



THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT MADE
ALL THE DIFFERENCE FOR ONE ALLIED SOLDIER

LED BY THE SPIRIT

By R. Ty Puente with Scott Harrup



HE was 19 and new to St. Louis. As World War II gained momentum in 1940, Raul Garcia, fresh out of basic training, waited for his duty assignment and fervently prayed for God's direction.

The second need would be met first.

Declining an invitation from fellow draftees to enjoy a night on the town, Garcia determined to attend a service at an Assemblies of God church in nearby Woodriver, Ill. At the end of that service, he responded to an altar call.

"I had been searching for a

special anointing for some time," Garcia, 86, remembers today. "Now, on the verge of going to war, I knew I needed it more than ever before."

While at the altar, Garcia asked the group of believers to lay hands on him for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. In five minutes, Garcia was speaking in tongues.

"It was a paramount moment in my life," he says. "From that moment, my sole purpose was to serve the Lord."

Garcia was shipped to North Africa to join the Allied armies

there. He arrived in Morocco on Christmas Day, 1941. Straight from the docks, he and fellow troops boarded open trucks for the convoy inland.

In this international hub, Garcia heard French, Spanish, English, Italian and Arabic blend from one conversation to another. Suddenly he heard a string of Spanish curses.

A local man, irate at the constant arrival of troops, was loudly haranguing the Americans as they waited to move out.

Garcia wondered if the man would become violent. Looking around at his fellow soldiers, he realized none of them understood Spanish. He took matters into his own hands and warned the man away from the truck.

"An officer saw me confront

the man," Garcia says. "The colonel ended up using me as his interpreter when he learned I could speak Spanish."

During Garcia's tour in North Africa, the conflict with the Japanese intensified in Asia. In the summer of 1942, Garcia's company was ordered to Burma to protect an air base. Their journey would include a three-day convoy across the Mediterranean. Axis forces patrolled much of the route, and many Allied troop and supply vessels had been lost to U-boats and fighter planes.

"Years later, I would find out that my mother felt a particular burden to pray for me just as our convoy approached the waters near the island of Crete," Garcia remembers.





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LED BY THE SPIRIT



Raul and Bertha Garcia

Victoria Garcia responded to that burden by putting down her laundry and ironing, calling her children together and praying intensely for her son. Garcia credits his mother with the miracle that followed.

A sudden storm hit the convoy hard. But the storm brought with it such massive cloud cover that none of the bombing raids sent against the convoy could find it. Every ship, with every single sailor and soldier, arrived unscathed at Egypt's Suez Canal.

"Our captain informed us that we were the first Allied flotilla to make that crossing without a single loss," Garcia says. "He then requested that all of us break into groups according to our faith tradition and thank God for His deliverance."

In Burma, Garcia and his company faced a constant onslaught from the Japanese. The air base they protected had only recently been taken from the enemy, and was recognized by both sides as a vital staging area to strike deeper into Japanese-occupied territory.

"Nearly every day," Garcia says, "we were under air attack. Some nights I slept in a foxhole. During daytime attacks, planes would fly in so close you could see the pilots' faces."

The base operated under black-out conditions most nights. When a pilot called in one night with a distress signal and requested an emergency landing, the command to turn on the runway lights was given. As the plane approached and opened fire, it was clear a Japanese pilot who spoke English well enough had created the ruse.

"He dropped a bomb in our fuel storage area," Garcia says. "The fire raged out of control and served as a beacon to other Japanese planes. We endured heavy losses."

But Garcia always sensed

God's leading, even in the heat of battle. As his tour lengthened, he became a chaplain's assistant. His aptitude for languages convinced his leaders to place him in a program to learn Hindi. With that knowledge, he began to build relationships with surrounding villages.

"I spent time with the people, even helping them with daily tasks like washing their laundry in the river," Garcia says. "Eventually, I had the opportunity to start a church. By the time I left, the congregation was well-established and had a trained local minister."

Garcia returned to the United States after the war with a far greater awareness of spiritual need. The passion for the lost that had begun to grow in his heart during that long-ago church service in Illinois now blossomed into a desire to plant a church in his native Texas.

In the summer of 1950, Garcia began a vacation Bible school and a small home group in greater San Antonio. Nearly 60 years later, he continues to lead El Sendero de la Cruz Assembly of God, the church that grew from those meetings.

"I personally witnessed the power of God and His miraculous providence and deliverance during the war," Garcia says. "I continue to see that power at work in lives in our church today." e

R. TY PUENTE lives in San Antonio and attends El Sendero Church. Pastor Raul Garcia is his uncle. SCOTT HARRUP is senior associate editor of the *Pentecostal Evangel*.

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