is not perfect, but you will never get all the freedoms and benefits that you get here in any other country in the world. This country is the only country in the world that can feed itself, has lots of freedoms, and can still feed part of the world. I can't understand the logic of some countries wanting to destroy this country. They would be cutting their own throat! Russia knows that now, fortunately. And there would be no winner in a nuclear war. Everyone would be wiped out. But are why these countries building nuclear heads to hit the U.S.? What would they gain? Do they think the U.S. would not retaliate? But everyone would all suffer. That's why I would like to see this country survive. I would like to see the blacks and whites live together. Slavery was a bad thing, and why should they ever have been held in bondage? That was bad, the way those poor people lived. Lincoln fought for their freedom, and he fought to keep this country together. And the poor man had to meet that fate. That was a shame.

**Ms. West:** What concerns you most about the state of the world today?

**Mr. Dente:** There is so much going on in different countries. There is no peace in Ireland, for example. And the Jewish people and the Arabs are not getting along. And then the way those people live in Iran, the women have no rights at all. Now they have a government and are trying to break away, but they are meeting with resistance from the old establishment. And Hussein is another threat. Why he wants to destroy his country, I don't know. All those things are a source of concern. Even in Cuba; I don't know if the sanctions against Cuba are good or not. But there are people suffering there because of the sanctions. They aren't getting any medical supplies or anything like that. Hopefully they will come to terms. After all, Castro can't live forever. Sooner or later, he is going to go. They are nearby, and we should get along with them. So thank God South America is democratic. Let's hope they stay that way.

**Ms. West:** Is there any part of your life that you would like to relive?

**Mr. Dente:** I would like to go back for the first sixty-seven years, if possible. I have made mistakes, but you have to live with what you got.

**Ms. West:** Well, we all make mistakes, you know.

**Mr. Dente:** I have hurt some people, and I didn't live up to expectations. I disappointed so many people, including my parents. They wanted me to get a

college degree and go on, but unfortunately I didn't. I couldn't make it. I spent one year at NYU, and I failed Trigonometry. They had a student teacher that taught that class, and I failed the midterm, but I passed the final exam. So what did she do? She added both of them together. So by a few points, I got a failing mark. And I spoke with other teachers, and they said they went by the final exam, which covers everything. But I couldn't get her to budge, so I didn't make the grade. But I never stopped going to school. I took courses, I went to night school, and I took many courses. I took drafting, languages, and I never stopped studying. I had good parents. They kept feeding me and gave me a good home, and for that I am very grateful.

**Ms. West:** What major changes have you seen in this country?

**Mr. Dente:** During the Roosevelt administration, there was a marked change in the people down the line getting some of the things that the rich people were getting. Social Security and Medicare, they never had that. And guarantee of bank deposits. In 1929, bank deposits were not guaranteed. That's one thing that Mr. Roosevelt put through. All deposits up to \$100,000 are now guaranteed, but they weren't at that time. Then anybody could play the stock market in 1929, with ten per cent down. But you never got that stock. The broker held that stock. If the stock went down, they had margin clerks. They'd send you a telegram to come across with so much money, and they would give you one day's time. If you didn't, then the broker took that stock, and down the drain went your investment. Everybody thought they were going to become rich. But the 1929 Depression was terrible. The population in the U.S. at that time was 130 million, in the 1930s. I think seventeen million people were out of work, mostly men or the wage earners. Women didn't count, in those days. The only thing women did was to do office work, or become nurses and school teachers. That's all. They did not become engineers or carpenters, etc. But those seventeen million people were wage earners. And they had soup kitchens to feed the hungry, and people were committing suicide because they couldn't make ends meet. Two or three families lived in one flat, just to pay rent. And the soup kitchens fed the hungry. But then Roosevelt started this WPA, and that helped a little.

**Ms. West:** What does WPA stand for?

**Mr. Dente:** Works Progress Administration. They hired people to do odd jobs for the towns and the government, and they paid them so much money. But then World War II came about, and they couldn't get enough people for defense jobs. But the mistake Roosevelt made was to run for the fourth term. He was a very sick man in the fourth term. He had the conference at Yalta, in Russia, and Winston Churchill thought you couldn't have a peace conference in five days. Russia got into the War in Asia after Germany surrendered. She got in and invaded China. And once she got there, she stayed there. And all the equipment that Russia left there, the Communists took over. And then they got Korea. And

so Roosevelt should never have done that. He gave Russia too much at that time. And poor Chiang Kai-shek went to Taiwan.

**Ms. West:** Who was Chiang Kai-shek?

**Mr. Dente:** He was a Chinese General in command of anti-Japanese forces in China. The Japanese came in and bombed the poor Chinese. So he tried to hold off the Japanese, but they came in and gobbled up most of China. He fought as best he could. And what were we doing? We were giving Japan oil to fight them! The Russians got into China, and they fought the Japanese. And then they knew the War was going to end. And MacArthur, he was bitter about that. He wanted to bomb their posts in China, but they wouldn't let him. We didn't want to get us into war in China, so that was a very turning point. We could have saved Asia, and now China is Communist. Who knows what will happen?

**Ms. West:** Are there any Italian customs or things that you celebrate?

**Mr. Dente:** Columbus Day, yes. We celebrate that because he changed the world around. The Vikings claim that they discovered America. And I'll give them credit for being the first people here, yes. But they didn't accomplish what Columbus accomplished.



**Mr. Dente cooking Italian food, 1996**

**Ms. West:** Are there any Italian things you practice?

**Mr. Dente:** Tomato pies, and all the food that the Italians introduced into this country. Broccoli and artichokes were Italian. Some of them came from the Arabs in Italy, and the Arabs made a big contribution when they occupied parts of Italy and Sicily.

**Ms. West:** Any particular religious celebrations?

**Mr. Dente:** I am a Catholic by birth and upbringing, and I celebrate Christmas and Easter. I am kind of liberal, yes.

**Ms. West:** I thought maybe there was some custom that your parents celebrated over there in the old country that they brought to the U.S.

**Mr. Dente:** The old Italians who came with the first wave of immigration used to celebrate feast days. Have you ever heard of Mulberry Street? I had roots there, and we had relatives and people we knew there. They had those stands selling all those Italian goodies, until the Mafia got in and cut it out. All these towns would always have these feast days like St. Anthony's Day on June 13th, the 15th of August is Our Lady of Assumption Day, and there is the Feast of San Gennaro in September. Each town had its favorite saint. They would have these bands, and they would march around during the day. At night time, the bands

would play and they would shoot off fireworks. The Gucci family was from Naples. My parents told me in Southern Italy they would have fireworks in each town, and they would give a prize to which company had the best fireworks. There were several firework companies that supplied the fireworks. And we have fireworks over here.

**Ms. West:** And we'll have a big celebration on the Fourth of July at South Street Seaport.

**Mr. Dente:** You have got to have experts take care of that, or otherwise they could be dangerous.

**Ms. West:** So I understand. What are your strong points or values?

**Mr. Dente:** My family, I would say. There is gardening, and things like that.

**Ms. West:** If you could give advice to youngsters today, what would you pass on to them?



**Dente Family Reunion 1989**

**Mr. Dente:** To love this country, and to obey the laws and customs here. And to get along with mankind, everybody. Everybody is your brother and sister. You can't have divisions, because they are harmful. I would like to see the black people get treated more fairly. Down in South Carolina, they have the Confederate flag flying under the American flag. Fortunately, they took that away. But it still is not eradicated fully. I'd like to see more brotherly love among all people.

**Ms. West:** We need that among everybody, everyone. How long have you lived here in West Long Branch?

**Mr. Dente:** We built this house in 1950, and we have been here ever since. We bought the lot here in 1949. We had gone by and we loved it. This used to be a chicken farm, and we were the first house built here. Then after that, close to eighty-percent of the houses were built subsequent to 1950. Monmouth College started at the Long Branch High School at night. They gave out Associate Degrees, and then a group got together and bought Shadow Lawn, as it was known then. And then it was known as Monmouth Junior College. Then later on, it became Monmouth College and then Monmouth University. They bought a lot of adjoining land, much to the displeasure of the people in West Long Branch, because a lot of the land they bought became tax-free. By the way, when we moved here, there were no sewers in West Long Branch. They were all septic tanks. Later on, they installed sewers on every street in West Long Branch and in all the towns around here, with several exceptions. And that's one good thing. And the environment is a little cleaner and better now. Now there is fear since the

Governor closed Marlboro Hospital. She shouldn't have done that, because a lot of those patients are on the streets now. And now there is the danger that the developers want most of that land. If they do that, the water supply that we get will be tainted because it supplies the river. She should never have closed the Marlboro Hospital. A lot of those people are on the streets now, and that's a mistake they made.

**Ms. West:** That's most unfortunate.

**Mr. Dente:** She may be a good Governor and all that, but she never should have done that.

**Ms. West:** Well, it looks like I have taken up a lot of your time. And you had so many interesting things to say.

**Mr. Dente:** Maybe you can come back some other time.

**Ms. West:** Well, I thank you. I was just going to say if there is something that you think about that you would like to add to our conversation, I can always come back. Thank you very much for your participation in our project.