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PRESS RELEASE

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VETERANS LIVING AT LA POSADA RECALL WAR EXPERIENCES IN HONOR OF VETERANS DAY

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. November 2, 2016 – Gerard Halpern was a German refugee who came to the United States in 1937. Six years after his arrival, he left to fight the very country from which he fled, serving as a machine gunner for the U.S. Army in several beachhead landings. Gene Starn left college to enlist in the Army and served in a variety of roles including journalist, chairman of the “Kollege and Khaki Ball”, tank engine mechanic and refrigeration mechanic. Both veterans are residents of La Posada, a continuing care retirement community in Palm Beach Gardens, and will be attending a special ceremony hosted at the senior living community (11900 Taylor Drive, Palm Beach Gardens, FL) on Veterans Day on Friday, November 11 at 3:30 p.m. Nearly 40 veterans live in the community.

“Veterans are a special breed, as they gave a part of their life to serve their country. Whether they served in combat or were responsible for behind-the-scenes work, it is of significance to pay homage the men that admirably signed up to serve and protect their country,” said Halpern. “I was in high school when Pearl Harbor was attacked, and that was the most unified I have ever seen our country. Everyone wanted to volunteer for the Army or assist with the war efforts at that point. I was 16 at the time and tried to convince my parents to sign me up as soon as I turned 17, but they refused so I wasn’t able to sign up until I was 18 years old. When you’re a teenager you want to be like everyone else, and I signed up mainly because all my friends were doing it. Sadly, some of these friends would not make it back from the war.”

Halpern served in the U.S. Army 45th Division Infantry from 1943 to 1946. He received a Purple Heart, Bronze Star, Combat Infantry Men’s Badge, French Legion of Honor, as well as four battle stars. He also recently went on the prestigious Honor Flight, which takes veterans to the monuments in Washington, D.C. He trained as a light machine gunner in the Army and was assigned to three regiments throughout his service.

“In the beginning of 1944 we were just outside of Naples, and in March we were shipped to the Anzio beachhead, a very active place from which we could not escape,” said Halpern. “At this particular

beachhead, we were surrounded by mountains, and those mountains were filled with Germans who were attacking us from high altitudes, so our casualties were mounting up. We stayed there for several weeks holding down the encampment that was formerly established. Near the end of April, a rumor circulated that we were going to break out of the beachhead and take over Rome, which was about 30 miles north of Anzio. We made this rumor a reality and took Rome on June 5, the day before the landing in Normandy. We were pretty seasoned by then, as the 45th Division had previously taken beachheads in Sicily and Salerno. After Rome, we moved through southern France on August 15, 1944 and established another beachhead in Normandy. This landing I took part in, as I had been a replacement soldier in Anzio. It's not as easy as it looks. We used little boats called Higgins boats to capture the stretch of beach. We ended up fighting all the way from the Mediterranean up through France into the Vosges Mountains and then Alsace. It was here that my right arm was hit by shrapnel, putting me in the hospital for three months."

Halpern considers himself fortunate to have been wounded at that time. While in the hospital, his fellow soldiers were engaged in the horrific Battle of the Bulge. This battle alone resulted in 18,000 casualties. Soon thereafter, the war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945, but Halpern wouldn't get back to the states until December. There were too many men to ship them back all at once. He was later discharged in January of 1946.

"It was hell serving in combat on the European stage," said Halpern. "Of course, when you look at the ratio of those who served in combat and those who did not, I was one of the unlucky few who witnessed and took part in combat. Other gentlemen, like my friend and neighbor, Gene Starn, would serve in other meaningful ways."

Starn served in the US Army from 1943 to 1945. His roles in the war effort were varied and he appreciates his experiences.

"I was in my first year of college walking out of the library on a Sunday morning when I received news of Pearl Harbor," said Starn. "The young people in those days were extremely patriotic and thought very highly of our country. We wanted to do whatever we could to help. After I completed my first year of college, I called the Draft Board and told them to disregard my college deferment, as I was ready to serve my country. I was drafted into the Army Air Corps and sent to Greenville, North Carolina for basic training. Here, it was discovered that I had a dust allergy activated by the green dye in the army 'fatigue' uniform, so they had me put on the dress uniform and sent me away as an office boy. I went to the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at the University of Maryland and later became a journalist for *The Diamondback*, the student newspaper at the university. I reported on the ASTP activities and learned a lot from my tenure there. I suggested to our morale officer that we hold a pre-



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war college dance, so he agreed and put me in charge. We dubbed it the “Kollege and Khaki Ball,” and invited all the brass from nearby Washington, D.C., including President Roosevelt and General George Marshall.”

Though Starn received handwritten ‘regrets’ from people like Eleanor Roosevelt and General Marshall, the event was a success, bringing in \$11,000 profit. However, the army wasn’t supposed to make money, so part of it was used to send the committee out for a night on the town and the rest was donated to the Red Cross. From there, Starn transitioned to the Detroit area where he received two months of training to become a tank engine mechanic.

“From Detroit, we were sent to do maneuvers in Virginia, but they forgot the tanks. A few weeks later we were sent to serve in New Guinea,” said Starn. “In the middle of the Pacific Ocean, the Army changed the number that designated us as tank engine mechanics to refrigeration mechanics. I have no idea why they did that, as we had all been trained to disassemble and fix tank engines and knew zilch about refrigeration. We were first sent to repair the air conditioning in General MacArthur’s villa in Hollandia, but after three days we were sent to Finchhaven to maintain the large refrigerators that held all the perishable food for our troops in New Guinea. During that time we ate well, had steak and eggs for breakfast and fresh bread and muffins from the base bakery across the street. Sometimes at night we would watch movies on big screens outdoors, and occasionally a Japanese soldier would emerge from the jungle surrendering to us. I actually enjoyed my war experience; it was soft – especially compared to the combat and life threatening exploits of Gerry Halpern.”

Starn believes that Veterans Day is significant because it is a time for everyone, no matter what role they played, to share their experiences and better understand all wars. He is happy to have had the opportunity to take part in the Honor Flight with Halpern and said they enjoyed visiting the memorials. He is proud to have served his country, proud to be a part of the history. Their service will be recognized again at a special Veterans Day ceremony at La Posada where they live.

“It is awe inspiring to hear these tales recounted,” said Brad Cadiere, executive director of La Posada. “We are fortunate to have nearly 40 veterans in our community, and it is a privilege for us to honor them for their service. We encourage everyone to take a moment on Veterans Day to pause and recognize all veterans and the men and women currently serving our country.”

If you are interested in covering this story or setting up an interview with a resident or team member, please contact Lauren Witt via phone at 214-378-7970 ext. 306 or email at lwitt@fortegroupinc.com or Amy Jones via phone at 214-378-7970 ext. 302 or email at ajones@fortegroupinc.com.



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ABOUT LA POSADA

La Posada is a resort-style lifecare community located in the heart of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. The continuing care retirement community features 193 luxurious independent living apartments, 11 independent living cottages, as well as elegant assisted living apartments, memory care suites, large private rooms for short-term rehabilitation and skilled nursing, all nestled within 22 prime acres of sparkling lakes and lavish courtyards. Providing a variety of amenities, residents enjoy chef-prepared meals, concierge services, a state-of-the-art wellness programs, personal chauffer service, and extensive intellectually stimulating events and activities.

As a Kisco Senior Living community, The Art of Living Well philosophy is in every aspect of community life. Unique social and wellness opportunities strengthen the mind, body and spirit.

For more information, call 561-232-6700 or go to <http://www.kiscoseniorliving.com/senior-living/fl/palm-beach-gardens/la-posada/>

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