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Ward Payne, a World War II veteran, was awarded the Silver and Bronze star medals for his service. See Page B2A

War MEMORIES

Laguna Woods veteran
looks back on the
battles he fought in
World War II and Korea

Although he would be the last to admit it, Laguna Woods resident Ward Payne, with a Silver Star and two Bronze Stars from two wars under his belt, is a bona fide war hero.

As Memorial Day neared, the 80-year-old recalled some of the worst moments of World War II, such as a battle in a German forest where his division suffered 3,800 casualties, or the time his troops liberated one of Nazi Germany's concentration camps.

"We were in the forest for six weeks. There were a lot of bodies," he said.

It was during this battle that Payne's sergeant was killed.

"He was hit in the same foxhole. We couldn't get back to the aid station due to all of the artillery. The Germans broke through and killed him," he said.

But Payne also remembers the triumphant moment of his World War II combat experience that earned him the Silver Star.

While in Germany as part of the 39th Army Infantry in 1945, Payne and his fellow troops were pinned by enemy machine-gun and small-arms fire. Payne located the machine-gun nest and lobbed a grenade from 10 yards away, destroying the Germans' installation.

"It was a frontal attack. There were six enemy soldiers. Not all of them were killed," he said. A few weeks later, Payne earned a Bronze Star.

At the end of the war, Payne returned home in November 1945 and resumed civilian life, working in sales until he was recalled in 1951 to go to Korea with the 40th Army Infantry Division.

The following year, he earned his



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World War II and Korean War veteran Ward Payne was awarded a Silver and two Bronze star medals for his service.

second Bronze Star as a battalion captain by maintaining the battalion's supplies under adverse conditions.

In 1953, Payne was discharged from the Army and continued his sales career before retiring in 1980. Soon after, he and his wife of 56 years, Ruth, became

part of the Leisure World community.

Always active as a leader, Payne has served as past director of the Golden Rain Foundation and is currently president of the Republican Club of Leisure World.

STORY BY STEVE KAWASHIMA ☆☆☆ PHOTO BY MICHELLE YEE

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