



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

## Wellsville World War II Army Veteran Honored Posthumously

CATHARINE YOUNG June 28, 2013

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*Family received awards earned for service in the Philippines and Japan*

WELLSVILLE – The family of a United States Army veteran who courageously served as an infantryman in some of the most difficult battles in the Pacific Theater during World War II recently received the military decorations he earned during his service.

Private Henry F. Gardner was honored posthumously for his service to his country at a ceremony on Saturday, June 22, 2013 at the Frank B. Church Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2530 in Wellsville. His wife, Valentina Gardner, accepted the awards on behalf of the family. The event was well-attended by many family and friends. Even Private Gardner's great-grandson, Tyler, age 8, participated, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

The ceremony was the culmination of an effort started by Private Gardner to obtain the medals he had earned for his service. After her husband's passing, Mrs. Gardner reached out to Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I- Olean) who was instrumental in obtaining the awards that were due to Private Gardner. His military decorations will be cherished by his family and passed down from one generation to the next.

"I was so thankful that finally he received the awards that he deserved," said Mrs. Gardner. "Maybe I'll even take them to the cemetery to show him."

"During a time when democracy was threatened across the globe, Henry Gardner answered the call to action and bravely served his country. We owe him a debt of gratitude for his service. It is important that future generations, especially his own family, know how much we appreciate his actions that protected our freedom and liberty," said Senator Young.

The awards were presented by Joel Vanik, Commander, VFW District 6. They included the Bronze Star Medal, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with one bronze service star attachment for the Luzon Campaign, the World War II Victory Medal, the Army of Occupation Medal with Japan clasp, the Combat Infantryman's Badge, the Philippine Liberation Ribbon with bronze service star, the World War II Honorable Service Lapel Button, and the Marksman Badge with Rifle Bar.

Mr. Vanik was Post Commander of the Cuba Memorial VFW Post 2721 at the same time that Private Gardner served as Post Chaplain. "I could always count on Henry, whether at a meeting, a Post banquet, or a fellow comrade's funeral. He cared about it an awful lot. That World War II generation was always willing to lend a helping hand," said Mr. Vanik.

Private Gardner was drafted into the U.S. Army on Sept. 24, 1944, trained as an infantryman and departed for the Pacific Theater on Feb. 17, 1945. He was assigned to Company I, 34th Infantry Regiment, known as the "Leyte Dragons."

Private Gardner fought in the Battle of Luzon. The Battle of Luzon resulted in the recapture of the Philippines and Mindanao, as well as the return of General Douglas MacArthur. The 34th Infantry Regiment is credited by the U.S. Army for participating in some of the most difficult combat conditions of the War in the Pacific. They faced the challenges of intense fighting, endured miserable weather conditions, and tackled rough terrain.

He joined the Regiment on March 16, 1945 after the battle had already raged for three months. Although Allied forces had secured strategic portions of the island that same month, Japanese forces had retreated to the mountains where they continued to fiercely attack and harass Allied forces -- most did not cease resistance until the unconditional surrender of Japan. From April 15, 1945 to Aug. 15, 1945, the Regiment was involved with clean-up operations on the Island of Mindanao.

The 34th Infantry Regiment then remained in the Pacific Theater following the surrender of Japan to occupy the southern Japanese Islands of Kyushu and Honshu.

After having served two years overseas, Private Gardner returned home with Valentina who he had met in Japan. Together they settled in Grand Island, NY where he worked for the highway department until his retirement. After retiring, the couple moved to Wellsville.

Private Gardner passed away in 2009.

“Our veterans deserve the utmost respect, and I was glad to honor Private Gardner by helping his family obtain the medals that he earned for his courage, dedication and years of service to our country,” said Senator Young.