

**Library of Congress transcript of recorded interview**  
**(Typos in original transcript)**

## **Interview with Joseph De Luca, Jr. [11/1/2001]**

**Tom Swope:**

This is the oral history of World War II veteran Joseph De Luca, Jr. Mr. De Luca served with the U.S. Army's 103rd Division, 411th Regiment, Company C. He served in the European theatre and his highest rank was staff sergeant. I am Tom Swope, and we recorded this at Mr. De Luca's home in Wooster, Ohio on November 1, 2001. Mr. De Luca's age at the time of this recording was 76.

**Tom Swope:**

Were you drafted?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

No. The minute I turned 18 I enlisted. And it was typical young kid. You seen everybody in uniform, and you thought, boy, I got to have one. And then I was sent down to Fort Hayes in Columbus, and from there they sent me to Camp--no, Fort McClellan, Alabama for 16 weeks of replacement infantry training. And I had to learn the use of 15 different weapons because you don't know who you are going to replace. Then I was sent home for a two-week furlough, and then I was to report to Fort Meade, Maryland, which was a port of embarkation; and when I was there, they weren't going to send 18-year-olds over anymore as replacements. So they packed us all up and sent us to Camp Hollis, Texas where I joined Company C, 411th Regiment of the 103rd Infantry Division, which is my outfit until the end of the war, and we had a little more training as a unit. Then we had orders to ship out. So we headed for Camp Shanks, New York, which was a port of embarkation. And we were boarding the ship and, of course, I was all excited. I never seen a ship except in photos, and thinking I am going to be on the ocean, not thinking what I am going to get into. And the ship's name, I'll never forget it. It was an old converted cargo ship, but the name of it was Santa Maria. It was so old that we thought Columbus was the captain. And the convoy formed up, and there was about 22 ships in the convoy and about midway in the Atlantic, the North Atlantic, we hit a hurricane, and the waves were probably anywhere from 20 to 30 feet high, and the boat rollin' and rockin'. And then they--it seemed odd you were on the railing and you were looking up at the water. Then they finally made us stay below deck. It was about three days before the storm settled down, and we were allowed back up on deck and nobody was in sight. And, of course, we--everything we seen was a periscope, and there were two ships burning off of the horizon there, and they said there was a collision. And I remembered there was a baby aircraft carrier, and it had, I think it was, 15 B25

bombers lashed on the deck delivering to England. Then when--the convoy, after a day, they got it all back together, was only four bombers left on the carrier. Show you how bad that storm was. We thought we were going to die before we got there. Then we went through the Straight to Gibraltar, and that was a thrill for me. Here I am looking at the rock, and I was just studying that in school and I thought, God, I'm here looking at it. Then we pulled into Marseille, France and that place was a mess. Everything blowed up and the cranes, ships on their side, ships sitting on the bottom, and then you start getting in your head that this is serious stuff. Then we had to--we got off--we were off the ship--the port was already secured. We didn't have to fight for it. Then march us up the hill--mountain, I would say--to our assembly area, and there you are marching up a hill. It was about 10, 12 miles from the dock, and you have all your--your 65-pound pack and your rifle and all your other junk, and you still had your sea legs. We were at sea 17 days and got right off, and it was kind of rough. Then they finally moved us up the front. We were--I don't recall the division. I think it might have been the 36th. We were going to replace them. And then in the distance I could hear the artillery fire and the flashes. It was at night. You'd see traces from machine gun bullets, and then that's when the fear starts setting in. And they put us in two--in a hole, me and another guy, and these two guys we replaced was pulled back. And we kept saying, well, where is the front? They said you're on it. And that kind of blew our minds. Then the next morning we were move out, going into the attack. And we then had too much resistance moving out. And then along the road there's--just as in my mind, I will never forget that sight, was the first dead German I seen. It looked like he was crawling out of his hole and half his head was gone, and then the fear was really getting bad. Well, then we kept making our way--we got--we were in Epinal, and that's where we started into the Vosges Mountains. And the first city we did--liberate was Saint Die. I think they called it Saint--well, anyway, we called it Saint D. And we marched--climbed all night through the mountains to go on the attack in the morning. And we came down to the tree line, and the Germans didn't know we were there, and I was looking down over the city. We were still concealed by the trees, and I was watching the Germans loading their trucks to get out, and you still didn't realize what you were into. Then they finally spotted us and started throwing mortar and stuff in, and we eventually took the town, but they blew up most of the town. We didn't do that much damage. And we went to--continued on through the mountains, which was--well, it was around ten degrees. They claim it was the coldest winter on record at that period, and it was about four or five inches of snow; and what few buildings you seen along the way, the Germans burn them down so we wouldn't have shelter. Of course, they didn't realize that made us mad. And one incident that--a lot of people ask if you had a close one -- well, I always figure every day was

close. But we were--our platoon or our squad, was the leader of the unit, and we were strung way back because the roads were awful narrow, and there was a big hill on one side, a deep ravine on the other. We come around a curve, and the sergeant didn't know what to do. We thought maybe we should hold it up, and they told us to keep moving. They didn't want to hold the column up. And two scouts went around the curve, and then our Browning automatic man went around the curve, and then the sergeant went around, and I was just ready to step around and a machine gun opened up and got all four of them. And I just fell back against the bank, and I don't know if I was even breathing, I was so scared. And then they put another squad up and moved us back in the column, and then I walked by there and looked down at them, and I just bawled like a baby. And I didn't know if it was--well, it was for them, but I guess it was for me too that I could have been the fifth one if that machine gunner would have waited a few more seconds. Then you wipe it out of your mind. Of course, it don't leave. Then we continued and finally broke out of the Vosges Mountains, got into the plains. Then we came up on the Maginot Line, and that was a goofy thing they did there. They had the guns, but they only pointed one way. You couldn't traverse them any way. And that wasn't much of a problem. And then the Siegfried Line that was a tough nut to crack, but you had to sneak--artillery would almost bounce off it was so heavy with concrete and just chip it, but I imagine them guys, their heads were ringing inside. And you try to get around--at night you try to sneak up with satchels, and there was this thing you just pulled it and that set it off, and you try to get it into the gun slit, and then try to get out of there. All you had to do was knock out a few, and then you had to watch because there were snipers around with machine guns. But if you could knock out a few and then move in, then go around the back and get them from the back door, made it easier and you didn't lose too many. So we finally broke out of there. And one city I remember was Strasbourg. And it's hard to remember the cities because you never look to see the sign where you were. You didn't care. And--I have to get my thoughts together here.

**Tom Swope:**

That's all right. It's okay if you jump around. That happens all the time.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

And then it was December the 15th of '44 when we crossed into Germany. Then everybody was saying we were in Germany. And then I don't know what we expected but we were whispering. We were--we're in Germany, we're in Germany. You know, we thought we were on (earth) soil now. Then it was around Christmas and there was one--it was quiet because things were going on at the Battle of the Bulge. And there was one bridge over a little river, and our squad was about three miles ahead of our main body, and our squad--our job was to blow the bridge if they

decided to attack, and then it was up to us how to get back to the main body. We're dispensable. And we stayed in this farmhouse. We had the, so-called, ten and one rations. There was two elderly German women there, and they cooked the meals and we shared with them. And I don't understand--I don't remember to this day what they wanted, but one wanted to go up to the next town about three miles. She wanted to get something. I didn't know stores were running. And the sergeant said, well, you go with her. Okay. So we got into the town, and there was a little store, and there were a bunch of German civilians there, and I guess they had never seen an American soldier. They were eyeballing me and checking my equipment, and just--and I started getting the most uncomfortable feeling that I was being watched. So I told her, you know, mach schnell, means let's hurry. So I got her to go, and she had a package. She could have had a bomb, I don't know. No telling what we had back there. So I had her almost on the double going across a field to get back to our--back to the house there. And halfway back I thought no wonder I felt uneasy. I'm in this town by myself. We haven't captured it yet. It's still in German hands, and I guess sometime you can have a feeling that somebody is eyeballing you, and I thought maybe the Germans were watching me, but seeing one dumb G.I., they didn't want to give away anything so they let me go. I got back to the house, and I told the sergeant, I said, what are you trying to do, get me killed? He said, why? I said, we don't have that town. He said, oh, my God. I never thought of it. I could have come back Sergeant York with a whole mess of prisoners.

**Tom Swope:**

Ten in one rations, what are those?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

That's--there's enough there to feed ten guys. We just call it ten and one. You had to do a lot of cooking with that. Not like the K ration, you just open it up and eat it cold or whatever. And then, finally, we start moving out, and we went one place that you just can't forget it was in Landsberg, Germany, and they sent two or three of us in on a Jeep. We had a 50-caliber machine gun mounted on it, and we went in--they figured the Germans are out of the city so we had to go in and scout it. I thought it was kind of dumb to go in on a Jeep. They could hear you coming, and you were exposed. But we were going around in the streets and nothing happened. Then we got around one--down the road there was--on the main street there was a crowd of people and yelling, and then I heard the guy in back of me, {makes noise}, got the old machine gun ready. So we crept down, and they happened to spot us. And then one come up and he was a Frenchman, and he spoke a little English. He said they were displaced people there, and it was more or less a work camp, and outside the town there was an airplane factory. They

manufactured Messerschmitts, and they were the slave labors. And we got up in there, and there was one German on the ground. He was a bloody mess. They were just beating him to no whatever, and we took him away from them and put him in a Jeep, and he was glad to see us, I guess. They said he was one of the guards and he'd beat them up and he was--they were just getting even. They wanted to finish him off. We said, no, you can't do that. Then the Frenchman said you come with me. We went outside the town going into the woods and, of course, I took my safety off, and I didn't know what I was going to get into. And then I could smell it before we got there. There come an opening, and there was a trench maybe 3 or 4,000 bodies and the stink you can't--if I see a photo of it today, I can smell it yet. And I vomited and I couldn't eat for a couple of weeks, hardly. So I went back and I told the guys there, I said, we got to go back and report this. But after what I seen there, I felt like shooting that SS man myself, but that would be a no-no because he was a prisoner. It's a funny thing, you have a thin line. Here's the front, do all the killing. Then you get back to this line, if you do something, it's murder. You get court-martialed. I mean, it's a fine line. But we felt like doing it to him or just hand him back and say finish him. So we went back and reported that. And then we used to say to ourselves a lot, is this trip necessary? Well, when we seen that, we thought, well, maybe this was necessary. Then we didn't exactly liberate Dachau. From what I understand, that was the first concentration camp they started that was within the borders of Germany. That was near Nuremberg. And after this--this other division did capture it, then we came through there, and I seen trenches again. This was the first time I seen the ovens, and I seen what was in them, and then people saying--someone was saying that Holocaust never happened, and I am probably one of the few eyewitnesses left that they wouldn't want to tell me that. Then, of course, we had to keep going, and we went clear across Germany. We were at northern Italy there at Brenner Pass, and we met the 88th Division coming up the boot. That was quite a celebration. The war was just about over. And then we were in Innsbruck, Austria when the war was finally over, and that was kind of a relief. You know, you were still alive, had all your limbs. Maybe in the head you weren't good. But from the time we landed in Marseille until the time we were in Innsbruck, that took us seven months, 500 miles. We walked it all and fought it all. I never was wounded. Then I always try to tell people--put a little humor--I could run so fast that I was a blur and the Germans couldn't get a bead on me. Then when the war was over, then I was--some of them went to other divisions to go to the Pacific, and I don't know why I was sent there, but I was sent in the Army of Occupation and then I ended up in Heidelberg, Germany, and that was one of the few cities that wasn't bombed. Then I was a street sergeant, and I spent a year there after the war.

**Tom Swope:**

I've heard about three or four of these. I've got them on tape. What was a street sergeant?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Eight-hour shift you're in charge of everybody on the street.

**Tom Swope:**

Okay.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

And, see, we had--everybody was under us. There was no law or anything. We were the law. And I spent a year there. It was really good duty. That's where--outside of Heidelberg where General Patton was in the accident, and he died in the hospital outside Heidelberg. And he was lying at state in one of the villas in Heidelberg, one of the general's villas, and I was picked to be on his honor guard. It was a 12-hour duty, and you were on a half hour and off a half hour. Then when you were off, you went down in the basement and they had soft drinks, not liquor, and little snacks, but we weren't allowed to sit down. No wrinkle in your uniform. And I never seen so damn many generals, but you could just see when they walked up, just real quick glance at your shoes all the way up to see if you were--then I knew why they didn't want us to sit down, but I considered that a big honor. I was right at the head of his coffin, and when nobody was around, I leaned over and was counting the ribbons on his chest. And finally, it was time--I had enough points to go home, but I kept--you know, the captain said, well, why don't you stay a couple more months and help train people coming over.

**Tom Swope:**

Alright, so we were, let's see, at Patton's funeral and then?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Well, then it was time for me to come home, and so they picked me up and took me to (Moore), Belgium. I was in a Repl. Depot for two weeks and finally the ship was ready, and then they shipped us to LeHavre, France and camp was called Camp Lucky Strike. Went back on the ship and back home.

**Tom Swope:**

Let me get some of these dates. You probably went in--if I am doing the math right, you went in 1943 then?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

No, '44.

**Tom Swope:**

'44 is when you went in, okay. And you shipped to and landed in Marseilles in October of '44?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Uh-huh.

**Tom Swope:**

Do you remember any specific memories of the day FDR died?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Yeah. Well, we--we weren't worried. You know, we knew the chain of command would still go on. Hitler was the one that rejoiced. He thought that was going to be in his favor, but they don't know the American soldier. Then you think of--oh, I was just reading a book there of the deaths of the 103rd, and I think our 411th Regiment lost 40 percent of our people, and that's quite a bit.

**Tom Swope:**

Do you have memories, specific memories, of buddies?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

A few. They've kind of--I don't know if you try to forget it or what, but--

**Tom Swope:**

Did you have one close buddy that you maybe palled around with over there?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Well, my platoon sergeant--or my squad sergeant, he was the one that got killed on that curve, and I never get that out of my mind. Then the other ones, there was a Renz (sp). Him and I were good buddies in the states. He was taking some prisoners back and got knifed. And sometimes guys would take prisoners back, and you would hear some shots, and they would be back and what happened? Well, they tried to get away. I mean, there is no mercy. If you have any morals, you got to toss them out of the window or you're dead. You got to be an animal and that isn't--it's just the most brutal thing that man invented. I'm going to--

**Tom Swope:**

Sure. What was your training? What was your specific job?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Rifleman.

**Tom Swope:**

Rifleman, all right.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Good old M1.

**Tom Swope:**

That was \_\_\_+

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

I had training in all the other weapons, but I just ended up being--which I was thankful. But if you had an automatic weapon, you--rifle \_\_+ didn't want to be near them. The minute they hear an automatic, {makes noise}, they go in for it.

**Tom Swope:**

Exactly.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

\_\_+ that I could see me doing it.

**Tom Swope:**

Let's take you back a couple of years when you were 15 or 16. Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Uh-huh. I was 16 and my dad said, well, I'm glad you're too young. You know, you will miss this. Then when I was on the line, I told my buddy in the hole with me, I said, I'm not supposed to be here. He said, why? I said, well, my dad said I was too young. I was going to miss it. Quite an experience.

**Tom Swope:**

Do you remember anything about getting letters from home?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Yeah. Uh-huh. What used to get us is, you know, they'd send us packages, and before we go in on the attack, they'd give us our packages. You don't have any room for anything else. The thing that amused me a lot is they would pack things with popcorn, \_\_+ and we would eat the popcorn. As stale as it was, but we would eat the popcorn before we would even look to what was in the package. I always craved popcorn and I craved milk, fresh milk. Then when we come home on dock there at New Jersey, the Red Cross was there, and they had coffee and donuts and what have you, and milk. I must have drank six of those little cartons. I got half sick, but I just--oh, it was cold, and I just never drank anything--milk that ever tasted so good.

**Tom Swope:**

I heard stories of guys, oh, making up songs and doing little things for entertainment. You do anything like that? Did you have any kind of formal shows that you could \_\_+?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

The only time I remember is we were right up on the line, and we were in a farmhouse, and it was our CP, and they were drawing up plans about some of the guys were going to have to go out on patrol. And there were a couple of USO come up there, right on the line. And they sang and didn't much impress us because they could leave and we couldn't. I wasn't impressed.

**Tom Swope:**

So it didn't serve its purpose as a distraction for you?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

It didn't help.

**Tom Swope:**

Didn't think about that they were going to--

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Well, we had to--I was picked to go on a patrol while they were still there, and we had to go to our right flank and make contact with a company over there, and we couldn't get through the machine gun fire. So we came back and said we can't get through. Suicide. What's the use of pushing it; you all get killed; you're not going to bring any information back. I don't think the captain liked it, but sometime you got to use a little sense, especially with my life.

**Tom Swope:**

When you were occupying Germany, did you have any relationship at all with the German people there?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

For the first six months you weren't allowed to fraternize with them. You were not allowed to talk. The only way you could talk to them was if it had something to do with business or whatever your duty was. If you were caught talking to them, you got fined 50 bucks. Then at night you would see everybody sneaking through the alleys with their girls. We won't get into that.

**Tom Swope:**

Sure. Tell us what the first phrase was you learned in German.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Frauelin, "Du schlafen mit dich?"

**Tom Swope:**

Would you like to translate?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Girl, will you sleep with me? I got a lot of chocolate. Of course, we learned all the bad things first.

**Tom Swope:**

Did it work?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Yes. Can I tell something bad?

**Tom Swope:**

Sure. Yes.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Well, Hershey bars were trading, and we'd see a guy eating a Hershey bar and say \_\_\_+.

**Tom Swope:**

Great.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

And, see, I never looked down on German girls as bad girls. It was a matter of survival. We had the stuff. We had what they wanted, and they had what we wanted. It was just a trade. And I never looked down on them as being bad girls. It was just a matter of survival, and we took advantage of it. What more can I say?

**Tom Swope:**

Did you do much souvenir gathering?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

A little bit. I wasn't interested in it like I am now. I told my wife, I said, if I was interested then the way I am now, I would have needed a whole ship to bring my stuff home. Stuff just laying all over. Anything you wanted. Anything. Just laying around. We didn't care. I guess the biggest thing, you were alive and-- END OF TRACK ONE; BEGIN TRACK TWO.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

A lot of that stuff, other guys they would go through dead Germans and take rings and watches and I could never do that. Like some of it was--gone through their pockets, but it was mainly for information, not anything personal there for you to keep. The nine-millimeter I showed you was the only thing I ever took, and it was just government, regular army issue, and he didn't have any use for it anymore. I thought, well, why not, but I didn't go through pockets or--guys had their arms all full of watches, and I couldn't quite buy that. I thought that was gross really.

**Tom Swope:**

\_\_\_+ how would you get that stuff back?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Well, I had to register the gun to have a permit to bring it back. Then what was--ticked me off is if you had stuff you wanted to ship home, an officer had to okay it. If he didn't okay it, he confiscated it, but nobody checked his boxes. So we figured if it was something he liked, he'd confiscate it us from and then send it home himself. That wasn't fair. And you wonder sometimes what you think about officers.

**Tom Swope:**

How did you get along with the officers who were over there--and \_\_\_+ action?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

I didn't have any problem with them. I think I told you before we went through 11 lieutenants in our platoon. If they don't move, we don't move. They had--some of them were, we called them, the 90-day wonders. They'd go 90 days to officer candidate school and then come over and think they know everything, and they do some stupid things. And we just sit there and watch them get killed. The thing is, you get the basics but you have to--you just throw the book away. Every situation isn't like the book, but you have an idea how to treat that special situation. Like the worse thing to me is flushing out a town. You have to go in all the rooms and look in the basements, and while you're going, you're exposed. There are snipers around and little machine gun nest in basement window you didn't even see. One time--as you go along the street, you run in one doorway and the guy up ahead leads and you run and then the next guy, and it was--and my turn I ran up the next doorway and another guy run in there and that's--the sniper decided and took him. I mean, just luck of the draw. I always felt it didn't matter how intelligent you were, how well trained, if you were at the wrong spot, you were at the wrong spot. You could be a dummy like me and come through, and the smart ass is laying over there yet. I shouldn't say that.

**Tom Swope:**

Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life when you came back?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Well, I think the biggest thing that helped me was staying in the year after the war, and then being on garrison duty I had to be Class.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

all the time, and I think that made me--and my wife said for about 10 years I would jump in bed or wake up screaming and would be sweating, and it finally leveled off. Thunder still makes me nervous. I don't get scared, but it makes me nervous.

**Tom Swope:**

You have a story about the wire cutters. I don't think you told that.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Oh. Are we on?

**Tom Swope:**

Yeah, we sure are.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Okay. It was in a small village, and we were behind a wall of the cemetery. All their cemeteries have walls around them, and there was a little battle going on between their machine gun and our machine gun and tracers flying. And a sergeant and one guy were out in the open there, and they hollered for a wire cutter. And every squad carries a wire cutter, but I didn't carry it. Before I knew it, it was in my hand and I guess--I don't know why you do it. You're not--maybe it's your training, but I ran out through that fire and handed them the wire cutter, and they were standing beside each other. And I was back a little ways, and two quick shots rang out. One shot hit the guy in the neck, and he was dead before he hit the ground and hit the sergeant in the arm and, of course, the minute you heard the first shot you hit the dirt. And the machine gun firing was going on, and I drug him back to that wall through the fire. And the one thing is, you don't leave your buddy; and if I'd have crawled and saved myself and left him there, the guys wouldn't have trusted me, and you would want somebody--the other guy, a week later, he's dead. And even when I think about it, I get chills. I don't know why the hell I just--I guess your training. Somebody said he needed a wire cutter and off you go, and then you look at the tracer and you swear everyone is going to hit you between the eyes. I forgot about that.

**Tom Swope:**

Anything about medals that you can tell us?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

I don't know if I got my bronze star for that. Then they had like three battle stars on our European ribbon, and it doesn't mean you were in just three battles. They have a close sector. Like, well say, (Alsace), Lorraine and southern France and northern and in central Europe. Well, each one of them are a star, a battle star. If you only stayed in one sector the whole time, you get one battle star. But as you go into different sectors, you get a battle star. So it doesn't mean--you know, like you have three battle stars, that don't mean just three battles.

**Tom Swope:**

It doesn't matter how many battles you fought in that sector, you will get one battle star?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Yeah. Then if you move into the next one where they have--I don't know how they do it. I suppose they got--you will get a star for this in this area and this area. If you happen to hit those areas, you keep adding your stars. I think our division earned three stars. I think it was southern France, the Rhineland and central Europe. All total I had nine medals, but nobody cared about medals. Couldn't care a less.

**Tom Swope:**

But they look pretty?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Yeah. Makes you look like you've been around.

**Tom Swope:**

When you think about that experience over there, is there one thing that comes to mind as your most vivid memory?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Like I told you, the Rock of Gibraltar was the biggest thrill I ever had. Then you reflect back and you wonder why this guy died and one was wounded bad and you didn't get a scratch. Just sometime you reflect back, you just shake your head. I used to tell my wife, I said, I don't understand how I survived. And she said, well, for me.

**Tom Swope:**

That makes sense.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

So I don't know. I guess it's--it's just horrible. Then like vets get together, like our reunion. And I always call them civilians; they don't quite understand. They think you're war mongrels. And, you know, like I told you before, who wants peace better than a combat man? And they don't realize that comradeship. There's something about being in-- especially in combat, how you feel toward each other that you don't find in civilian life. You were trained as a team. You worked as a team. And everybody's life depended on everybody. There was no such thing as cutthroat like you find in the business world. You don't find the friendship. I have been retired 16 years, and I haven't missed one person. I mean, like I hear some of them say, well, when I retire, I am going to miss the people. Bull. Just hard to understand the comradeship. You see how the guys acts. Of course, you go to division, people think you know everybody, and you just know your little group. Like when you get a chance to bed down, you just--your squad, we're supposed to have 12 men but we never had 12, and you stayed in a house, and one guy would guard. But just your little squad was--so many you didn't even know in your company. Even in your own platoon. It was just so much--

**Tom Swope:**

Eight guys or ten guys, right, sometimes less?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

I was telling sometime like how it figures down, I was number--I was--like you see a whole mob run out on a field and before you know it, everybody is in line. Well, you're numbered in your mind. Like I was No. 5 in the 2nd Squad of the 1st Platoon, Company C of the 1st Battalion, of the 411th Regiment of the 7th Army of the VI Corps.

**Tom Swope:**

You remember all that?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

And they know right where I'm at. Well, one thing, like we carried--we would find a lot of wine cellars, and we would empty the water out of our canteens and carry wine, and they would say we're moving out and you'd take a couple of gulps and say, which way is to the rear? No, it's something that sometimes I can still sit and cry. There was one funny thing that just crossed my mind. I think it's funny now. It wasn't funny then. We were in a vineyard in France, and we got pinned down by a couple of machine guns; and the way the terrain was, it was pretty hard to outflank them. So they told us to dig in, stay flat, and they ordered some tanks up to knock them out. And I was in a little gully, and I didn't think that was deep enough. I didn't get up or anything, but I started digging with my hands and pushing the dirt. Well, my elbow went up above the gully and a shot rang out and went right in front of my head, my face. And I really wanted to go deep. I start digging, and I did that again and another shot. He must not have been a good sniper to miss my elbow. It went over and hit in front of me. I thought, well, seems like I am okay as long as I don't use my--put my elbow up. That must be the only thing he can see. And so I flattened out as flat as I could go, and I had a box of crackers in my jacket, and I'm pinned down by a sniper, and I am eating crackers. Then the tanks, couple of tanks, came up, and they knocked out the gun. They told us to move, and I just laid there. And, Sergeant Joe, let's go. Well, I am not moving. He said, why? I said, that sniper is just mad enough that he is going to wait until I get up. So a bunch of them got on that side and said, now, get up. But I imagine when he heard the tanks, he got out of there. But when I think back on it, there I am pinned down. I am laying there eating crackers. Well, you know, like you can watch movies like Private Ryan and you can read books and you hear stories from guys like me, you just can't put the fear in there.

**Tom Swope:**

Yeah. You can--

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

My stomach was always sore because every time they said "move out" my stomach would tighten. I was sore the whole time. Oh, another thing, I went 28 days without a shower and change of clothes. Then the Germans were moving back pretty fast, and we would say they can't stand us so they're leaving. Now, see, I just thought of that.

**Tom Swope:**

But you got used to yourself after a while, right? You didn't smell yourself anymore?

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Well, when I was able to take showers, I would take two or three a day. I didn't feel clean.

**Tom Swope:**

Uh-huh. Yeah.

**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

See, it is a 24-hour, seven-day a week job. You eat when you can. You clean up when you can. You sleep when you can. I might have gone 24, 30 hours without no sleep. Then sometimes I think guys get so damn tired they don't care if they get killed or not.

**Tom Swope:**

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**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Well, you don't know from day to day. I mean, you don't know how many close ones you had that you didn't know it. Like when you hear artillery coming and {makes noise}, that's outgoing. That's ours. Then sometime it has a little whistle. When you don't hear it anymore hit the girl--hit the ground--hit the girl --

**Tom Swope:**

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**Joseph De Luca, Jr.:**

Hit the ground because it is going to land near you. You learn so much by sound. We were in one barn and I was asleep--I was dead but my rifle was always at ready, and I could open my eyes--and I could be in a deep sleep and the minute I open my eyes I know everything that's going on, and I still have that. And I felt something hot on my breath--not my breath--on my cheek. I jumped up and here was a cow checking me out. The guys said why didn't you shoot it; we would have had steak. I was in a deep sleep, exhausted, but I could come wide awake, and I do that today. The minute I open my eyes, I know everything that's going on. Then like our machine gun would sound like tut-tut-tut-tut. Theirs was fast and {makes noise}. Then you tell by engines and airplanes. Ours was more steady hone and theirs was more--and then you learn the shells, the sounds. Then a rifle, you know, the bang sound it makes, but when you hear it crack, the crack sound, that's pointing at you. That's a different sound than when you're firing from the back of it. When you hear that crack, get down there and try to figure out where it's at. Sound has an awful lot to do with it. Then when you go to like the division up there, then our Company C has a reunion in Branson every year. I tell people you can't go and tell bullshit stories, because the guys say, hey, wait a minute, I was there. That's not way the it happened. Same way with the division up there at Grand Rapids. But I was a proud soldier, and I feel good in myself and what I contributed.

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