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Narrator

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Interviewers

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Q: Mr. Broga tell me about where you were born and raised.

EB: I was born in Rome New York but raised in Syracuse. All my life I lived there, period.

Q: But you graduated schools?

EB: High school.

Q: What was your family like? What kind of family did you come from?

EB: Generally, just an average family. My father, he wasn't the best, he had to work a lot and was on welfare and things like that. And I didn't wanna be like my father, I was gonna work and had the things I had because of what my father had in the past and....Basically that's about it.

Q: So what year did you graduate high school?

EB: Oh my god <chuckles lightly> I don't know. I was about 18 I guess. I went to.....I dropped out of high school and then I went back to continuation school to finish the high school business, but that's about it. And I went out working not too long, and then of course they called me into service.

Q: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed? What were you doing?

EB: Oh boy.....Probably home, working. I was probably working at the fairgrounds, the army supplies you know, shipping them out and stuff like that, I was in a depot there. And that's what I was doing toward the end.

Q: This was at the fairgrounds?

EB: Yeah, at the fairgrounds.

Q: Okay. Tell me about that, I'm not too familiar with it. The army took over part of the fairgrounds?

EB: Yeah, they had supplies, they brought them in, we shipped them back out. And I operated one of those toll lift things. That's what I did until the.....I was informed that I had to go into service you know. And I...I wish I had enlisted in the Air Force, but I didn't, I just went in.

Q: What kind of supplies were you handling at the depot?

EB: I don't know, everything was boxed. So, I don't know.

Q: Did they take over existing buildings there or did they build their own buildings?

EB: No, Just existing buildings. The supplies, they just filled them up in the building itself.

Q: But were there any troops stationed there?

EB: Not that I know of, no. Not at that time, no.

Q: When did you enter the service?

EB: <laughs> Oh Boy. '40 what was it? '43?

Q: February of '43?

EB: Yeah. Because I spent 3 years in the service. So, I got out like '45, so it must have been about '42 then.

Q: So, in '41 and '42 you were working at the Syracuse Army Depot

EB: Yeah.

Q: About how many people were working at the depot, do you know?

EB: There wasn't an awful lot, no.

Q: What was it like in Syracuse in '41, '42, I mean was there a lot of impact from the war?

EB: Generally, no.

Q: Rationing?

EB: Yeah, gasoline was. That was one of the main factors, you couldn't get gasoline you know, stuff like that. That's about all I can remember.

Q: Okay so you went in February '43. Where were you inducted?

EB: Downtown in the Army. Syracuse Army.

Q: Then what happened, where did you go from there?

EB: The Armored triangle one, I think you got the patch.

Q: Well mine is a little different.

EB: Well yeah, the triangle one, that's where I had my, uhh, basic training.....Fort Knox.

Q: What were you trained as?

EB: Just, I had the basic training. They didn't have anything special, I was a replacement more or less, until I went overseas. Then they shipped us around, I went to Africa. Then from Africa I joined the 102nd Calvary, Mechanized.

Q: The 102nd Calvary?

EB: Yeah the 102nd.....Calvary Mechanized though.

Q: That was a National Guard outfit wasn't it?

EB: I don't know if it was or not. But they were a special outfit, that's all I know of. Glad I got into it and not the regular army outfit, I didn't want the army. I guess maybe I wasn't.....my sight wasn't very good and when they would put me on the rifle range they uh.....I could never hit the targets, it took me 3 different times on there to make me qualified. But I guess they got tired of me going down there so they let me go through anyway.

Q: Well let's back up a little bit, how did you get from the United States to North Africa?

EB: Shipped overseas on a boat. A tug boat, one of those tiers you know there all up and down they had bunks. And the ship was quarantined because there was a.....spinal meningitis epidemic, at that time. And the guy that had it, he was right in the next bunk with me. So, we stayed there for a little while, but after that we went up the line, went to Africa. I joined that one. Let see.....I went to the invasion of Southern France- Oh Italy, then France, then Germany. I had the invasion of Southern France.

Q: Now, is North Africa where you joined the 102nd Calvary?

EB: Yeah.

Q: What did you do with them? What was your job?

EB: I was on a half-track. Mounted with that big gun, you know the turd gun. I drove that for a while, but I didn't wind up doing when I got into the actual fighting. I was with my Corporal in a jeep. Our main job was just to field the Germans out, get back, then the Army went up. That was our main job.

Q: So, when did you first see combat?

EB: I guess the invasion of Southern France.

Q: Alright so from North Africa you went to Italy.

EB: Yeah.

Q: But you weren't in Combat in Italy?

EB: No, we were running, that's all we were doing. And our main thing was just field out them, where they were and retreat. And it was just running, running,

running all the time, in that respect. Until we got to the division in Southern France and.....that was rough.

Q: Tell me about that, did you go into the assault waves?

EB: No, we were all by ourselves, our unit by ourselves, when we had a chance to get in to the inland, we went it, and we were just like you say, we were just the fielders.

Q: So, when you landed on the beaches, the beaches had already been secured, and you moved inland.

EB: Yep.

Q: When was the first time you came in contact with the Germans?

EB: In France.

Q: Was it soon after the invasion?

EB: Yeah, soon after that.

Q: What happened?

EB: Well we.....let's see....We tracked down the Germans, and we.....this one group was the headquarters of the Germans, and it was a small office, and we took them as prisoners. And we treated them well.....one thing okay. Then after a very short time, not very long, they called the Panzer Division to come in.....They took us over. And that's where I got a hit with a shrapnel and I carried the open scar. And I was taken prisoner. Then they lined us up, they were ready to shoot us down, but the Headquarters people said that we treated them real good and that's why, the only reason we were kept alive. There wasn't very many of us, just the small outfit. But I could see that German tank coming and putting that gun right there and being like "oh no", one blast and.....they killed quite a few of our outfits. I was wounded and then taken prisoner, and they took us. Then riding back into....we winded up in Munich, at Moosburg, Stalag 7A They stripped me down, I had just my pants and the army shirts of course, and they took everything away from me. And I lived in those for about 9 months, the same clothes, there wasn't enough water to even wash yourself without trying to drink water, in that respect.

Q: So, let me see if I understand this correctly. You had captured a German Headquarters Group?

EB: Yeah.

Q: And then you were immediately captured by the Germans yourself?

EB: Yeah, because, I don't know, somebody.....they probably knew that their headquarters was stopped, and uh, and that came up and we knew we had it then.

Q: How close was the tank to you?

EB: From here to over there <points at where he is sitting to presumably the other side of the room>

Q: So, it was only a matter of a few yards and you were staring down a German tank barrel?

EB: Yes, they had that gun, I can remember that dirt gun, I can see that German putting it like that <mimics pointing gun with arm stretched out> and it was like “uh oh”.

Q: Not really any place to go.

EB: No there wasn't.

Q: At that point you must have thought you were about to die.

EB: I didn't worry so much about that. You know my biggest worry? Coming home in a basket.

Q: That was more of a worry to you?

EB: Yeah, dying I didn't mind, but coming home after losing an arm or legs, that worried me more than anything else.

Q: Did that influence the way you acted? Did that change the way you behaved in the field? The fact that you were more concerned about being crippled?

EB: Partly. And then when they took us. There was a couple of experiences. Oh, I'll give one before I was captured. My Corporal and I were walking down this one road and we went so far away, we knew the Germans were up in the hills and we were just surveying the hillside and stuff like that and all of a sudden, another Corporal in another jeep came up and said the Captain wanted to talk to my Corporal, so we had to turn around and come back. As we turned around to come back, the Jerry's lopped a mortar shell right in the middle of that jeep where I was.....One of those incidents. And then when I was a prisoner of war they put us in one of those box cars and we slept in barns. This one incident was in the box cars, they were supposed to have the red cross marks on the top of the box cars, but the marks were so weary that they strafed us. The German train went through a little valley, and the Germans got out, they took their machine guns, and they went on the mounds on each side, and if you opened the doors, they would shoot us down. But in the meantime, the American planes, they strafed the upper part of the box car. We was laying down on the floor. You know they had quite a few of us in those box cars, they were called 40/8 but we had to put a 140 in. So, they staffed the whole top of those box cars, and we had no choice. We were either gonna be killed by the Americans or we were gonna be killed by the Germans, because they had the guns on the mounds and ready to, you opened the doors and you were dead.

Q: Now this was in route to Stalag-?

EB: 7A.

Q: Okay. You were in Stalag 7A for about 9 months?

EB: Approximately.

Q: So, tell me....take it from the beginning when you arrived at the camp, what was it like when you first got to the camp?

EB: The German Camp?

Q: Yeah.

EB: What was it like? Well I should've brought some pictures I got, I got the POW booklet you know, and I had my Stalag 7A and it had the- it was just like Army camp life you know, rows and rows of camps and person who was tiered high, 5 or 6 tiers high....they threw us in that. And it was just rough living there, rationing for food, and of course I lost.....I'm 200 lbs. and I was down to about 100 lbs. when I came out. But when they took us in the camp and into Munich to work on the box cars, they gave us potato soup, otherwise we just got what they call grass soup.

Q: So, rations were very slim at the camp?

EB: Very slim. Once in a while, we would get a care package, in a care package, we had about 10 guys jump on that and you probably got about 2 or 3 pieces of the whole thing, but with me, I'm a non-smoker. I got about 3 or 4 cigarettes out of a pack. Those were just like gold to me because even the Germans liked the American cigarettes, I bought food with cigarettes, and that's how I survived starvation.

Q: What kind of food did you buy with cigarettes?

EB: German bread mostly.

Q: Do you remember what the exchange rate was? How much could you get for a cigarette?

EB: 1 cigarette, 1 loaf of bread. Like I said, the cigarettes were like gold. And I'm glad I never smoked. And I still don't smoke.

Q: What was your daily life like? What was your routine in the camp?

EB: The usual, they got us up and they had roll calls to check and see if everyone was there. And then most of the time we.....most of the time I had to go out and work, get in the boxcars and go to Munich and work. We had a couple of occasions where Americans would come over and they was bombing. And they put us in a bomb place, but the experience of hearing those bombs coming down, you could hear them whistling, that's how close they were to us.

Q: What were the German guards like?

EB: Some were pretty good, and others weren't.

Q: Who ran the camp in terms of the Americans, I mean you were all soldiers right?

EB: Yeah. Well it was mixed, they had Russians, they had English, and Australians I think.

Q: So, did you have some kind of chain of command within the camp?

EB: That I don't know, I can't remember. Anyway, at that time I got sick. I guess I had a bad case of arthritis, because I was real bad in my legs, I couldn't work, and I had a....I think he was a Captain, he was a doctor, a trooper.....a paratrooper, he was in the camp and he took care of me, and I was in their offside where they took care of the sick and this captain took care of me. And after I got out of the service, I was going to the VA complaining that my legs were bad and stuff like that. It was too late, the Captain died. His son wrote and told me that "it's too bad my father died, he would've definitely helped you". So, I've been fighting the VA all this time, but I wound up with a nervous condition and they paid me 30% and the arthritis they had to just take care of me and they couldn't do anything about it. I am better of course and my nervous condition, they gave it to me, it was 30%, that was the most they gave me and I had it for about 2 or 3 years, all of a sudden they had a big drive, they cut every body and they cut me down to 10%, so it's been quite a few years I've been fighting them, I had to go in, get examined and they denied me, they even sent the reports to Washington, they denied me. About 6 or 7 years ago my wife and I were both bad, she went in the hospital and I went in the hospital. She was one week, and I was the next week and we went through that several times. The 2nd time she went in I went in with her and I thought I was losing my life. It was too much for me and I passed out and I was having my condition from which the VA said I was alright. So, after I got this other doctor, and I said, "what was wrong with me?", he told me exactly what had, and that's all I wanted to know, I took that report and went back to the VA hospital and in 6 weeks I had my disability back up to 30%.

Q: How long ago was this?

EB: 6 year ago. So, for about 30 years I didn't have it, and they wouldn't pay me, they only paid me back for about 6 months.

Q: Let's go back to the prison camp for a moment. Was there ever any talk of attempting to escape?

EB: Yeah.

Q: What was that like?

EB: It wasn't too much really because we were just soldiers and we had no....we was in a group of our own like we were the working ones, and there wasn't too

much activity in that respect. They had a small camp on one side with the Russians and they tried it but they could never do it. So the Germans <chuckles> I have to laugh at this, the Germans had their police dogs and they have to go in the camps, so the Russians.....so one time they just let the dogs go in.....the dogs never came back.....you know what the Russians did? They ate the dogs!

Q: Did the Germans treat the Russians differently than they treated the Americans?

EB: Yeah, I think so.

Q: Did you ever or did any of the other American soldiers have contact with the Russians?

EB: Not that I know of. We knew they were off to one side. And the episode with the dogs, we heard about it.

Q: What about the forced labor you were involved in, what kind of work did the Germans make you do? We had to.....they took us out to just clean up the mess. It was like out on terminals and road tracks, just clean up the debris. That was about all.

Q: Did you ever have any problems with the German Civilians?

EB: No we weren't involved in that too much no, we had seen a lot of.....what do you call it?.....The Jews and they were in those special prison robes, that's about all.

Q: So, when did you get liberated from the prison camp?

EB: Oh, when the what you call it came in. They came in and they liberated us, but the war was over shortly after that. Because everybody, before they came in everybody, all the Germans were gone, even the civilians and they just walked in. Of course, I was still in that sick bay business. In fact, I was gonna bring in the picture, there's a reporter from Syracuse at the time I got liberated, we got talking and he took a picture, but I don't know where the heck my picture is. It's in the Herald Journal in the Sunday paper. And I was gonna bring it to you and I couldn't find it. I don't know where it is, I had it all together with my discharge and everything else like that.

Q: That would've been a great picture to see.

EB: Maybe you can still get it, it 's in the Herald Journal, it was in the Sunday Paper.

Q: Was that sometime in early May or late April.

EB: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember the actual day you were liberated?

EB: No, I can't.

Q: What happened to you after that?

EB: Uh, they took me, fed me eggnog to get me fattened up, they sent me home, and then I went up north.....(to his wife, off camera) what was the name honey? I went up north and was there a couple of weeks recuperating. <his wife suggests name of place> No,It's a well-known place.

Q: Lake Placid?

EB: It could be. I was there for 2 weeks and then they said, "we'll get you signed to go over to Japan". I said "what?". "Yeah you're ready to go and be shipped out". I'm a prisoner of war, I've got 2 weeks, I'm about a month home and I gotta go out. They were getting me ready and all of a sudden they said that they gotta point system coming up. Well I was more than qualified for it so that was it.....And I got out on the point system. Guess I had more than enough points to qualify. They wanted me to stay in the service, and they said they was gonna give me all kinds of stripes, but I said "look, you didn't give the stripes when I was there, and I was entitled to it". I was a Private First Class, they bumped me up that much. They said they would give me sergeant stripes.....no.....no.

Q: So, you actually got out before the war ended in Japan?

EB: That's right, yeah.

Q: So, tell me, what did you do when you got out?

EB: Well I probably had the arthritis in my legs and I couldn't walk, so I stayed home for a while, and I went to work after that.

Q: What kind of work?

EB: What kind of work? Uh, I worked in an auto store, I was doing break jobs, clutches and stuff like that, rebuilding.

Q: Was this something you had learned to do before the army?

EB: No. And then I was getting disgusted of that and I took a test for my best qualifications to the Army that they had set up, and they said my line of work is clerical or mechanics. I thought okay. Then I got another job in the bus terminal. I was nothing but a parks cleaner. I had that for about a year. Just before that I put in an application for the VA hospital and an application for the post office. It was 5 years before I actually heard from them, would you believe it, both applications come in about the same time and by comparison, pricewise the post office was better. So, I took the post office, and that's where I worked the rest of my life, I put in 30 years, I'm retired, I got 20 years of retirement under to go to Uncle Sam. And that's where I am.

Q: Got married?

EB: Yeah, I got married.

Q: Kids?

EB: No, I got 2 adopted, one girl and one boy. My wife couldn't have any.

Q: Your children, do they ever ask you about your experiences in the war?

EB: No, I told them a few. Now more so my son has asked a little bit more about it and I told him, I want him to have all my medals. I'm gonna have 2 purple hearts, I got one for the wound and they're giving me another one for POW which I'm qualified for, so that's one of 2 purple hearts.

Q: Did you apply for the POW medal?

EB: Yeah. Yeah, that's the one. It's been 3 years, and they still haven't gotten that one.

Q: Yeah, they're a little slow.

EB: I was supposed to get it back in November, and it's now what? January going into February? They're still 3 months behind. I gotta letter finally, they got the official form for the application for it. I'd seen Lois Rinehart and finally I went to her and said hey. She filled it out, she's the purple heart uh, what you call it in the VA hospital?

Q: You know you're also entitled to a decoration from the State of New York.

EB: Yeah, I put that in to. I think I talked to him <points to someone off camera, possibly the cameraman>. So, I made 2 applications, one back to you and one to New York State for the valid medal. That's what I've done, I haven't heard anything yet.

Q: What else does your son ask you about concerning the war? What's he interested in?

EB: Gee I don't know. Just general what I did and how I was wounded and stuff like that.

Q: Well let's go back here for a minute. The 102nd Calvary, what kind of group was that? Good officers, bad officers?

EB: Yeah, they were good, but I had one officer, he had a brown eye and a blue eye, that stuck out with me. He was one of these cocky officers, he was in an armored car, and we was running like crazy as usual, he was in this armored car and he was strutting around. He strutted around a little too much, I guess there was a German sniper, and it got right in between the eyes. I felt sorry for the man but.

Q: What about your Sergeants what were they like?

EB: <chuckles> I couldn't [unclear] because I was in basic training, and then I went into this outfit and like I said I was close with this one Corporal and that's the only thing they know of.

Q: Why were you close to him?

EB: I don't know. He had a pick on me, like I say I was in his panem and we was together a lot. So, he and I, I think are very lucky in that respect, I guess because we didn't get that shell.

Q: You said you did a lot of running around?

EB: Chasing. Chasing. You know, seeing where the Germans are. I wasn't like the army you know, I'm glad I wasn't in the army, I really enjoyed this outfit.

Q: Did you ever keep up with anybody you were in that outfit with, after the war?

EB: No, I tried to, but I couldn't get a hold of anybody. Half of them I can say, half or 3 quarters of them was POW. And there was one fella that, I called him [unclear], but his name was not really that, but that's how I can remember him, he was a guy like I was, and I guess I hear that he finally got, he wasn't a prisoner of war, I heard that he was driving a staff car for one of the Generals. But the rest of them, like I say I couldn't get in touch with any of them. But I heard about his one fella, that was all. I would like to get to know some of-, probably most of them are dead by now. And I'll be 78 this November and like I say, that book that I got, they're dying more and more and even my local paper are averaging about 6 to 8 World War 2 Veterans. They're all in my bracket, 75 to 80 years old. I'm going on 78, I'm hoping to live a few more years.

Q: When you look back now, after all these years, is there anything that particularly stands out in your mind about the time you were in?

EB: No. Maybe I could've gotten a better job if I had stayed out of the service or something like that, but no. I went in, like I say, I had to have a job done.....I went and did my duty.

Q: [unclear], Was it important to do?

EB: No.

Q: Are you proud of your service?

EB: Yes. Like I say, when I came out of the service, I had what they call a 10-point preference, when I applied for the Post Office, that put me up, so I could get a job quicker, more so than some of the other fellas, which was in my favor. And I went in as a, what they call a driver mechanic. What I did at the beginning of the first couple of years was I delivered bulk mail. I got mail from the train station and delivered it to the main Post Office and then from the main Post Office we distributed the broken-down mail to the substations around, that was my job for about 2 years. Then they got to the point where they didn't have any vehicles,

then they started to bring in the vehicles, well then there was a new job created. I got into the stock room and I was called a storekeeper. So, I was in charge of all the parts, I had a budget that I had to follow and stuff like that, \$100,000 spent for all the equipment, vehicles, stuff like that. Of course, they were building up the trucks now.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add? Something we haven't covered that perhaps we should have.

EB: Uh yeah, there's one thing. I heard, I was talking to another fella, I don't know if he was a prisoner of war, I don't think so, he was just another service guy. But he said that the Germans are paying those POWs that were working. I said that I didn't hear nothing about it, no information was through the POW book or anything like that. I would like to get that money if I'm entitled to it. That's the only thing I care about. Probably worth about \$6,000 to \$8,000, I would like it. If I'm entitled to it, I would like it.

Q: And you haven't heard anything about it?

EB: No, nothing, I can't apply for it or anything. They said it was one quick deal.

Q: Did you talk to the VA about it?

EB: No. Like I say it was only hearsay, so I don't know what to do.

Q: How long ago did you hear about this?

EB: About 2 months ago when we went to this restaurant, and one thing led to another.

Q: I'm not sure, I think your best bet would be to ask your VA counselor to see if they can tell you anything. To my recollection, when the Peace Treaty was signed with Germany, that ended all the claims for POW reparation. But I could be wrong.

EB: Like I say it was only hearsay and I couldn't believe it. Of course, the German prisoners in this country were well treated. So, if they said that the Germans had said that they was gonna do that for all the working POWs, that don't mean the Corporals or the what you call it, just the ones like I, I'm a working soldier, and I had to work.

Q: Do you have a regular benefits counselor at the VA you can talk to?

EB: No.

Q: What about your county VA or State division of reference affair?

EB: I don't know. I just found out through him <points off camera> that I could send in this application for this merit award. I didn't know anything about it, and I read up on all this stuff. If I'm entitled to it, I want it. I feel I've done my job, if I'm entitled to it. But if I'm not, I ain't gonna be bothered. It's just like my

disability, I farm ever since I came out of the service. But in that lull period, to me after I got, I got disgusted, but with my wife being in the hospital 6 years ago and when that doctor gave me that report, that's all I wanted and there was no dickering on back up at the VA and I had no problem. Like I say they only paid me about 6 months back. I'm happy with it, the VA is a, they're a wonderful group of people that take care of it.

Q: Alright, well thank you very much.