

World War II Veteran

By Allena Tapia

Reynaldo Rendón was a long way from his birthplace in San Vicente, Nuevo Leon, the night he learned to pray. In fact, behind enemy lines in France shortly after D-Day, 1944, he was about 5000 miles from Mexico and his home in Texas.

"We were in the woods...at night we were supposed to dig a foxhole. Pretty soon we heard a plane. They told us no American plane would fly during the night. All of a sudden there was a light, a flare, and it was like daylight. Where they were dropping the bombs, that's where we were.

"I learned to pray, I've been praying every night since then."

Born in 1920, Rendón grew up the son of a laborer in Texas and partially in Mexico.

"That was during the depression. [My dad] didn't like the life in Mexico, he had been raised in the U.S. So he went back."

Rendón and the family rejoined his father in the U.S. in 1934, and that's when he began working in the fields, at the age of 14. "I didn't know anything about working in the fields. I hated it. But I got used to it, because I had to eat."

While sharecropping in Mississippi in 1942, Rendón was called to register for the military by the U.S. government. "The Japanese had already bombed Pearl Harbor by then. Everybody had to register." Although he didn't pass the language test needed to enlist, a young man's sense of adventure had already taken hold.

"I read a lot in Life magazine, there in North Africa the war had already started. I had seen a lot of pictures. I wanted to see those parts."

But his mother followed her instincts: "[She] wanted me to go back to Mexico because the war was getting nasty." Rendón resisted, and instead his father sent him to Corpus Christi. It was there that Rendón met his destiny.

In Texas, immigration stopped the bus that he was traveling on. When given the choice between jail, deportation, and joining the Army, Rendón took his chance to see the world.

He was taken to Fort Houston in San Antonio. During his induction, Rendón was first asked to become an American citizen, but he refused. The army threatened to send him back to jail, but completed his induction without citizenship on Oct. 23, 1942.

After completing several years of basic and advanced training, the soldier was shipped to Scotland as part of the 1303 Engineer's Regiment. He arrived on British soil, a Mexican citizen, fighting for the US; "When we left [the U.S.] they gave me another opportunity to become a citizen. I said 'I feel ok, I'm all right.'"

Later, the army attempted to swear him in a third time. "There were 30 or 40 other people. And I rejected again. 'No, I want to stay the way I am.'" Some of his friends suggested becoming a citizen when he got out of the army. "I said, 'Yeah, if I get out.'"

When D-day arrived, the 1303 Engineers held back. "They worked us pretty hard. We were building because the Germans were bombing all the big cities." They eventually entered France and saw heavy action,

"I couldn't tell my parents where I was." Their tour included travel throughout Europe and into the Philippines, and involved several campaigns.

It was on May 10, 1945, in Paris, France that Rendón finally did something he never did on American soil: he became a U.S. citizen. "In Paris, France, I swore and I raised my hand."

When Rendón returned to Texas after the war, he was still treated as a second class citizen, despite his veteran status. At one time, in El Campo, a waitress at a restaurant informed him that she was not allowed to serve Mexicans. "There was still a lot of discrimination down south. It's one of the reasons that I'm here in Michigan."



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Veteran

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Rendón met his wife, Maria de la Luz Lozano, in 1947, and together they moved to Michigan in 1953. The auto industry was booming, and there was plenty of work available. He got a job at Fisher Body and brought several family members along. "At one time there was 5 Rendón's working in the department."

The couple worked with Cristo Rey Church and the local Chávez movement, even participating in a march from Saginaw to Lansing. "After the 60's, when Cristo Rey was born, we were involved a lot. Back then the whole church was cooperating 100%."

The couple now resides in Lansing, and is still involved in the local community. When asked what advice he has for the next generation, the veteran immediately counseled them to value their education. "Somehow, somebody woke up and found out that if you aren't educated, than you're not going to amount to much. Get educated."

Perhaps learning to pray wouldn't hurt either.

Veterano

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en auge, y había mucho trabajo. Él obtuvo trabajo en la planta 'Fisher Body' y trajo también a varios familiares. Una vez hubo 5 personas de apellido Rendón trabajando en el departamento".

La pareja trabajó en la iglesia de Cristo Rey y el movimiento local de Chávez, también participaron en una marcha de Saginaw a Lansing. "Después de los años 60, cuando se originó Cristo Rey estuvimos involucrados mucho tiempo. En ese tiempo toda la iglesia estaba cooperando 100%".

La pareja vive ahora en Lansing, y todavía están involucrados en la comunidad local. Al preguntarle qué consejo le da a la próxima generación, el veterano inmediatamente les aconsejó que valoren su educación. "Por alguna razón, alguien despertó y se dio cuenta que si no estás educado, no vas a valer mucho. Edúcate".

Quizás aprender a rezar tampoco te perjudicaría.