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BOONTON TOWNSHIP

An effort to keep vets' stories alive

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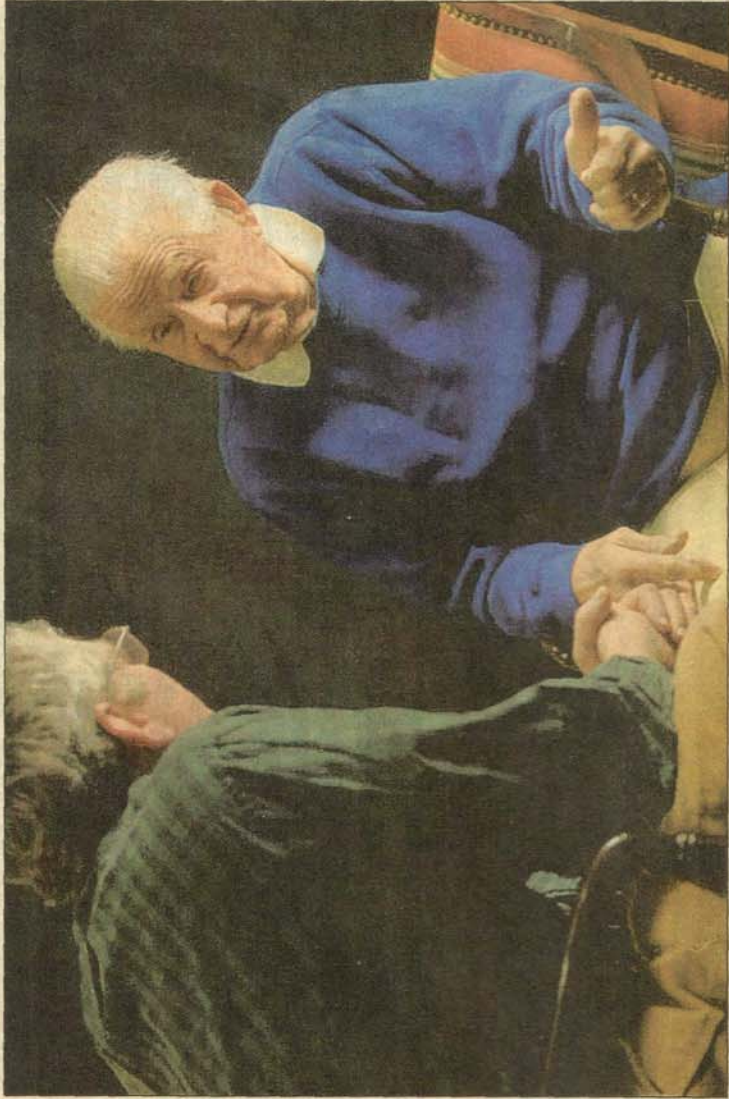
With a video camera recording the conversation, Vic Campbell questioned World War II veteran, John Varga about his experiences six decades ago. There were five other such recording sessions taking place that day at Victoria Mews Assisted Living in Boonton Township. While Campbell is determined to let the World War II stories be known, his interest lies also in another generation - today's school children.

The challenge, according to Campbell, is not in doing the interviews with the members of what is often referred to as the Greatest Generation, but in encouraging schools to have students who are interested in film or history get involved in this project. Campbell has been traveling all over New Jersey taping his interviews with the World War II veterans for a program with the Library of

bridge on the river Kwai, but this was a whole fleet wiped out and soon after Pearl Harbor. The Japanese sank this entire international fleet (consisting of Americans and the British, Dutch, and Australians) in Sundra Strait. A few guys survived and were in slave labor."

At Victoria Mews, Campbell had the chance to learn even more. Varga broke down with emotion several times while recalling the war and his recently deceased wife. He entered the army in 1942 and while serving as tank communications sergeant found himself in the only tank of 17 to survive a battle in Germany. Varga said that after new recruits and tanks were sent. Training the new guys and painting the tanks white to blend in to the winter landscape left no time for sleep.

Eventually, Varga's tank was in Austria, where they helped to liberate a concentration camp. He and the other soldiers offered their



PIERFRANCESCO BACCARO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Vic Campbell of Sparta prepares for his interview with World War II veteran John Varga. This is part of Campbell's Veteran Interview Project which will be hosted on his Web site, www.me3tv.org.



PIERFRANCESCO BACCARO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Vic Campbell of Sparta, left, has just finished his interview with World War II veteran Robert Aquino, who served as a Marine stationed in the Pacific for 33 months from 1943 through 1945. Also pictured are Hannah Rowan, resident program assistant at Victoria Mews Assisted Living in Boonton Township.

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ers. Varga then recalled the day, about six years after the war, when while shopping with his wife at the Grand Union in Elmwood Park, he was approached by a man who recognized him for freeing him from the concentration camp. Varga's family was from Hungary and the two men conversed in Hungarian.

Among the other vets Campbell recorded at Victoria Mews was Robert Aquino. Originally from Boonton, he entered the Marine Corps when he was 19 and served in the Pacific, the Marshall Islands more specifically. He recalled in *Neighbor News* that he served in the same platoon as Al Scerbo, a former Boonton mayor and alderman, as well as a former Morris County freeholder.

Aquino observed how tough training camp was - even swatting away bugs from one's head while marching back and forth in the "hot" boondocks could get one into trouble.

Robert Muilenburg was a lieutenant commander in the Navy and served in an antisubmarine as part of Task Group Alfa, in which he chased Russian submarines during the Cold War. He volunteered

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ricanes in a destroyer as "not a pleasant memory."

Thanks to efforts by people like Campbell, the facts of bygone war days will not be lost. With Campbell's determination, the younger generation may actually hear these important stories.

tapes and make them available to the public.

Noting that schools have the necessary equipment, Campbell said, "One person can only do so much. My hope is to get schools interested. That's where it needs to be. I'm happy to teach kids how to do this. I'd be happier to tell 10 kids how to do this rather than have me come here and there are no kids in the room. There's no progression."

The Sparta resident, who has a non-profit Web site on me3tv.org, started talking with veterans 15 years ago when he attended a meeting for Tin-Can Sailors. A vet himself, but younger than the World War II vets he met that day, he listened to the "interesting stories" and thought he should tape them.

"Every now and then you hear a story and think, I would never have thought that, and I know my history well," said Campbell.

He added, "That was a surprise. Whenever you talk to veterans you end up with a surprise story. You learn something."

Learn something, he did. Stories about the "USS Houston" prompted Campbell to make a documentary on the subject. "It is one I knew nothing about. I knew the

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to be in the Navy, where he could be an officer. This was his way of avoiding the draft. It did not however keep him from difficult times. He described going through hur-

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