

Orman Zachariah Rippeon, or “Ormie” as he was affectionately known to everyone, was born on August 10, 1919 in Frederick, MD. He was a dedicated member of American Legion Post 171, working as a Bingo volunteer. He loved to dance with his wife Alda Rippeon, and together they participated in many other Legion activities. He also faithfully attended Post meetings and functions such as dinners and outings. He was a member of the American Legion for over 62 years, a Life Member of Post 171 in Damascus, MD, a member of VFW Post 10076 in Mt. Airy, MD, and Past President of the Hyattstown Volunteer Fire Department. In partnership with his brother Dick, they owned and operated Rippeon’s Service Center in Damascus, MD, for many years. Ormie passed away before we could interview him for this article, so what you read here is based on a recorded interview conducted several years ago by a Unit 171 Member. He will be sorely missed, and we hope this article does justice to a member of the Greatest Generation.

Ormie enlisted in the Army during World War II, serving as a Sergeant with the 99th Infantry Division, and was twice wounded during the Battle of the Bulge. His injuries plagued him throughout the remainder of his life, and they would eventually contribute to his death on November 10, 2013. His military decorations include two Purple Hearts, Bronze Star Medal, American Theatre Campaign Medal, and European–African–Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with Battle Star, WWII Victory Medal, and Good conduct Medal. Ormie was also nominated for the Silver Star.

Upon enlisting, Ormie’s first day was spent at Ft. Meade, MD where he went through the usual indoctrination. He got shots “from the start of the day to the end of the day”, and was issued clothing that “was just about 10 sizes too big for me”. It was a hectic day because he had to keep all the clothes until he could get some free time to change them for something that fit.

After completing indoctrination at Ft. Meade, MD, Ormie was sent to Camp Van Dorn, MS, to complete training. From there he went to Paris, TX for additional training, then on to Boston, MA where he left for Europe on a ship which was part of the biggest convoy that ever crossed the ocean. Ormie said: “They had every kind of ship you could imagine.” Upon arriving in Southampton, England they had to take training to deal with “those buzz bombs that came at us from Germany”.

His infantry division landed at Le Havre, France where there was nothing standing, It was totally bombed out, no buildings standing, nothing. From Le Havre they went through Belgium and on into Germany. Ormie tells the following story on his taped interview: “We were in Belgium, and it was raining, cold, everybody’s feet were wet. Some of the boys got their feet frozen so when we were in Belgium we was gonna camp one night and all the noncom’s – there was 4 of us – got everybody to get their pup tents up and we dug trenches around the tents so the water would run around the tents instead of underneath. While we were doing this the noncoms saw this farmhouse down in the valley. So after we got everybody settled us noncoms decided to go down to the farmhouse and see who was there. When we got to the farmhouse I could hear voices, so I knocked, and it was a little while before they answered the door. The cow stables were right on the side of the kitchen so this woman opened the door and she screamed “Americana!” She told me she

thought it was Germans at the door coming for her husband to put him in the army, and that her husband was hiding up in the cow stable. He came out after she yelled "Americana!" She saw that our boots were wet and muddy, and took our shoes off, washed our socks, and put our shoes by the fireplace. One of the noncoms was a mess sergeant. The farmers brought out eggs, which we hadn't had in a long time other than powdered eggs. They said they didn't have any meat, so our mess sergeant went back and got a big tin of Spam, and they cooked us some nice Spam and eggs. It was whole lot better than the C-Rations we were eating all the time! Then they put straw down for beds, and that's where we slept there that night. The next morning our boots and socks were all clean and dry, and we had to get back to our camp before the other guys woke up so they wouldn't know we were down there. When we got back everybody was wondering how we came to have dry shoes! We never did tell them about the farm house! That was a real nice day."

After walking all through Belgium we came to Germany. We didn't know exactly what was going to happen in Germany, but we know something big was up. They didn't have us walking all day and half the night through Belgium and into Germany for nothing. And that's when we ran into the war at the Battle of the Bulge. I got wounded in the back of the leg on Dec 17, 1944. When the guys were carrying me back on the litter and the Germans started shelling us again, the guys who were carrying me put me down and jumped in a foxhole. I got wounded again from the shelling and got a piece of shrapnel in my shoulder, which is still in there today. I spent Christmas Day 1945 in a hospital in Paris, France. When they sent us back to England they didn't have any room for us. All the rooms were filled so they pitched a great big tent about 100' x 40' and put saw horses in there and put our litters on the saw horses, and put in 4 or 5 kerosene burners for heat. The smell of the kerosene burners was terrible! After spending a few months in England they flew us back to New York. Many of us were in body casts and racked up in bunks along the inside of the airplane walls. The plane hit turbulence and knocked a bunch of the guys, including me, out of our racks and onto the floor of the plane. It was good thing I had a body cast on because the guy in the rack above me fell on top of me!

While on the plane they had us fill out a paper asking where the closest hospital was to our home. I put down Walter Reed. The guy came back and said: "You don't think we're going to stop at Walter Reed just to drop you off do you." I said: "I don't want to call you what I think you are, but why did you ask us where the closest hospital was when you knew all along you wasn't going to take us there?." He wasn't happy, and they finally took us to Camp Pickett, VA where I stayed for over a year. A transfer finally came through and I went to Walter Reed, where I stayed another year. I was in hospitals for over two years altogether – four years in the service and two years in the hospital. I was discharged from the Army at Walter Reed and went to a rehab at Silver Spring, MD. After discharge my brother picked me up, and that was all I wanted to see about the Army. After I got home I was a mechanic for a good while. There was a Sinclair service station in Damascus and I was good friends with the man that could hire someone. I asked for the job and he gave it to me.

One thing that happened was when I was in that hospital tent in England. There was a kid in there that had both feet frozen and he was in the bed beside me. The doctors were going to take his feet off and wouldn't sign the papers to let them. His feet looked huge, gray, swollen and all. I told him that he was going to get blood poisoning, and they'd have to take his legs off above the knee. I said that getting legs cut off below the knee was a whole lot better than above the knee. I kept talking with him and asked him: "What would your mama say?" I said your mother will still love you whether you have feet or not so you should sign those papers. I finally talked him into signing. He went for the operation and I never saw him again.

His best buddy was his First Sergeant. They were exactly the same age; born the same day, the same year. Ormie said he never kept in touch with his Army buddies, and never went to any reunions. He said the war was over with and he just wanted to get back to his life. I guess that could be the epitaph of most WWII veterans: I did my duty and now I just want to get back to my life.