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News Column

Book Focuses on Mexican Americans' Role in World War II

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Author Dave Gutierrez self-published the book 'Patriots from the Barrio' about a Hispanic battalion in World War II.

In his new book "Patriots from the Barrio," author Dave Gutierrez examines the true story behind a World War II combat unit composed entirely of Mexican Americans from Texas.

The book narrates the beginnings of the 36th Division, 141st Regiment 2nd Battalion, Company E, the all-Mexican American combat unit. The author traces the unit's upbringing in Texas to its participation in World War II battles in Italy and service in North Africa.

"This book should have been written 60 years ago," said Mr. Gutierrez about the book that will be released this month. "The true story of the men of Company E should be passed from generation to generation. These courageous men should never be forgotten."

After learning that a second cousin that was listed in the 36th Division, Mr. Gutierrez was influenced to write about the unit after coming across its Mexican American roots. Mr. Gutierrez was able to connect with some veterans of the unit and more than 50 families of the soldiers who served in the division.

Interviews, documents, letters and photographs provided by the survivor's families made it possible to piece the book together. Mr. Gutierrez spent four years researching the subject and took six months off his job at a logistics company to finalize the project.

The main focus of the self-published book is on Sgt. Ramon Garza Gutierrez, Mr. Gutierrez' second cousin and recipient of the Silver Star and three Purple Hearts handed out by the U.S. Army.

Aside from the book's focus on the division's battlefield efforts, Mr. Gutierrez also explores issues that affected the Mexican American community at the time. Topics such as discrimination, school segregation and illegal deportation of Mexican Americans during the Great Depression are discussed in the narrative.