

Man seeks to build a 'rainbow' of valor

World War II veteran wants to help troops, families of Rainbow Division now in Iraq

By **SHERRY GREMINGER**

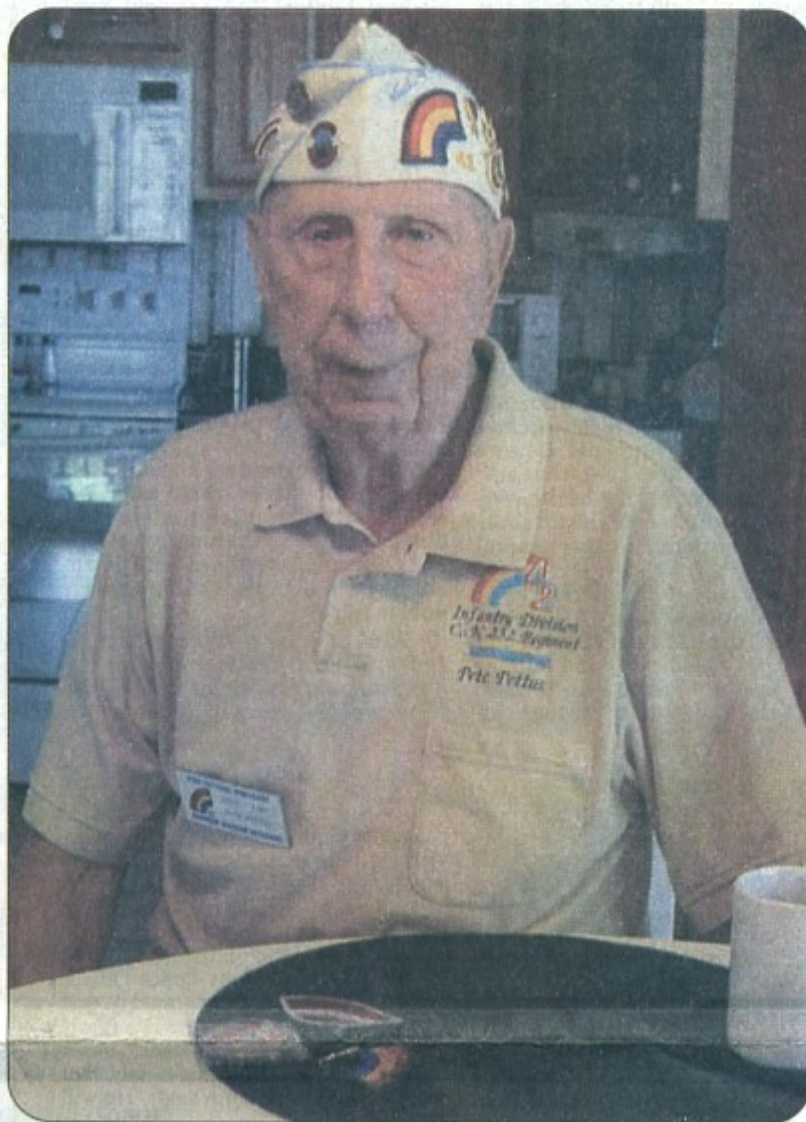
Daily Journal Managing Editor

DESLOGE — A Desloge man wants to make sure a rainbow which began in World War I stretches to give hope and comfort to those embroiled in the current war in Iraq. James "Pete" Pettus, who served with the Rainbow Division in World War II, is on a mission to raise \$20,000 to aid the troops and families of the Rainbow Division serving today in Iraq.

Pettus' mission began several months ago when he received a correspondence from Ludwig Stoeckl. Stoeckl, a resident of Dachau, Germany, wanted to present the Rainbow Division with a diamond-studded, 18-carat gold replica of the Purple Heart medal. Stoeckl's hometown, Dachau was the site of the oldest Nazi concentration camp and was liberated by the Rainbow Division in 1945.

Pettus, who is the 42nd Rainbow Division Veterans Memorial Foundation reunions officer, said at first he thought it might be a scam. He contacted the top four or five officers in the organization and all agreed that if the offer was legitimate, the group should accept the medal. "Once we found out it was for real someone asked, 'What will we do with it?' I said that I had been to the Holocaust Museum in Richmond, Va., and that they had a very nice Rainbow Memorial. We contacted them and they were very happy to receive the medal."

Stoeckl is a master goldsmith and his father had also been a goldsmith. Stoeckl told the group that his father would not support Hitler and had been persecuted by the Nazi Party. Although that might be reason enough to thank the Americans for liberating his hometown, he really decided he wanted to create this gift after his wife just missed being in New York City on



SHERRY GREMINGER / DAILY JOURNAL
James "Pete" Pettus talks about the Rainbow patches worn today and those which were worn during World War II. Pettus is helping to raise \$20,000 to support the current Rainbow Division fighting in Iraq.

PLEASE SEE **PETTUS** / PAGE 2

MONDAY EDITION

July 14, 2008

Daily Journal

www.dailyjournalonline.com • Volume 78, Issue #193 • 50¢ daily, \$1 Sunday



Prize Awarded - See Page 3

New ordinance would allow golf carts on streets

Owners must obtain permits,
carry insurance for such use

CHRIS CLINE

Man seeks to build a 'rainbow' of valor

World War II veteran wants to help troops,
families of Rainbow Division now in Iraq



Pettus

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Sept. 11, 2001. He became angry with the German government when they refused to provide troops or money to invade Iraq.

"My gift shall be a sign of thankfulness and remembrance to the 42nd Rainbow Division," Stoeckl said. "It is also my wish that this Purple Heart Jewel is understood as a sign of friendship between the people of the United States and Germany... and a sign of thanks and honor of all those who fought and presently fight for freedom, liberty and justice."

Pettus said the Rainbow Division's commitment to Stoeckl was to raise \$20,000 for the current troops. Anyone who would like to donate may send checks to 42nd ID,

FRG, Fund Raising Chair, Loise Carnesale, 4 Eckman Place, Remsenlaer, NY 12144. All funds will go to the 42nd Infantry Family Readiness Group, a volunteer organization that provides a support network for soldiers and their families.

The Rainbow Division was so named by General Douglas McArthur during World War I. Up to that time, all National Guard units went into the army as state guards. McArthur, who at that time was the division's Chief of Staff, wanted to blend the state units together and said his division "would stretch over the whole country like a rainbow."

Troops still wear the Rainbow patch today. It is now half the arch. Pettus explained, "At the end of World War I, the men cut it in half and buried it in France to honor their fallen comrades, so when World War II came along, we had the one-fourth patch.

"The Rainbow Division entered

Dachau sometime a little before noon on April 29, 1945," Pettus said. "We found 32,000 prisoners and 50 boxcars full of bodies stuffed in them. The Nazis were moving prisoners from Buchenwald to Dachau because the Allies were approaching. The ones who tried to climb out of the boxcars were shot and there were bodies lying all around the boxcars. We were all horrified."

Gen. Eisenhower gave orders that units all over the country would distribute copies of the atrocities and round up the civilians and march them to a theater and make them watch.

"I watched them to see their reactions," he said. "Most were horrified and pretty stunned, but there were a few who came out laughing."

"All German people nearly all pleaded innocent that they didn't know what was going on. I believe a lot suspected and just didn't want to know and some knew and just didn't claim to," Pettus said.



Hear Pettus talk about his military service at our Web site:

www.dailyjournalonline.com