WWII Veteran's New Mission: 'Let Freedom Ring' in American Classrooms

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WWII veteran and VFW member, George Ciampa, 84, knows first-hand the true cost of freedom. During his stint in the U.S. Army he completed five campaigns in the European Theatre including the Invasion of Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge. Though both operations made a significant impact on young Ciampa who was 18 at the time, his most culminating experience came during his time with the 607th Graves Registration Company. His unit was tasked with a solemn, eleven month assignment to gather, register and bury the bodies of fallen soldiers across the battlefields of Europe.

While that duty was perceived as especially dismal, he was one of the fortunate ones. After service, he returned home to the South Bay area in Southern California to marry, and raise two children. He transitioned back to civilian life, embarking on a successful career, with 37 years in the advertising business and more than 26 years with the Los Angeles Times before retiring a few short years ago.

Still, more than sixty years after Ciampa last witnessed the cost of freedom paid by thousands of American service members; his experiences and lessons learned remained just as vivid and stirring. Advancing in age, he couldn't help but consider America's future as he reflected on his past. He hadn't forgotten, and the possibility that someday our nation might didn't sit well with him.

For him, no history book, death toll, or glorified Hollywood production expresses sacrifice the way he saw it thousands of times over, face to face, in the eyes of young soldiers. Yet, as America continues to lose its WWII veterans, it's already evident that future generations have come to rely on these channels to try and understand the cost of freedom and those who fought for it.

Ciampa hopes to change that.

Armed with the overwhelming desire to pass along his insight and familiarity with the price that liberty commands, he formed the non-profit organization Let Freedom Ring, with the

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purpose of educating America's young adults in a way that promises to endure well into the future.

In August of 2006, Ciampa returned to Belgium with four high-school history teachers from the Torrance Unified School District in California, and two Battle of the Bulge veterans of the Army's "Big Red One," a division that lost 21,000 during WWII.

For the teachers, it was a rare and inspiring lesson of their own. They listened intently as Belgian survivors of the Nazi occupation gave graphic accounts of what it was like to lose their homes, friends, families and their freedom, and Battle of the Bulge combat veterans recalled stories of their survival and what it was like to participate in one of the largest and bloodiest battles American forces experienced during WWII.

Ciampa returned again to Europe in July of 2007, accompanied by two more Torrance, California high school history teachers and three 1st Infantry Division veterans of the D-Day Normandy Invasion. Here they met with French civilians and resistance fighters of the era, who openly —some for the first time in decades— talked about life in concentration camps while living in sub-human status, resulting in another horrific aspect of war for Ciampa and his crew.

However enlightening these trips were, how could Ciampa possibly expect to educate all future generations using only a small group of teachers from the West Coast as the vehicle?

By arming himself with an HD documentary crew.

Each of the accounts that occurred between Ciampa's crew and the WWII survivors was recorded on video, resulting in two documentary films: "Let Freedom Ring...The Lesson is Priceless" and "Let Freedom Ring...Memories of France."

Along with lesson plans devised by the teachers, Ciampa hopes these DVDs provide an invaluable tool for classrooms across the country — bringing first-hand accounts of citizens whose countries were stripped of their freedom and heroic tales of the veterans who fought to give it back— straight to the young minds of our nation.

Ciampa has not forgotten. And, not forgetting these stories in the future is the educational mission of George Ciampa.

His goal now is to ensure both films are distributed to all of the 2,117 high schools across California and offer lesson plans contrived by participating teachers on the Let Freedom Ring website, www.letfreedomringforall.org.

His mission doesn't end here.

Ciampa is now seeking funding for his next mission to bring forth the story of the Eighth Air Force and the dangerous daylight raids executed on German targets during WWII. The "Mighty Eighth" suffered 56,000 casualties as a result of these raids. The film will follow Frenchman, Jean- Paul Favrais — who as a young boy witnessed a U.S. P-38 fighter plane crash near his home — through his relentless search across France for downed American aircrafts.

"In this day and age, freedom is not a word that should be political. It is beyond that. It's the one thing worth dying for because without it, there is no life," states Ciampa.

For more information or to purchase a copy of "Let Freedom Ring…The Lesson is Priceless" or "Let Freedom Ring…Memories of France," please visit www.letfreedomringforall.org.