

## Joe Demkovic

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**Question:** Now where -- let me make sure -- Joseph?

**Answer:** Joe

**Question:** Joe.?

**Answer:** Demkovic. Leave the itch off.

**Question:** Oh, no ich, ick.

**Answer:** Yeah, Dem-ko-vic.

**Question:** Demkovic. But it's spelled with ch or no ch?

**Answer:** V-I-C.

**Question:** V-I-C, okay. And you -- in World War II, you were in which branch of the service?

**Answer:** Army.

**Question:** In the Army.

**Answer:** Army Infantry.

**Question:** How did you get in the Army? Did you enlist or --

**Answer:** No, I was drafted. I didn't -- I didn't run away to Canada

**Answer:**

**Question:** How old -- do you remember how old you were?

**Answer:** Eighteen. When I was 18 I got my draft notice.

**Question:** Was that after Pearl Harbor or before Pearl Harbor?

**Answer:** Well, it would have been -- March 28th was my birthday, that' when I turned 18. That would have been before Pearl Harbor -- after Pearl Harbor.

**Question:** So where did you end up in the service? Where did they station you for --

**Answer:** Well, after I reported in, back in Pennsylvania they called it Indian Town Gap, where all the recruits reported to.

**Question:** What was that like?

**Answer:** Oh, it was the usual, go in, you know, get your hair cut, what's your name soldier? I wasn't a soldier. Well, what's your name. Demkovic. How the hell do you spell that? (laughs) So I'd have to spell it, every time.

**Question:** Was it -- as a young kid, cause I mean 18, you're still -- you're just out of high school, you're a high school kid basically.

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**Answer:** Just out of -- I didn't never have the opportunity to go to high school. I went to grade school. And of course they -- they shipped us down from there in Pennsylvania, shipped us down to Camp Croft, South Carolina for basic training. Talk about -- you talk about playing in the heat. But surprisingly, at the time, of course, all the training was leaning toward training us like we were going to be going and fighting the Japs or something. They never said that, but that was all the type of training we were given, that Jujitsu stuff and all that. But we ended up going over to European theatre of operation. On my eight weeks basic training in Camp Croft, then I had an eight day en route furlough, and then I report back to Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia

**Answer:** And there they loaded us onto an old Liberty ship which was nothing more than a big cork. And we headed out, nobody knew where we was going -- nobody. So we're on our way but then the rumors fly one day, one day, that there was a submarine on our tail. We didn't like that at all. So we finally, got, okay, no submarine. We finally landed and got over there and landed or docked at Casablanca, Africa there. And there we trucked out in the desert someplace where they had tents set up. That was the receiving station. Sand and everything. And we didn't stay there too long, some more training, ten mile hike, whole field pack, every -- every evening. Ten mile out, and of course back. And the last couple distances was rough, full, you know, full field pack, and run, that damn thing would bounce up and down on you.

**Question:** Do you remember what was in your field pack? What type of stuff you had in it?

**Answer:** Couple cans of C-rations and your shovel to dig a hole when you got into combat. Finally they loaded us on one of these little French narrow gauge railroad cars, we ended up -- from there Casablanca, we ended in Or -- Oran. Well it may be hot in the desert, warm in the daytime, but at night it gets cold. And that -- it seems to me like it was a cattle car that we were in -- like we were all cattle in that thing. You'd be trying to stay warm with all the cracks between the planks, the wind come through, just jogging along. But we get to Oran, then they loaded us up in some trucks again I think. No, from Oran we didn't stay there very long, but again it was some liveable tent stuff.

Then we get the word that we're going to go load up on that ship that's out there. It wasn't the same ship that we went over there on. So we go down -- we get this down, this was all by foot power down to the water. We get on like a -- a -- just a barge thing. If this thing don't tip over we're going to be all right. I can't see nothing but guys in uniform standing on it; there's no motor to it. I don't know how -- there must have been some kind of motor. Pretty soon we're moving out, slowly, toward that ship. And we get out there and we climb that rope ladder along the side. Get on the ship, get assigned to your station or deck level. I tell you, it reminds me now when I talk about that. When we went -- that Liberty ship that we left the States in -- when I said it was like a big cork, I believe I was -- I think my station then was down the last damn deck of the ship, down in the hold. And you know, everybody getting seasick and puking, things weren't smelling very good. And so we weren't eating very good either. And at some point the seas got pretty rough. That old ship was a bobbing and rocking sideways and the old -- what they call the hatches or whatever, you know, doorways to go through. One door would be open and slam bam and you had to go real quick because the door came back shut and slam-bammed again. Heavy door, I wouldn't want to get caught in it. And then I had to -- also had the privilege or whatever to be picked for damn black out guard. Up on the deck. I'm up there on the.. I find something to hang on to, I'm like making love to it. Not really but I mean holding on tight. And I tell you, I know it's dark but they don't want no lights showing because submarines in that are

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**Answer:** They didn't want nobody out on deck smoking or nothing. So that old ship's rolling over one way and then the other and I see big swells of water coming up and I thought well, they're going to drop right in on us. But they didn't, fortunately. The ship come up and righted itself.

So we finally ended up -- in that ship we ended up at Naples, Italy. And I think there we had to scramble down the rope ladders again, that netting, the rope net and onto -- again onto a barge again. My first impression, Naples was -- cause it was bombed pretty heavily. Didn't know it at that time, but my first impression was I saw was ships that were turned upside down and bottoms of ships, you know. Spooky feeling, thinking about, wonder how many bodies are in there? And we had to do our best to walk across the bottom of those ships to get to the shore. And so we got across there and again I think they put us in some trucks to haul us someplace but before they -- we'd only get off the trucks if we had some walking to do. And that Italian goo, mud, you know, every step you take you get taller. There we're walking through like -- looked like -- it was not really but it looked like it might have been some kind of orchard at one time. And it was all bombed. Like skeleton trees standing there. And way way off we could hear the boom and rumble of firing. And so we ended up in some little -- in some little patch of woods, like where they issued our division patch. They gave us our division patch, said here, sew this on. Where do you want it? Well, right there. (gestures) on your left arm. How far up or down. Well, don't make any difference, just so it's identified, so it can be seen. So fortunately at that time I had a little kit that I think I bought earlier back in basic training or something. So I do my damndest to stitch that on -- on the overcoat that they had issued us. After we get that on, they say okay, take your overcoats off -- take your overcoats off and they'd turn them in. They had the patches on. Give us a regular field jacket and that was our winter -- that was our winter gear. Summer pants, summer shirt, summer underwear. And that field jacket was not much for warmth. Had the old -- remember anything about the canvas leggings?

**Question:** No.

**Answer:** Instead of having high top shoes you had canvas leggings to lace on. We were told back in basic training if you ever get in mud, they shrink. Get too tight on your legs. Well, okay. Now I got my field jacket and off we go, walk some more. Next thing you know we get ready to cross the river. Not on the bridge, I mean just through the water. that's, that Volturna River that runs by past the town of Cassino. Anyway before we get there this war sound's getting closer and closer it sounds like. Louder and louder. We get to the river's edge, okay, we're going to cross it. Okay, that sounds fine, but why are them people over there shooting at us? The Germans were on the other side. So we get into the water and they're shooting at us. Fortunately I didn't get hit there. Well, this, I ducked down under the water to keep from getting hit cause I knew bullets wouldn't go very far in the water. And we finally get to the other side. Amongst all the noise level, and we don't stay there very long, okay, we're heading up the hill. Okay, so we start up. Before we start up the whole damn hillside like it exploded. The -- now I know that it was a bunch of artillery that they threw in there -- our side -- to soften up because the Germans were -- hid out behind every damn rock up there. We didn't know that at the time until we started up. Well that was the hill to take us up to Mount Cassino. Well, we finally get up there, we get up behind Mount Cassino and there's a little old building up there. I didn't know it at the time but I think it was -- Italian ranch or something. Had.. kept a couple of cows in there or something. Well, we're -- you know when you're packing a full pack and all and you're heading up the hill, you get kind of tired. So when you find a place with maybe a little protection and little place to lay down, you stretch out and you don't care what you're laying on. Well, I had my nap and when I wake up and look around, hell I was laying in cow poop. And then we were assigned our positions, where we were going to stand and be -- hold our positions, whatever. And we didn't know it at the time but that abbey, the Monte Cassino Abbey, the Germans were using that for a

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lookout post. And they don't have -- didn't have no trees over there so it was like a fence line all made out of rock. And we're on one side and the Jerrys are on the other side. So we throw -- we throw out some grenades ever once in awhile hoping it will hit something or somebody. And next you know, here the grenades come back. Them Germans had picked them up and threw them back. Well then they started throwing their grenades over. So we'd pick theirs up quick as hell and throw them fast. None of us, fortunately, got injured from that. Well that was my introduction into fighting.

Try to dig a fox hole, you couldn't, cause everything over there is rock. Like I mentioned, they used rocks to build this fence line or borderline, whatever it was. So my little -- little buddy which I've been trying to locate for a year or so now, lives in Philadelphia

**Answer:** Or he did live in Philadelphia

**Answer:** Archie Beard, he was a short guy compared to me. We were digging and banging, making noise, digging, trying to dig through rock. And he said Joe, you know, if you weren't so damn tall we'd be done with this hole a long time ago. I said that's probably so but if you weren't so short you wouldn't have to worry about it. So he was kind of my buddy through that er

**Answer:** We got our little slit -- we didn't dig fox holes down deep, just a little slit trench, they call them. Just a trench just to lay in, get in and out of the firing of artillery and whatever. Started snowing so we took one of our shelter heads (inaudible) we kind of stretched it out and held it in place with some -- put some rocks on the corners. And it was snowing. So we thought well we're going to lay down and get us a nap for the night. Unfortunately the snow turned to rain during the night. So we woke up, we were laying in water. And my hands were numb, and my feet were numb and I had to take a wee-wee real bad, so I stand up and I try to open my buttons on my pants, forget it. I couldn't do nothing with my hands. So I just had to get a thumb into my pants fly there and just do my best to pop the buttons off -- rip them off. I wasn't worried about sewing buttons back on again. But anyway, after awhile my feet and hands started coming around a little bit. Well somebody, after I got home somebody said did you have any fun during the war? I said oh yeah, until they started shooting at me. It was all fun up to that point. Well anyway, we was up there and we could see the abbey now, the Cassino -- Monte Cassino. And, now that's a picture I should have brought along. And the first time that it was bombed, we heard the airplanes come in and just a couple of fighter plane, fighter bombers, I guess, dropped their bombs and they hit the side of the building and knocked off some dust or moss or something. Didn't do no damage. That came later. At some point -- at some point there in time after that, when we got the order to gather up all you could carry, we're heading down the hill. Boy, that sounded good. And as we were walking, or hiking down the hill, we heard a bunch of -- more airplanes, big, whole bunch of bombers came over. That's when they really bombed that Abbey. And then they demolished it, what they did, just make more hiding places for the -- the Germans to hole up in. So we got back. They -- they did relieve us with a Polish outfit up there. And we headed back -- we got back down, 40 men out of the whole company, and I mean there's about 200 in a company.

And from there I don't remember if we went -- where we went. Anyway, days go by. You don't think about whether it's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Sunday or what. But then I think one of the holidays came along, maybe like Thanksgiving or something. And all of a sudden we were going to have hot chow that day. It was packed out there, driven out by truck or something. Anyway it tasted mighty fine after eating on your cold rations. No place to heat it. And then I was put on another detail to go down the hill because the Italians they used to -- they'd lead the mules -- pack mules, bring supplies up. But the son of a guns would only come so far, so they'd dump the stuff off, unload their mules, and we had to go down and pick up five gallons of gas and five gallons of water. So we went down there.

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Grabbed -- each grabbed a can. We finally -- that stuff's heavy when you're a kid, you know. So we finally get that pack out. Let the Italians, cowardly, head down the hill. So now I'm thinking to myself, now why do we have to pack up five gallons of gas -- there ain't no vehicles up there. The only road up there was on the other side of the -- the wall, fence, what Germans occupied, hell. Yeah, it was fun all right, sure it was. I can't even remember who asked me that, but as I thought about it, I thought, gee, that was something stupid to say. Was it fun? The only fun I had -- somehow or other we ended up from that area then back into -- walking into Rome following the railroad tracks. Fighting I think was all done in Rome by that time. We were walking into Rome. And I come up with an ingrown toenail on my right foot. I got the Medics and I sat down, I said I can't take another step. The Medic come along, took my shoe and sock off, there was my toe just bleeding like crazy. So they put me in an ambulance from that point, hauled me to some field station. I was still on a litter and I remember laying on the ground on the litter and saying, trying to get ahold of somebody's attention, I say hey, I called everybody Sarge. Hey, Sarge, I got to take a leak. Got something I can leak in? Yeah, we got a urinal right here. So he got one, and I rolled over and tried to use that sucker and I couldn't seem to turn it loose. And I'm looking around -- here's a rifle with a bayonet on it stuck in the ground and there's a bottle of plasma I guess it was, hanging on it. So I finally get to do my job and oh, boy, that was a relief. Now are we going home from here? No you're not soldier, not yet. So anyway seemed like it was a day or couple days, see time is -- there was time for them to check on my ingrown nail again. So there's the doctor, ward boy or whatever, with a pair of tweezers, gets ahold of some gauze that's been all Vaseline'd I think and he was pulling that sucker out and I didn't think he was ever going to stop. It didn't hurt taking it out and I still don't know why it didn't hurt when they shoved it in there. Hell, it was as long as my arm or more. Well, got that taken care of, and then we ended up somehow or other in Rome. And we got in this building, we were in this building with signs, they had cots already set up. They issued us a couple blankets. Okay, we got our beds made, when you guys get your beds made you can head out, do what you want. Well, that was kind of nice. We didn't have no passes, worry about paperwork or anything. So me and two other guys, we decided we're going to go out to go see the town a little bit. So we no more than step out of the building, here's a little Italian kid. Hey Joe, to us, to them, well, everybody -- every GI was Joe. Hey, Joe, you want woman? So us two guys looked, said sure, why not. Okay, Joe. Let's go. So we followed him and we ended up. I remember all the buildings over there were either some kind of stone. Had no wood or no trees over there. So we -- we followed the guy and pretty soon we get in a house. I remember going up some stone steps on the outside of the house. And going to do our thing. We didn't do anything then but ... got to spend the night with this one gal, 17 lira, -- at that time \$17 was a hell of a good price for a whole night. And one of the gals was younger. I think it must have been couple mothers and a daughter working. Well they had to live too so they had to earn their money some way or the other. And that, I guess, was the fun part of the war. I'll tell you what, when you don't know their language and they don't understand yours, try and talk to them. But you pull out your wallet and you say how much? They understand that. Seventeen, 17 lira

**Answer:** Well that ain't bad for a night's work, I guess.

**Question:** Now you got injured in the war, correct? You were injured in the war?

**Answer:** Oh, yeah, later on. After the Rome stint, I can't remember where we went. I know we -- we were doing some foot work again, and we come -- we'd be following some -- like a little mountain stream now. And we're going down that. Wasn't all easy going. And we get down near the bottom, where the bottom of the stream emptys out into the river which I think was the Po River, and the Jerrys started throwing shells in there, I think it was, they was shooting mortars. Cause we were in this place -- one of those narrow places where you look

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up, you see hardly any daylight, it was sheer rock wall on each side. It was a stream bed that had over many years had wore out -- wore things out, you know. So there's shelling and my Sergeant says Hey Demkovic, yes sir. Get your machine gun up on the hillside there. Okay. So I said come on boys, up we go. Well we was able to get around that sheer rock cliff, and we went up on the hill side, picked a good position, didn't see nobody back to fire at though. So I come back down off of there. Sarge says what's the matter. Well, there's nothing to shoot at up there. Okay. So I'm standing down there and all of a sudden I hear a thump like, well I think at that time it was my right heel. So that -- that mortar shell had whatever dropped in there. It was either a piece of mortar shell or a piece of rock. I don't know which. At this point it didn't make no difference. So at the same time that same mortar shell got -- injured 12 of us. And most of that 12 was able to walk back up the way we came in, to get out of there. But not me. I got hit across the left foot and the right heel. So I was definitely -- I was a stretcher case. Well that was about noon one day when I got hit.

Then later on when it started getting dark, then we started -- people on this left side hillside, "Hey, Joe, Hey, Joe". It was just the Germans, see it was their way of trying to find out where we were at. Well next noon, here comes, couple of Italian -- Italian prisoners of war carrying litters. They had to take us down a little further down the creek onto where it flattens out to get to the river. And soon as we got out in that flat area, Germans starts shelling us again and them Italians dropped the litter, they took off for shelter. And I'm laying there, and that is scary. I didn't know that I could get so damn scared. I'm laying on the litter there, can't get up and walk because of my feet being all shot to hell. And during the night before, during the night I said about these 12 guys got hit, most of them were able to walk back out except me and another guy so we looked after each other there. He kept trying to get on my foot and I -- he got hit in the knee pretty bad, that's why he couldn't walk back out. So I kept trying to get on him and loosened it. Finally the shelling stopped and the Italians came back and picked me up and we started down out down toward the river and back along the hillside like -- there must have been like a path or a trail there cause they were walking fairly easy with me. And I kept slipping cause we was going uphill, I kept slipping down the litter down toward the other guy on the other end. And my feet were starting to hit him and every time I did that, hurt like heck. We finally get up -- before we get to the very top up there, there was some shooting going across -- the German tanks were shooting across, not trying to hit us I don't think cause they was shooting -- . Up on our side then there was an aid station. And that's when they started looking after me a little bit. And come nightfall they took me and the stretcher and loaded it on a jeep and they had some way of road to get out of there. But we had already heard that every time a vehicle moved, or any kind of noise, the Germans started shelling right away. Here I am, I'm on the stretcher on this jeep -- I say what in the hell -- don't lose -- don't bounce me off of here. Oh, you'll stay. Okay. So sure enough it was true, soon as they heard the jeep start up and started running, they started shelling. Didn't matter, day or night, they had every target picked out. I don't know where we got from there. ... So after that I don't remember how we got back to Florence into the hospital there, Florence, Italy. I don't remember too much about it because I might have been going in and out, but I remember laying in an army cot, waking up, couple nurses around, one of them started talking to me cause they had cut my leg off below the knee and she was telling me how everything was going to be all right, that you -- you'll get around fine. Okay. All right. Now what am I going to do -- you know, up to that point I was an active individual. I was an old farm boy, born and raised on a farm. I was never thinking about going back to the farm, but. ... Then they came, we're going to take you from here to Naples. We're going to fly you down to Naples and load up on ship there to go home. Well guess what, it was too foggy to fly. So I got loaded this one old army ambulance that's like a big ole metal box on wheels. Not soft riding so drive all the way from Florence to Naples.

They did get us loaded on a ship there and head out. Then we were coming back across the big old Atlantic Ocean again when we got word that President FDR had died. Well we felt pretty sad about that. And then one day it was pretty nice so the ward boy, whoever they

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were, I don't know what their position was. They wanted to know if any of us wanted to go out on the deck because it was sunny outside. I said sure, I can't walk but can you carry me out? Oh, yeah, we'll get you out there. So they get me out on the deck and all the fresh air - fresh air and sunshine and no boom-boom of guns. Sure neat, knowing you were heading home, to the States. And I didn't realize until later on when I thought about it, I came all the way back across that ocean from Naples -- I came back with my head -- I was backwards. I was going headfirst toward the States. But anyway it was a good feeling when the ship pulled in at New York, all of a sudden my one sister's there. Which I was glad to see. She was in the WACs at the time. Yeah, I can't remember where we stayed there, but they gave us a choice of one or two places. Either Atlantic City, New Jersey -- I can't remember what the other place was. The other hospital where the amputees -- where they handle amputees. So anyway I'll pick Atlantic City. And cause that's closer to Pennsylvani

**Answer:** Thomas M. Englund General Hospital. It was a hospital that... the military took over a couple hotels to put -- to make it a hospital. Just right off the Boardwalk there in Atlantic City. So that's where I ended up. It just felt so good to be out of that war business. But up to that -- that point yet, any sharp noises had me all -- I'd be jumping scared and nervous.

**Question:** Did you -- you said it felt good to be out of the -- the war, but what about the fact that you lost your leg. I mean, did you leave with -- with anger towards somebody for that or --

**Answer:** Not really, not really. By this time I'd growed out of my kid state, I guess my thinking was more adult. I would say I'd get mad at the Germans. But they had -- they were doing their thing just like we had to do our thing. And they had a limb shop right there in the one building. There was three buildings that made up the hospital. And they had a limb shop in the one that they put me in, made a limb for me. Teaching me to walk. That kind of stuff, nurses. When I started wearing that limb it hurt like hell. And finally a nurse come along, says, well, you're going to have to learn how to ride horses today. I says I know how to ride horses, used to ride them on the farm all the time. So believe it or not, that was part of my rehabilitation. So somehow she drummed up some transportation and we ended up where there was some horses. Got to climb on that sucker, I says boy it's different when you don't have your own two legs. She says, "Yeah, that's right. That's why you're learning." Says okay. She says now after this horse ride you're going to have to learn to dance. I says, "Well, I don't know how to dance, I never did." I says well who's going to be my partner and she said I'll be your partner. I said okay, let's go do it. This was all new to me, I'd got to learn sometime. And up to that point, really, I never did dance. I didn't know one step from whatever. So here we are in some building, music starts up, she says well come on partner. We start weaving or whatever we start doing. Well, I guess that was my dance lesson learned. Okay, now you got to learn to walk up and down stairs. Well she was right with me, teaching -- how am I going to walk up and down stairs with this artificial limb. And then we got pretty good where we could do it pretty much on ourselves with either walking with crutches or with couple canes. So we checked out some -- two canes for me and a pair of crutches and she said now I don't ever want to see you walking with one cane. So one time me and this one of the other guys that I got acquainted with there in the hospital, we said how about us going to the Boardwalk and take a walk and see what's out there. So we did and I had my canes and guess who we ran into, this nurse. She come by and she says you come to my office in the morning and pick these up. You don't need them right now. So I didn't. I got chewed again when I was down in her office the next morning. And since we were getting around that well, this buddy of mine, said why don't we go out and lay on the beach today. I said that sounds like be a good deal, sunshine and beach. So we did. We laid on the beach, fell asleep, woke up and we were all burned. (gestures) Next morning I was so sick, I

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managed somehow or other to get to the doctor's office and he said yeah, you've got sun sickness all right. What did you do? I said we went out and laid on the beach. Well that was a dumb thing to do -- didn't you know you'd get sun burned? I said well I didn't think I'd get burned like this. He was pretty good about it. So he said what you ought to do, he says, why don't you put in for some leave and go home for awhile. I said Okay, soon as I get feeling better I'll take some leave. That's what I did. Made arrangements to get from there, from Atlantic City, to Philadelphia

**Answer:** Little old milk train, stopped at every damn crossing. And finally ended up in Philadelphia, which is not too far from Redding where I was living at the time.

**Question:** Do you think that -- cause World War II changed your life dramatically.

**Answer:** Oh, sure it did.

**Question:** Do you think that there's a message that you would leave for future generations? About World War II?

**Answer:** I wouldn't tell them to run away -- do your duty. Uncle Sam calls you, go. Uncle Sam needs you, don't mean that you're going to go fight in a war every time. Other -- lots of other services that could use you. I tell you these young guys, be a man and go -- be a man and go help Uncle Sam out. Not these guys that run off to Canada to get away from things or these riots -- college rioters. Put your heads on straight, keep thinking straight.

**Question:** Are you proud of your service?

**Answer:** Huh?

**Question:** Are you proud of the service that you did?

**Answer:** Oh, yes. Yeah.

**Question:** You don't seem to hold an animosity --

**Answer:** I really don't, no. I really don't. Maybe I'm just different guy or something, but I'll tell you what, take that -- makes a young fellow grow up real quick. I don't mean the war but I mean even the basic training. We had to learn together to work together as a team.

**Question:** That's a big part of it, isn't it.

**Answer:** Yeah. Yeah, we did one. It was down -- had my basic training in Croft, South Carolina

**Answer:** And we had a barracks, a sergeant, just a old buck sergeant, and a corporal. And that sergeant, first day that he got involved with us, he said something you don't like here and you're going to straighten it out, meet me behind the barracks, I'll be glad to take care of it. Well, I never had any reason to dislike him. But I knew darn well that he'd hold his own in whatever he got involved in. And then the corporal -- he was born in Germany and raised in Japan, so he's the one that was teaching us all this Jujitsu and all that stuff. And where to stick your bayonet if you had to use your bayonet on somebody. Not just the guts, you stick them in the throat. But he knew his stuff, too. He said, one day in training was okay, put your bayonet on. Now I'm going to tell you I want you, with your bayonet, come at me like you're going to stick me with it. Play for real. So I did. And I'm running like hell at



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him with my bayonet on my rifle position, next thing you know I'm flying through the damn air. He said well now let's see how easy this was. I said yeah, that it wasn't bad till I landed. What it was -- was I was running toward him, cause he says I'm not picking on you guys, I'm trying to teach you in case this happens wherever you go. Somebody's coming at you with a bayonet, all you've got to do is side-step a little bit, push that rifle down so the bayonet gets in the ground and with all the momentum of the guy running, he's just going to go. By God it worked. I said sure did work. (laughs)

**Question:** Was that a dilemma -- cause here you are a 18, 19 year old kid sent over to Cassino and you talked about going across these ships that have sunk and turned upside down and wondering, you know, how many lives had been lost.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** Do you get into a survival mode at that point and say --

**Answer:** I think so, I think so.

**Question:** -- whatever it takes?

**Answer:** Yeah. Well we used to hear, that you could, even with your helmet, steel helmet you had on, you could even dig a hole with that if you had to. And it was true, you could. You could dig pretty good with it. Cause when I was talking about the river that we crossed, finally Germans got out of there -- and then they started throwing some shell fire, you know, at us. I remember that. I couldn't reach my damn shovel in my backpack and I didn't want to take it off so I just took my helmet and I started scraping dirt. Really does work. You want to survive, you want to survive, yes.

**Question:** Now you had to be just freezing -- I mean you talked about the river you went through and --

**Answer:** Yeah, it was cold and wet and like I say them leggings -- it's true that when they get wet they'll shrink on you, cut off your circulation. And they did.

**Question:** Now one of course I never thought asking anybody is -- is -- did you have any extra clothes with you?

**Answer:** No, just what you had on your body, that's all you had. And one -- one wool Army blanket.

**Question:** How long do you think you wore that one set of clothing?

**Answer:** Well I think I had that on until we got -- that session in Rome. I think in that area they had -- they had -- they was taking them in -- they had like you got these 18-wheelers, you know the big box trailers. They had some showers fixed up in those. And on the way to Rome or once we got in Rome then I had a shower and an issue of new clothes. So time wise I don't know what to say how long I was in. I told you when my hands felt like they were numb and my feet.

**Question:** When you see the American flag go by, what -- is that a special feeling for you?

## Joe Demkovic

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**Answer:** Oh, yeah. Tell you what, if somebody disrespects it, I feel like I want to go choke them or something. That's the only time I feel anger, respect the flag; I fought for that sucker.

**Question:** Did you think the younger generations understand what you did for us?

**Answer:** I'd like to think so. Boy I tell you one thing that got to me, come back and find out that they can't even salute the flag in school or say a prayer. Hell, that's what this country was founded on. And some yahoo politician or something comes along and makes changes. If I was physically fit, they wanted me or needed me, I'd gladly go back and fight for this country again.

**Question:** I think one of the biggest dilemmas is the fact that you fought for, the freedoms that you fought for, allows that person to not salute the flag, which is a real dilemma

**Answer:**

**Answer:** What I'd really like to do if I ever become physically fit again, to be able to go back over to Italy and kind of retrace some of -- some of my steps there. Not necessarily in Rome for the females but I'd like to find that place where I -- where I got hit down in the creek I was talking about.

**Question:** Under a little better circumstances, though?

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** Maybe have somebody drive you rather than hike so much, huh?

**Answer:** Yeah. Well, I -- I was all right till I come up with this stroke, and then I killed my left side. My left leg and my left arm -- I got my right -- right works good. So far, but I sure count on it a lot and my right leg and my right arm.

**Question:** Well you seem to be -- to have a pretty positive outlook on life.

**Answer:** Well, oh, one other thing I forgot to mention. On the ship we were coming back on, to the States, I said when FDR passed away. They said somebody want any milk, somebody want any bread? Oh, yeah. We didn't have enough milk for bread up there in the hills, so sure, we'll have some. And boy that bread tasted just like cake to me. And milk, my goodness gracious, that was wonderful.

**Question:** How did you guys -- I talked to some prisoners of war about how they passed time. I mean in the fact that you had so much time to deal with and what they talked about. Now they at Luft Stalag 113, talked about food. What were things that you guys talked about that helped you get through the day, or did you even have time to --

**Answer:** I don't think there was much of that, really. Much time to just sit around and BS, you mean? No, not really.

**Question:** Sitting in a fox hole -- are you -- are you by yourself in a fox hole?

**Answer:** Yeah, me and my little short friend -- we'd squeeze in there.

## Joe Demkovic

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**Question:** Did you build a -- do you build a friendship or do you try to not build friendships because you don't know --

**Answer:** Oh, you don't know, really, how long you're going to be around or -- you just start get acquainted with somebody and kind of friendship develops. Like this little short fellow, Archie Beard, I was telling you about. We've been trying to locate him -- have no idea where he -- he may have passed. I know he didn't get killed or anything over there.

**Question:** Do you use the Internet -- are you an Internet person?

**Answer:** My wife is.

**Question:** Because I was going to say, that's a real good way to --

**Answer:** No, we tried that. Didn't come up with anything.

**Question:** Did you lose a lot of friends in the service?

**Answer:** Well, I've lost them. But I wouldn't say they were friends at the time, we weren't that close. But little short time you get acquainted with somebody. They say a shell won't land twice in the same hole. That's a bunch of BS, too. Cause I seen that. One of the - - what you're talking about friends. One of the guys in the company that I was fairly well acquainted with. These darn shells, and he wanted to go find a place to -- to hide a little bit. So he jumped into this one shell hole, wasn't too damn long he was in there, here comes another shell in and blew him all to pieces. That's when I learned that that's a bunch of BS about one shell won't hit twice in the same place.

**Question:** Was that a hard aspect, the fact that you saw, I mean acquaintances, you know, you knew that they had been killed. Did you just kind of turn your mind off or how do you --

**Answer:** Yeah, I think you do. Kind of sad at the time. And just glad it wasn't you.

**Question:** Well thank you very much.

**Answer:** How are we doing on time, all right?

**Question:** Doing real good.

**Answer:** Okay. One piece, well not quite one piece but -- but I'm not laying over there in pieces.

**Question:** Did you have contact with your family while you were over there? Did you write letters or --

**Answer:** Yeah. Member the old what they called V-mail? Yeah, I -- we just pick one of those up, we didn't need stamps, and I'd write to my Mom. I sent one, I think. In fact I think I might have one in my pack here cause I was reading it this morning at home. I sent it to my mom.

**Question:** Did you, now you had a sister that was a WAC?

**Answer:** Huh?

## Joe Demkovic

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**Question:** You had a sister that was in the service?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** And where was she?

**Answer:** I don't know where all she went.

**Question:** Did you have any other brothers or --

**Answer:** Not in the service at that time.

**Question:** Not in the service.

**Answer:** Later, but --

**Question:** So your mom just had to worry about you and your sister.

**Answer:** Yeah.

**Question:** That had to be tough on the parents.

**Answer:** I imagine it had to be. And I had some money out of my monthly paycheck which I don't remember how much I got -- I sent some home to Mom.