

GUEST COMMENTARY:

Oral history interview recalls Queen Mary during WW II

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Contributing writer

November is a month with two important holidays, Veterans Day and Thanksgiving, in which we reflect upon and honor our service members and appreciate the goodness, abundance and history of our nation.

Along with Memorial Day earlier in the year, paying tribute to our military is a duty that communities and local institutions take seriously. Not surprisingly examples of this abound in the patriotic South Bay.

Torrance's Armed Forces Day Parade honors its military members and is the country's longest running city-sponsored military parade.

A memorial garden across from City Hall in

Palos Verdes Estates remembers fallen soldiers from all military conflicts and two policemen who died in the line of duty.

The Palos Verdes Library District's Local History Center conducts oral history interviews, allowing us to capture the voices and recollections of these service members.

One such interview is with longtime Palos Verdes Estates resident, Gregory Sarmanian a decorated veteran of World War II.

Born in 1922, Sarmanian served in the U.S. Army with Troop E of the 18th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized and was involved in one of the momentous battles of World War II, the Battle of the Bulge.

In his interview Sarmanian details his trip across the Atlantic aboard

the Queen Mary, which had been converted to a troop ship, noting the activities of his fellow soldiers during the four day voyage.

He recounts training in England and testing equipment in preparation for battle and going into the closest town for "beers and a couple of sandwiches" when off-duty.

A modest, self-effacing man, Sarmanian also speaks of his experiences on the battlefield where "we were [at] the meeting place of the Ger-

mans on one side, and the Americans on the other."

He remembers running out to an abandoned half-track in the middle of an open field, and driving it to some bushes where his comrades had taken cover. When he arrived, the soldiers piled in. Sarmanian recounts with humility and humour, "Fortunately, one of them, a sergeant, a tank driver or something, pushed me off the driver's seat...and took the wheel himself...I never had a good sense of direction."

Captain Clinton Meadows and 1st Lieutenant Reginald Smith of Sarmanian's unit in eyewitness accounts, provide further detail of what happened on December 18, 1944—two days after the Battle of the Bulge erupted.

Sarmanian gave first

aid to wounded troops in the midst of "intense fire from enemy 120mm mortar, high velocity self-propelled guns, bazooka, three heavy machine guns and countless small arms," despite receiving injuries to his head, face and left arm.

As one of the bazooka rounds nearly severed a fellow soldier's leg, Sarmanian, again disregarding his own safety and injuries, moved the wounded comrade to a shell hole and performed a field amputation on the man's leg.

For these deeds, Sarmanian received the Distinguished Service Cross, our Nation's second highest military decoration for valor and awarded for extraordinary heroism while engaged in action against an enemy of the United States.

Sarmanian also recalls unexpected moments

during the war. After falling asleep in a wagon trailer outside a German farmhouse, he was awakened in the morning by a grandmotherly German woman who "gave me a glass of warm milk which I drank right away...Little things like that stick in your mind."

As November draws to a close, we take this time to thank and honor Gregory Sarmanian and all other service members and law enforcement personnel who have served and sacrificed for our country. The Local History Center strives to ensure this history is remembered for future generations.

Dennis Piotrowski and Monique Sugimoto are adult services librarians at the Palos Verdes Library District.

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