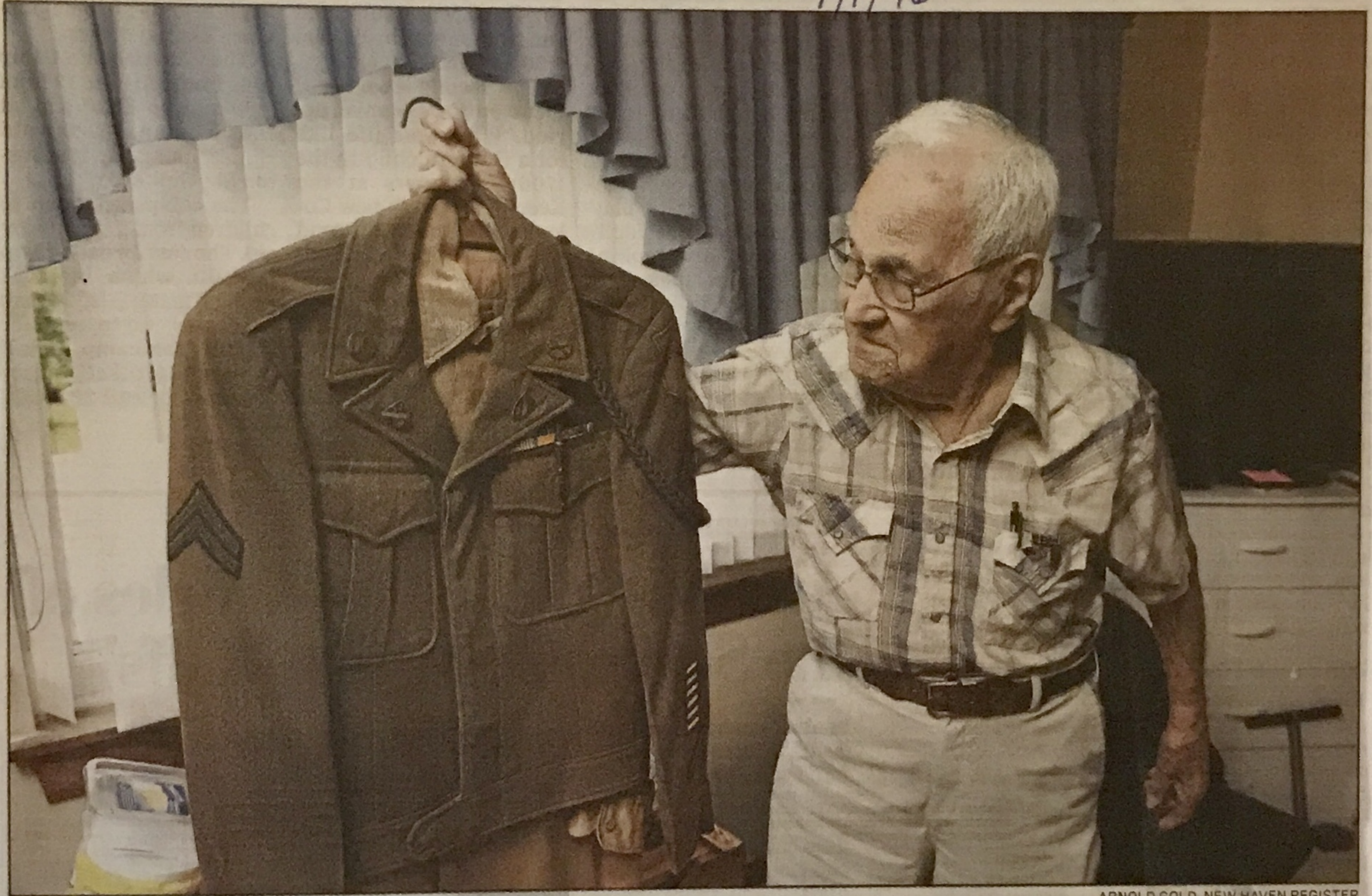


A REAL PATRIOT

World War II hero "Pop" Boboc celebrates 94th B-day with D-Day anniversary

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ARNOLD GOLD-NEW HAVEN REGISTER

Ninety-four year old John Boboc looks over his Army uniform from World War II at his home in Branford.

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BRANFORD » John Boboc still remembers the cry in the dark he heard on June 6, 1944. "Help me!" someone was calling from a bank on Omaha Beach. As heavy rounds of artillery fire whistled through the night and bombs dropped from above, he climbed to the top

where he found a wounded soldier.

But U.S. Army veteran Boboc of the 1st Infantry Division's Company B, 7th Field Artillery Battalion insists he wasn't a hero for telling the soldier not to panic, that he wasn't going to leave him.

"I just happened to be there, just saw he was bleeding, and needed help," said the gentlemanly, bespectacled Bran-

ford resident known as Pop at a lively surprise party on Monticello Drive to celebrate his 94th birthday.

"He never talked about it until recently because he really doesn't think he did anything special," said Pop's granddaughter Sandy O'Hare, 48, who, along with her mother, Judy Tupy, arranged the party to mark Pop's actual birth-

day, which is June 6, the 72nd anniversary of D-Day.

That's right. On his 22nd birthday, during the largest amphibious invasion in history, Cpl. Boboc used a half-roll of toilet paper to make a path down the bank in the darkness of night so medics could find their way up the hill with a stretcher.

Patriot

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Still, "it was nothing special," maintained the animated nonagenarian, who arrived at Ellis Island with his mother from Romania in 1927, reuniting with his father and settling in Bridgeport.

"Textbook definition American hero," countered his grandson Lee Letourneau, 44, as Pop, who prefers hugs to handshakes, greeted his younger brother and sister and then a trio of great grandsons with a warm embrace.

To Pop's mind, there was nothing heroic when, as an 18-year-old, he joined the U.S. Army on July 23, 1940 to defend a nation he had only called home for 13 years.

"I had no choice," said Boboc, whose first name the Army changed from Iancu to John. "It was the Great Depression. I needed a job."

So, naturally, Boboc "was just doing [his] job" when he landed in Algeria on Nov. 8, 1942 as part of Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa. The campaign represented the first action for American ground troops since the attack on Pearl Harbor and helped force the retreat, and eventual surrender, of Rommel's Afrika Korps.

Likewise, for the Allied invasion of Sicily, beginning on the night of July 10, 1943. Cpl. Boboc saw action in an operation that drove Axis air, land, and naval forces from the island, toppled Mussolini from power, and caused Hitler to divert troops to Italy, resulting in a reduction of German strength on the Eastern Front.

Still, asked about those battles and then about the Normandy Invasion, the retired SNET cable splicer, seated on a sofa amid the aroma of barbecue and the spirited conversa-

tion of family and friends, shrugged.

"I was there," he said, as slides of his life as a soldier, a newlywed, a young father, a Shriner, and a grandfather, shuttered across a screen. "I had no choice but to be there. And I got lucky."

Lucky indeed. When his landing craft alighted on Omaha Beach, he found himself walking together with another soldier he didn't know. The two hit the sand as the shelling started. Cpl. Boboc got "a little nick in his shoulder... a small thing, it was noth-

ing, like getting scratched," he said, in explaining why he chose not to report it.

The soldier lying next to him in the sand never got up.

From Normandy, his company proceeded through Northern France, central Europe, the densely forested Ardennes where he saw the tail end of the Battle of the Bulge, and then into Rhineland, with Cpl. Boboc again meeting with fortune—or a sense of foreboding.

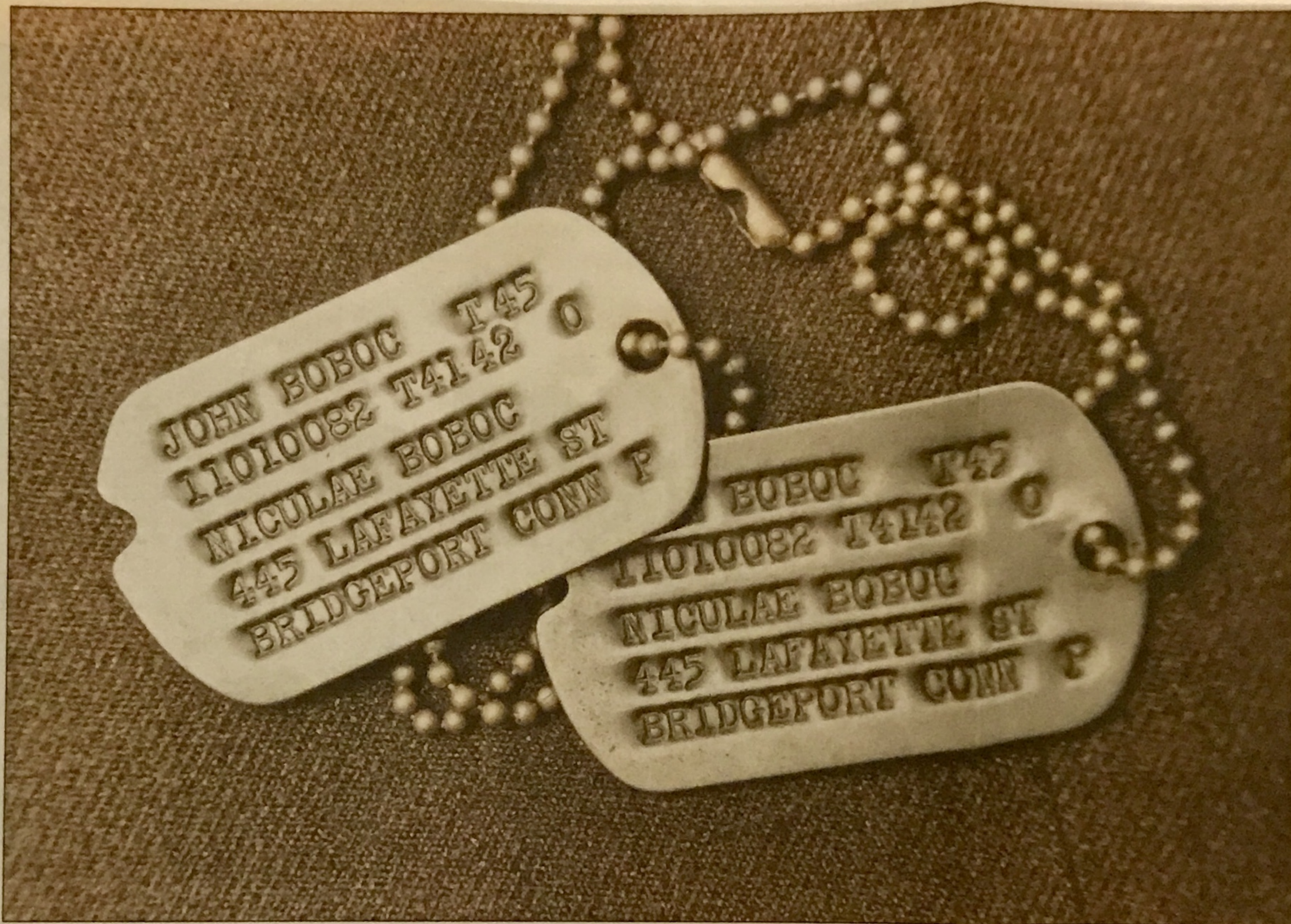
"We had set our guns up, dug our trenches into a

hill, and that's when I had a gut feeling that someone was watching us, so I said to my crew, 'I'm not staying here, I don't know about you guys, I'm moving,'" said Boboc.

Five minutes later, the hill got shelled.

"For some reason things were happening that were in my favor," said Pop, shaking his head. "I mean, I'm still here."

And then he looked around the room. "Just look. Look at my beautiful family. I am truly a lucky man."



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Above: John Boboc's dog tags from his time in the Army during World War II photographed at his home in Branford on 6/17/2016.

Right: A photograph of John Boboc from his time in the Army during World War II hangs at his home in Branford on 6/17/2016.

