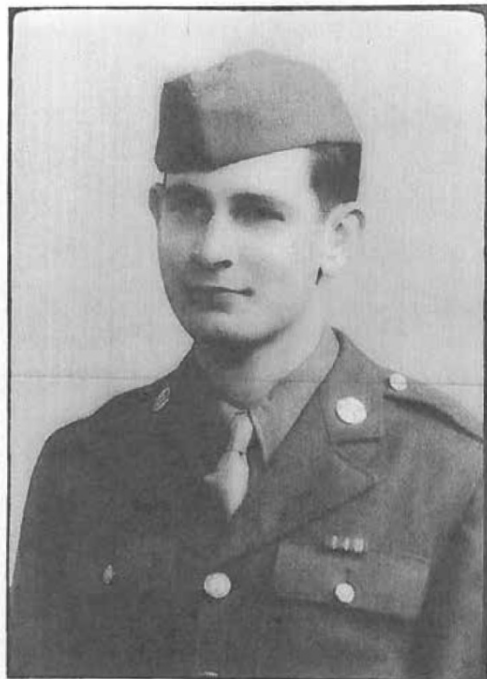


DISTINGUISHED RESIDENT



# WAR *and* PEACE



HAROLD MUELLER IS  
A TRUE AMERICAN HERO

Franklin Roosevelt had promised the mothers of America that no troops would be on the high seas over the holidays in 1943. But two days before Christmas that year, Harold Mueller and 13,000 other young soldiers and crew members stepped aboard the RMS Queen Mary, bound for Europe and a war that would define their generation.

A fresh-faced 20-year-old from St. Louis, Mueller had been drafted into the U.S. Army the previous March. After nine months of artillery training—first with the 549th Gun Battalion and then the 110th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion—and two months awaiting combat in England, Mueller's unit learned they'd take part in the Normandy invasion.

Between 3 a.m. and 5 p.m. on June 6th, they waited aboard the Navy's tank landing ship (LST) #291 while the Army Rangers and the 29th Infantry Division went ashore. For hours, LST #291 took on and treated the many soldiers bloodied during the initial assaults on Omaha Beach.

At 5 p.m., it was Mueller's turn to go ashore on what was dubbed "Hitler's Crawlin' Coffin," an 18-ton artillery tractor that carried the 90-mm anti-aircraft gun and its crew. "I was unprepared for the gruesome sight," he recalls. "No movie could capture the sights and sounds of that day... that would remain with me forever." But Mueller's company made it through and continued fighting, providing support to the 29th Infantry Division with anti-aircraft action at night and field action during the day. The 110th would become the first 90mm gun battalion to shoot down a German plane on French soil.

After Normandy, Mueller's company was positioned at Vierville-sur-Mer, France. It was there, among the hedgerows, where Mueller's company suffered its first casualty of the war as they took on small arms fire from the Germans. The 110th 90mm gun battalion fired anti-personnel and anti-tank shells throughout the war including the Battle of the Bulge, the bloodiest battle fought by Americans during World War II.

"I drove a CAT," said Mueller. "That is, a 10-ton bulldozer-type tractor with a cab in the front for the driver. The gun crew sat facing each other in the rear. It had storage for 300 gallons of gasoline and on each side it carried 26 shells—a total of 52. It also towed the 90mm gun that weighed 10 tons. It was like a bomb ready to explode. My guardian angel must have been keeping close tabs on me," he recalled. "Looking back to some of the near fatal events, I sometimes shudder."

One of those events occurred on December 19th, when his unit was stationed at Malmedy, Belgium, on anti-tank duty. After three days without sleep,



"I EXTEND THE HEARTFELT THANKS OF A GRATEFUL NATION," WROTE PRESIDENT HARRY TRUMAN IN A LETTER TO MUELLER AFTER THE WAR (LEFT). HAROLD MUELLER WAS MARRIED TO HIS WIFE ALBERTA JEANETTE (ABOVE) FOR 65 YEARS.

Mueller and the other tank drivers set up the 90mm gun next to a solidly built commercial building and went inside around midnight to finally get some shuteye. During the night, an 88mm German shell struck

the building. It buried the truck outside under a ton of bricks and ripped the soles of the sleeping soldiers shoes off. A hot tile from the flue that weighed about 100 pounds fell between Mueller and the sergeant, missing them both by inches.

Mueller recalled other close calls, including several attempted infiltrations by German troops who had stolen dog tags off dead American soldiers. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, Mueller was fortunate enough to return home after his service and live a full life in the country he loves so dearly. Mueller's 110th AAA Battalion received the Normandy Invasion Arrow, five Battle Stars, and the French Croix de Guerre. **S**