

(This is from an email from Dr. Carlos Munoz to Paula Kerger.)

Dear Mr. Kerger: Below is an op ed I wrote on Veterans Day about a Mexican American WW II hero. Please pass it on to Mr. Ken Burns and others working on your forthcoming WW II PBS series so they can learn that Mexican Americans also fought in that war. Dr. Carlos Munoz, Jr.

Honoring an American hero this Veterans' Day

By Carlos Munoz Jr.

503 words

On this Veterans Day, let's honor the many Latinos who have served in our armed forces.

One such person is Meregildo "Mike" Carrillo.

Carrillo is 82 years old and lives in San Angelo, Texas, where he was born to poor Mexican working class parents. Few people outside of his family and close friends know that he is one of the most decorated Latino World War II veterans.

He has never received public recognition for his combat heroism. His city's public officials have never honored him on July 4 or Veterans' Day.

Mike Carrillo joined the U.S. Army in 1943. He vividly remembers that he and other Mexicans were not allowed to stay in the city hotel that temporarily accommodated Army recruits pending their being shipped out to basic training. Back then, Mexican Americans, like African Americans, were not allowed in the hotel.

Carrillo went on to fight in some of the major battles of Europe, including the Battle of the Bulge and the D-Day invasion of Normandy. He was lucky to survive without being wounded, although he was in harm's way many times.

His numerous medals included two Silver Stars and five Bronze Stars. He received one of the silver stars for "gallantry in action" in the last battle that was fought in Germany.

The U.S. Army citation describes his gallant action as follows: "During an attack on enemy positions, Sgt. Carrillo went forward of the company to act as advance point. Encountering an enemy outpost of four men, Sgt. Carrillo personally killed three and captured the fourth, enabling his company to continue the advance and gain the objective without delay."

After this last battle, he was one of the first U.S. soldiers to liberate the surviving Jewish victims of the Dauchau concentration camp. He has never forgotten the half dead bodies of the starving men and women he carried out in his arms like babies.

Mike Carrillo served the nation with pride and put his life on the line, like other WW II Latino veterans who served the nation with courageous distinction. Latino soldiers earned a disproportionate number of combat medals and other decorations, but their sacrifices and contributions have been largely overlooked.

In Iraq today, Latinos are once again putting their lives on the line to prove their loyalty to a nation that does not honor them away from the battlefield. Many will return home to be treated like second-class citizens at best, and, at worst, as foreigners in their own land.

They deserve better.

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