

40th Assembly District, Community Spotlight:

Sergeant Ray Zaragosa



Assemblyman Mike Morrell recognizes San Bernardino resident Ray Zaragosa as a true hero in our community. "His story is truly captivating and his service to our nation needs to go on record." said Morrell, "We cannot forget the sacrifice made by our veterans in wars past and serving our nation as we speak. His journey is an inspiration."

In 1943, Ray convinced his mother to let him join the army. He took a train to Arkansas' Camp Joseph T. Robinson for basic training, where in Sergeant Zaragosa's words, "we had to learn to stay alive." They trained day and night and had to sleep in the woods, bringing with them only their duffle bags. "When we woke in the morning, we would shake out our sleeping bags and see rattlesnakes." From Arkansas, Ray made his way to Boston, where he would sail to Marseille, France, to join the 83rd Infantry Division under General Patton. While in France, his sergeant asked if anyone would like to volunteer for combat, and "we were crazy enough that we volunteered and went." Ray fought all through northern France and into Germany.

To conceal themselves from the enemy they dug and hid in foxholes. The foxholes were dug to accommodate two soldiers. "The first person digs a hole to get in and when he is finally inside he digs more space for the next man...we stayed down there and would just listen to the Screaming Mimis overhead...no soldier can ever say they were not scared in those foxholes." After the loss of his sergeant and lieutenant in battle, Ray himself was promoted to sergeant. He and his men crossed the Rhine River in Germany. It was after crossing the river that Ray was hit by an exploding shell, losing his leg in the blast. Ray remembered little at this point except that he threw his gun in front of his body to protect himself, because if the Germans had seen his gun they would have shot him. His memory after being hit fades in and out. He does know that his comrades had captured four German soldiers and those soldiers were forced to carry him to a nearby medical facility.

After Ray recovered, he returned to California. In his post-war years, by his own admission he became quite "a rascal." His favorite pastime was fast cars and evading speeding tickets. Despite the handicap of losing a limb, he pursued life to the fullest. He did not let his wartime experience or wounds limit his possibilities. He found a career in the automotive industry, married his sweetheart, and raised four children. All in all, it can truly be said that Sergeant Ray Zaragosa is an American hero.

