

COMMUNITY Profile

The Greatest Generation

Filmmaker Mark Salloum's harrowing WWII documentary set to enthrall

By Ryan M. Place

PLYMOUTH filmmaker Mark Salloum is producing a fascinating documentary titled "A Salute to Our WWII Generation: Let Us Not Forget." The film is a tribute to the brave men and women who served valiantly during that great war.

"Less than 40,000 soldiers are estimated to still be alive at this time," Salloum said. "It's crucial that we share their stories."

Listening to six Plymouth vets at the 2019 Memorial Day Parade inspired Salloum to produce this film.

"Incredible stories from amazing people," he said. "By December, we were in production, then COVID hit and delayed things. Meanwhile, I put together a treatment, budget, trailer, and began assembling a story. Paying tribute to the men and women who served, understanding how the war affected their entire lives, and teaching future generations – that is the goal."

Teaming up with co-producer Keith Famie, they recently created Bending River Films, and this is their first film together. Another important person is Ellen Elliott, executive director of the Friends of the Penn Theatre.

"Ellen and I worked in tandem during my first film, 'Plymouth, Michigan, a Rich History', I knew she had to be a part of this next film as well," Salloum said.

The film crew amassed over 70 hours of raw interview footage with 26 veterans, and over a dozen family members and military organizations.

"Many of the vets shared heart-wrenching stories with us that they haven't spoken of since the war," Salloum said. "We frequently teared up listening to



them – how they were reared during the Great Depression, thrown into WWII, then forced to readjust to civilian life after such horrors."

Some of the vets include heroes like Lt. Col Harry Stewart.

"He's Michigan's last known surviving Tuskegee Airman and he shot down several enemy planes,"

Salloum said. "We also flew to Jackson, North Carolina, to film three Montford Point Marines, which were the first African American Marines."

Many more powerful stories were shared.

"During the Battle of the Bulge, Tom Houdek was taken as a POW," Salloum explained. "Cliff Alvira drove the amphibious Higgins boats at Omaha Beach on D-Day. Ethel 'Cricket' Poland was U.S. Navy intelligence and sworn to secrecy for decades. Three of the original Rosies talked about Detroit's Arsenal of Democracy."

Plymouth has been involved in this project with many supporters.

"The Plymouth Chamber, USA Hockey Arena, Penn Theatre and P-CCS have been great," Salloum said. "In fact, P-CCS teacher Chris Belch allowed us to film his high school students as they conducted research on our WWII veterans. We took them on a field trip to Great Lakes National Cemetery in Holly and the Michigan Heroes Museum in Frankenmuth. The highlight of their project was marching in the Memorial Day Parade while holding a picture of the veteran they were researching. It was truly inspiring!"

Dubbed Operation Honor, the final push to raise completion funds is underway.

"We're offering 100 donations of \$1,000 each," Salloum said. "In the credits, we'll pay tribute to a WWII vet of your choice by including a photo and details about their service. This is a great way to honor our veterans while helping contribute to a film that will educate future generations."

The world premiere is happening right here in Plymouth.

"November 13 will be our world premiere at the Penn Theatre, shortly followed by its debut on Detroit PBS," Salloum said. "We look forward to a great turnout for the opening weekend."

Contact Salloum at mark@highwaymediapro.com or WW2Heroes.com.

