



Definition of a Hero

T rue American hero: a description applied to extraordinary people for their actions in a number of different arenas. A sometimes overused phrase, perhaps, but not in the case of Edwin Price Ramsey, an OU law graduate who earned this exalted status in the steamy jungles and rugged mountains of the Philippines during World War II.

Ed Ramsey was born in 1917 in Carlisle, Illinois, raised in Kansas by a single mother, along with an older sister who later flew for the postal service and piloted WWII planes for the military. As a high schooler, Ed found an outlet for his love of horses playing polo at Oklahoma Military Academy. Commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in the Cavalry Reserve, he headed for the University of Oklahoma, which had a ROTC horse artillery unit—but not for long, leaving OU in February 1941 to enlist in the Army. He arrived in the Philippines that summer as an officer in the elite 26th Cavalry (Philippine Scouts).

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in December, the outmanned and outgunned U.S. and Filipino forces braced for the invasion coming their way. They held out for six months, finally retreating to Bataan under cover provided by Ramsey's unit, sent north to hold off the invading Japanese infantry. At one point, with a platoon of only 27 horsemen armed with Colt 1911 pistols, Ramsey led what would be the last horse cavalry charge in U.S. military history. His gallantry earned him the Silver Star, but the success of that moment was short-lived.

When Bataan fell, Ramsey escaped capture and the infamous Death March, heading into the jungle and mountains to join Colonel Claude Thorpe, who had been sent by General Douglas MacArthur to establish a resistance movement among the Filipino natives. They trained without uniforms and with few weapons, suffering under the most dire conditions; at one point Ramsey underwent surgery to remove his appendix without anesthesia. As the resis-

tance forces grew in effectiveness and in number, reaching 40,000, so did their risk of capture and unbelievable torture. After three years, as the U.S. invasion neared, Ramsey, now a major, was the only officer remaining.

Ramsey had established personal radio contact with MacArthur, who ordered him to step up the information gathering and disruption of the enemy. On January 9, 1945, MacArthur's forces landed at Lingayen Gulf; the general had kept his promise to return—and Ed Ramsey, the guerilla fighter who everyone including his family had thought was dead, was back in the U.S. Army. MacArthur credited Ramsey's actions with saving tens of thousands of American and Filipino lives, and he personally pinned the Distinguished Service Cross on the newly promoted lieutenant colonel, then sent him home. He weighed 90 pounds.

After the war, Ramsey returned to OU and graduated from law school in 1952. He became an executive with Hughes Aircraft Corporation, and established his own electronics and consulting firms in Taiwan and the Philippines, where Filipinos of that generation still consider him a hero, second only to MacArthur. He retired to California in the 1990s, became a public speaker, co-authored a 1991 memoir, *Lieutenant Ramsey's War: From Horse Soldier to Guerilla Commander*, and lobbied Congress on behalf of Filipinos who had fought for the U.S. during WWII. His operations having become a

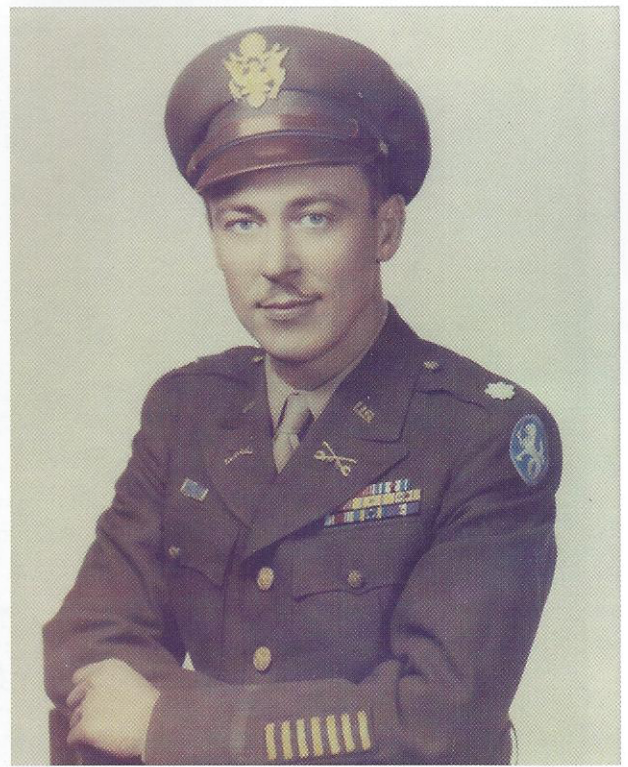


Photo Provided

Edwin Price Ramsey

blueprint for U.S. Special Forces, he was made an honorary Green Beret, and in 2010 was inducted into the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame.

Ed Ramsey died peacefully in his sleep on March 7, 2013. His first marriage, which ended in divorce, produced four children, who survive him with his second wife of 33 years, Dr. Raquel Ramirez Ramsey, four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. He was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors.

In noting his death, the *Los Angeles Times* quoted his statement to a reporter in 2001: "I look back and think of myself as a soldier, not as a hero. I just had a temperament that made it impossible for me to surrender."
—CJB

In addition to the Los Angeles Times, an article by Phil Davison in The Independent, a U.S.-Japan dialogue on POWs, and the Edwin Price Ramsey official web site contributed to this article.