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Vet talks to students of WWII

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DANBURY -- For nearly 60 years, **J. Arthur "Joe" Setaro** kept his memories bottled up. Memories of battling German soldiers in the sewers of Paris. Images of friends being shot or blown up by booby-traps. Thoughts of the half-dozen times he'd nearly been killed.

"You never talked about it after you got back," said **Setaro**, now 86. After the war when the topic of his military service came up, "I'm a veteran of the European Theater" was about as detailed as he got.

But these days, the retired architect and teacher is a frequent guest speaker when area high schools study World War II in history class.

"It's just taken off for him," said Sally Markiewicz, media specialist at Henry Abbott Technical School, who convinced **Setaro** to start talking about his wartime experiences. "The students are very respectful. They don't have a lot of experience with people who have actually fought, and they get a perspective that you can't get in a text book."

Setaro, a Danbury native, enlisted at the outset of the war. He was assigned to a military police unit and for more than two years went through a variety of training exercises and assignments that had him wondering what plans the Army brass had in mind for him and his fellow soldiers.

Today he realizes they were being prepared for the job they eventually were called upon to do, clear Paris of enemy troops after the city was liberated.

Setaro's 709th Military Police Battalion arrived in the French capital in late August 1944, just days after most of the Germans had withdrawn. But pockets of enemy soldiers remained, harassing Allied

troops and hiding in bombed-out buildings and the city's elaborate storm sewer system.

Setaro's unit was charged with rooting them out. During a four-week stretch, six of his friends were killed. Several times he nearly lost his own life.

"I call it Hell Time," **Setaro** said. It's a period he treads lightly upon in his talks, because "it brings back too much bad stuff."

After the war, **Setaro** became an architect and worked in New York City for several years before coming back to Danbury in the mid-1950s.

After unsuccessfully attempting to find employment in his profession, he started teaching blueprint reading at Abbott Tech, a job that eventually allowed him start his own design business on the side.

He married in 1961, and he and his wife, Mary, now have two children and two grandchildren.

The wall of silence that **Setaro**, like many other combat veterans, erected around his wartime experiences started to crumble in early 2005, after he was given a DVD of the HBO television miniseries "Band of Brothers," which chronicles the experiences of a group of soldiers who fought in France.

He began having trouble sleeping. His wife said he was tossing and turning at night and talking in his sleep, experiencing something a later generation of veterans referred to as "flashbacks."

"It really shook me up," he said.

About the same time, **Setaro** was gathering paperwork for his income taxes and discovered one document had inadvertently been sent to an old military post office address, even though he'd been out of the Army for nearly six decades.

As a result, he decided to research the murders of several GIs that occurred while he was stationed in Paris. He did this in part because he believes he may have narrowly escaped becoming one of the victims.

The search took him to the library at Abbott Tech, where he met Markiewicz.

"It was something really obscure, and I couldn't find anything about it on the Internet," Markiewicz said. "But as he was leaving, I asked him if he would consider speaking to our history students. He looked me straight in the eye and said no."

But a few weeks later, **Setaro** called her back and said he'd

reconsidered.

"It was something I had to do," he said.

Since then, **Setaro** has even started wearing his World War II veteran's cap to parades and other events. When he does, complete strangers come up to him, shake his hand, and thank him for his service.

"Hitler was well on his way to dominating the world," **Setaro** said. "People do remember, and they appreciate it."

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