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 Queen Mary, which had been converted to a troopship, 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.

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, noting the activities of his fellow soldiers during the four day voyage.

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."

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A modest, self-effacing man, Sarmanian also speaks of his experiences on the battlefield where "we were [at] the meeting place of the Germans on one side, and the Americans on the other."

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