

John Skeen will turn 105 years old October 3rd, 2023. He was drafted into the U.S. Army in January of 1941 when the West Virginia National Guard was activated. He was among the first troops sent to Alaska as part of the "Asiatic-Pacific Campaign".

From there he went to Camp Adair, Oregon where a new division was formed, the "Trailblazers". The name originated from the pioneers moving west into Oregon and blazing trails through the thick evergreen forests of the Pacific Northwest. John served a Combat Infantry Rifle Platoon Leader in the 70th Infantry Division which adapted the Trailblazer title when they were activated in 1943. It is little known that his unit fought in the Aleutian Islands Pacific campaign which was second only to Iwo Jima in terms of percent of personnel lost in combat.

The 275th Infantry Regiment of the division, John's outfit, fought in the major European Campaigns: The Ardennes, also known as the "Ardennes Forest" or "Forest of Ardennes". This region of extensive forests, rough terrain, rolling hills and ridges, which extends from Belgium to Luxembourg well into Germany and France. Central Europe: including "Alsace-Lorraine" and the "Vosges", a range of low mountains in Eastern France near its border with Germany where in 1944 the 275th had to endure the coldest winter in 54 years; the "Rhineland" and "Saarland".

SSG John was awarded a "Purple Heart" for wounds he received in the small French village of "Lixing-le's-Saint-Avoid" and a "Bronze Star" for taking out a German machine gun bunker despite having already been wounded and later hit by shrapnel. In addition, John received the "Good Conduct" medal and "Presidential Unit Citation Award". John was offered battlefield commission twice but turned it down because he did not want to give up leadership of his platoon.

John has served as Vice President and the archivist for the "Trailblazers Association", working with the editor of the newsletter and as a liaison between members of the military and extended family and friends. An avid Spartan fan, now living in Bradenton, Florida he wears his Spartan cap with pride. In 2013 he spoke to Michigan State students in Professor Anita Skeen's class-his daughter. In October of this year, John was recognized with five other Suncoast veterans across three generations with a Congressional Commendation by Congressman Vern Buchanan.