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'Rainbow' Liberation Expressed in German Jeweler's Token of Gratitude

Story by Spc. Jimmy A. Bedgood, 42nd Infantry Division

FREDERICKSBURG, Va.— German Jeweler and Goldsmith, Ludwig Stoeckl made a one-of-a-kind jewel he calls the Purple Heart Jewel for the 42nd Division "Rainbow" Veterans Memorial Foundation. Stoeckl says it is a token of 'friendship and thankfulness' for the 42nd's aid in liberating one of many Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

Dachau, Stoeckl's hometown, was the first of more than 500 Nazi concentration camps. Dachau Concentration Camp was liberated on April 29, 1945 by Soldiers from the 42nd Infantry Division, known as the Rainbow Division.

Stoeckl presented the Purple Heart Jewel to the foundation during a ceremony at Hurkamp Park in Fredericksburg, Va. on June 15th.

"We of the 42nd Rainbow Division Veterans Memorial Foundation are sincerely honored," said James Clemmons, Rainbow Foundation's memorial officer. "But of equal importance is Stoeckl's expression of values in choosing a time-honored American medal, the Purple Heart, by which to communicate his expression of thanks."

Clemmons chose Fredericksburg—the childhood town of Washington—as the site of the ceremony, keeping with the historical theme that inspired Stoeckl.

Stoeckl knew it had to be inspired by something very special so he researched the history and meaning of various medals.

"I tried to put thought and value into the design. I felt the Purple Heart medal's design shouldn't be copied, but that my design should mean more," he said.

The Purple Heart Jewel is made of 18-karat gold with 29 diamonds around a profile of



Stoeckl at work at his jeweler's bench in his shop in Dachau, Germany. Courtesy photo.



New York Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Karin Coons of the 42nd Infantry (Rainbow) Division presents a framed illustration mapping the division's path through Europe during World War II to Ludwig Stoeckl for creating and donating a bejeweled Purple Heart medal to the Virginia Holocaust Museum in Richmond, Va. The medal (below) was created to honor the Soldiers of the 42nd Infantry who liberated the Concentration Camp Dachau in April, 1945. Courtesy photo

George Washington's head; The 29 diamonds represent the day the members of the 42nd aided in Dachau's liberation from Hitler and Nazism.

During his speech he referred to the Purple Heart medal as: "...a very special medal to honor soldiers who gave their health, or even made the ultimate sacrifice in the fight for freedom, liberty and justice."

Over 60 years have passed since the Dachau Concentration Camp was liberated. The 42nd has gone on to fight many more battles. However Stoeckl says it's never too late to celebrate Dachau's freedom, liberty and justice. Stoeckl said he believes these precious values are threatened in today's world:

He acknowledged the daughter-in-law of decorated German soldier Hans Oster during his speech.

Stoeckl and Oster's daughter-in-law, Anna, both live in Dachau. Anna was a long-time customer of Stoeckl's shop in Dachau. They later found out Anna's Father-in-law and Ludwig's Father were both persecuted by Nazis. Through



this common history they became friends.

Hans Oster was hung at the Flossenburg Concentration Camp just 20 days before the Dachau Concentration Camp was liberated by the 42nd. Anna was scheduled to be killed by Nazis, but escaped the same fate as her father-in-law.

The Purple Heart Jewel is just the start of Stoeckl's gift to the 42nd.

Ludwig initiated a fundraiser for family members of 42nd troops in Iraq. "The fund-raiser for 42nd troops and families is very important. It was my explicit wish that a monetary benefit will result from my gift."

The Foundation initiated a public donation program to support the 42nd Family Readiness Group Foundation with its own donation of \$1,000 to meet the goal of raising \$20,000.

The Purple Heart Jewel is on display at the Virginia Holocaust Museum in Richmond, Va.

A ceremony of the Foundation's dedication of the Purple Heart Jewel to the Virginia Holocaust Museum is slated for September. 9