



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Wellsville Wwii Vets to Receive France's Highest Honor

CATHARINE YOUNG March 25, 2011

| ISSUE: **VETERANS**



WELLSVILLE - An official representing French President Nicolas Sarkozy will make an extraordinary exception to policy by traveling to the Southern Tier to present two local World War II veterans with high honors, according to Senator Catharine M. Young, (R,C,I-Olean).

Robert Sweet and Larry Hannigan will receive the National Order of the Legion of Honour in the grade of Chevalier from Colonel Vincent de Kytspotter during a special ceremony at 4 p.m. on Saturday, March 26 at the Wellsville Manor Nursing Home.

Originally, the veterans had been requested by the French government to travel to the French Embassy in New York City to accept the honor in recognition of their role in liberating France during World War II. The award typically is presented on French soil. It is a tradition that was founded by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802 to recognize outstanding achievement in the military.

Unable to make the long trip due to health reasons, family members contacted Senator Young's office to see if an exception could be made. The Senator wrote a letter to the French Ambassador to inquire if a representative would be willing to travel to Wellsville instead.

"We are extremely grateful that the Embassy was responsive, and we especially thank Colonel de Kytspotter for his graciousness. Everyone is very excited that he is coming, and that these brave veterans will receive well-deserved acknowledgment for their heroism," Senator Young said.

Mr. Sweet was a member of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment, U.S. Army 101st Airborne Division. He parachuted into France on the evening of June 5, 1944 near Saint Martin-de-Varreville, and literally was one of the first Americans to assist in liberating France from the Germans on D-Day during one of the bloodiest battles of the War. Mr. Sweet also has been awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge, Parachute Wings and the New York State Conspicuous Service Cross.

Mr. Hannigan was a crewman on an M-4 Sherman Tank as part of the U.S. Army 70th Independent Tank Battalion. His unit landed at Utah Beach and later fought through to Cherbourg, Saint-Lo, eventually liberating Paris. He was severely wounded near Luxembourg, yet still was able to help his blinded tank commander get to the aid station. At least one other crew member was killed and another critically wounded. Mr. Hannigan also has been honored with the Purple Heart, Silver Star and New York State Conspicuous Service Cross.

"I am quite thankful the French government is honoring so many of our veterans for the efforts they made in the liberation of their country," Mr. Hannigan said.

Securing the Legion of Honour awards truly has been a family and community affair, said Senator Young.

In October of 2009, Mr. Sweet's son and daughter-in-law, David and Jackie Sweet, filed an official application on their father's behalf. In May of 2010, Mr. Sweet was notified that he had been voted into the Legion of Honour.

At the encouragement of former Allegany County Veterans Service Agency Director Scott Spillane, Mr. Hannigan applied for the same award in the fall of 2009 and received confirmation last October.

"This event proves what great people we have in our community. These veterans are an inspiration to us all, and we owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude. Everyone pulled together to make this special occasion happen," Senator Young said.

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