



Members of the Meriden Antique Veterans salute U.S. Army World War II Veteran Richard Egan, 96, who salutes back on Thursday while arriving in his 1944 Willys Jeep for the group's weekly meeting at the American Legion Post 45 in Meriden. Accompanying Egan are driver Mark Bender and passenger Clark Doehr, both Antique Veterans. Egan, of Meriden, served at Omaha Beach and the Battle of the Bulge and helped form the Meriden Antique Vets in 1996. There are approximately 250 members.

Dave Zajac, Record-Journal

WWII veteran from city honored

Egan greeted by Antique Veterans at American Legion after ride in his 1944 Jeep

By Steven Scarpa
Record-Journal staff

MERIDEN — Richard Egan, a private first class from Meriden, sped toward Berlin in his Jeep carrying an officer from his unit, Company C of the 296th Engineer Battalion, part of Patton's army.

Thousands of pieces of Russian artillery trained on the city to assure that no Nazis remained in the Allies' path. The noise was deafening. The end was near. It was April



Egan

1945.

Egan leaned forward over the steering wheel as he entered the battered city. His beloved captain asked him what he was doing. "I know you are going to be reported as first in Berlin, but I want to know I actually was," Donna Egan recalled her father saying.

"I thought that was a big thing for me," 96-year-old Richard Egan said in an interview Friday.

Egan's service in World War II is never far from his mind. Even today he talks about

childhood friends he lost in the war.

On Thursday, the Antique Veterans of Meriden had a surprise for Egan. He had taken the World War II-era Jeep he rides in every year in the Memorial Day Parade to Civali's Auto Service for maintenance. He was then driven over to the American Legion where an honor guard made up of members of the Antique Veterans was there to meet him.

"He was speechless, and that's something he's never been," Donna Egan said.

Old men dressed in khaki uniforms stood at attention and saluted Egan as he rode by in his Jeep. They then presented him a plaque

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U.S. Army World War II Veteran Richard Egan, 96.



U.S. Army World War II Veteran Richard Egan, 96, is presented a Recognition of Service award from fellow Antique Veteran Ed Lynch.



A P.F.C. Egan plate attached to the front of Egan's Jeep.



Egan

From A1

thanking him for both his military service and his years of work with the veterans group, speaking to students and performing military honors at almost 2,000 funerals since 2001.

"I feel pretty good. They are a good bunch of guys, every one of them," said Richard Egan, who served in the Army from 1943 to 1945.

Ed Lynch, current commander of the veterans' group, thought the time had come to pay tribute to Egan. "Everyone felt it was an honor to do it for him," Lynch said.

Egan, by every account a jovial man, experienced places and events remembered for conflict in history books.

Egan landed at Omaha Beach in Normandy on D-Day and braved the fierce German defenses and used a Bangalore torpedo to help breach part of their line. "I didn't think about being scared because all I was thinking about was getting on that beach," he said.

He was at the Battle of the Bulge. He was in the Ardennes Forest. He saw the concentration camps. Patton himself called Egan to task for not wearing a helmet. In a lighter moment, he smuggled a French bulldog puppy from the French Riviera back home, naming him Snuffy after his captain.

Egan is proud of his service. "It was important to everybody, especially the guys who didn't come back. I was



U.S. Army World War II Veteran Richard Egan, 96, is buckled into his 1944 Willys Jeep with assistance from fellow Antique Veterans Clark Doehr, left, and Mark Bender after the vehicle's brakes were repaired at Civali's Auto Service on Research Parkway in Meriden on Thursday. The three were heading to the Antique Veterans weekly meeting at American Legion Post 45. Egan, of Meriden, served at Omaha Beach and the Battle of the Bulge and helped form the Meriden Antique Vets in 1996. Photos by Dave Zajac, Record-Journal

one of the fortunate ones. I made it back. A lot of guys from Meriden didn't make it back," Richard Egan said.

The recent months have not been easy for Egan. His 94-year-old brother Joseph died on June 6 — the anniversary of D-Day. His own health has been a struggle.

A ride in his old Jeep and a salute from his local band of brothers helped him out of his blues, at least

for a little while.

"When he got home, he said 'I should do more of the exercises, walk more, try harder to drink the fluids.' I said, 'Yes, Dad.' He said, 'I've been real sad, but I feel better today' ... I told him, God called your brother, not you. You still have something left to do on this Earth," Donna Egan said.

"He said, 'I'll try to do more tomorrow.'"

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