



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

World War II Veteran Ernest Weller Awarded French Legion of Honor Medal

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OLEAN - U.S. Army Technician 4th Grade (Sergeant) Ernest Weller's service during World War II took him to the shores of Normandy and across the European continent. His Battalion played an important role in ending the war that was raging in Europe.

During a ceremony at War Veterans Park in Olean, Mr. Pascal Soares, Honorary French Consul of New York, and Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I – Olean) presented France's National Order of the Legion of Honor, and other medals of commendation, to Technician 4th Grade Weller in recognition of his contributions to the liberation of France.

For his service in the United States Army, Technician 4th Grade Ernest Weller was also presented with the Good Conduct Medal; the American Defense Service Medal; the American Campaign Medal; the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with one Silver Service Star; the World War II Victory Medal; the Honorable Service Lapel Button; and the New York State Conspicuous Service Cross.

He was joined at the ceremony by local officials, family and friends, who traveled from across the state to attend the event.

"During a time when the world faced an uncertain future, Technician 4th Grade Ernest Weller answered the call of his country, traveling to foreign lands to defend freedom from those who wished to take it away. For his actions, the French government has installed Mr. Weller as a member of the Legion of Honor, and I join them in thanking him for his service," said Senator Young.

Senator Young nominated Technician 4th Grade Weller for the French Legion of Honor. However, due to health reasons, Mr. Weller was unable to make the trip to New York City to be presented with his award.

On May 6, 1941, Technician 4th Grade Ernest Weller, age 24, demonstrated his sense of duty and service when he volunteered for service in the United States Army.

After completing basic training at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, he was assigned as part of the Blue Army where he was trained as a telephone and telegraph lineman. Among his responsibilities were the installation, operation and maintenance of cable and wire communications systems, and associated equipment that established tactical wire communications networks for America's fighting forces.

He was then assigned as part of the initial cadre to the 26th Signal Construction Battalion, an independent First United States Army (FUSA) unit, activated at Claiborne just three months earlier.

With Europe already at war, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed an Unlimited National Emergency, placing the American military and civil defense forces in a state of readiness to repel any and all threats of aggression directed to any part of the Western Hemisphere. Technician 4th Grade Weller was shipped overseas with the 26th Signal Construction Battalion, arriving in Great Britain on July 12, 1942. The battalion was initially tasked with erecting the communication network for American military forces staging for Operation Torch in North Africa and preparing for the eventual invasion of Europe.

Army Signal Corps troops assembled for the Normandy Invasion constituted the largest gathering of Signalmen yet assembled for combat. Technician 4th Grade Weller was one of 13,420 First U.S. Army Signalmen in 33 independent or unit-assigned organizations that were part of this effort. Eighteen of those signal units went ashore at Normandy. All were volunteers. During the invasion, and as the Allied forces moved inland, 48 percent of these men became casualties and 60 percent of their equipment was rendered useless, but their mission was successful.

According to the U.S. Army Center for Military History, the 26th Signal Construction Battalion was then one of only two signal construction battalions in the European Theater. Equipped with office-type switchboards, teletype units, high frequency radios, wire, cable, spare parts, and the vehicles necessary to furnish radio,

telephone and messenger communications systems, these Signalmen landed at Normandy three days after the initial D-Day assault landing. As the allied forces advanced, they labored around the clock for the next 48 days, linking the three command posts of Beach Command to various shore elements, field units and higher headquarters. These men formed the nucleus of the Army's First Communications Zone, and supplied most of the wire communications for the U.S. Army across France, Belgium and into Germany.

In the months that followed, as the German Army was pushed back, these Signalmen participated in the Liberation of France by opening channels linking other Allied units with wire-based communications, surveying abandoned German communications facilities, and restoring vital French telephone systems. This hard wire method of communication was more secure and urgently needed because radio communications were increasingly being intercepted by the Germans in an effort to push the Allies back into the English Channel.

During the December 1944 German breakthrough in the Ardennes at the Battle of the Bulge, the 26th Signal Construction Battalion was again immediately pressed into service to re-establish communications. Signalmen such as Technician 4th Grade Weller suffered through the extreme cold and the pressure of fighting through snow and ice to achieve their objectives. Through January and February 1945, in the most trying of conditions, these Signalmen worked to maintain communications under fire, sometimes re-splicing cable and wires high in poles as the infantry fought and passed underneath them.

For more than eight decades, U.S. Army Signal Corps personnel dedicated themselves to the famous and indomitable motto: "Get the Message Through." Millions of American soldiers in every war have depended upon the skills of Signalmen to live up to this proud motto, and many times those same dedicated Signalmen gave their lives to ensure success of their mission.

The U.S. Army credited the First Army's Signal Construction Battalions for being directly instrumental in repelling the German advance because not once was critical communication lost. As result, for its continuous efforts beginning at Normandy and through the Battle of the Bulge in World War II, the 26th Signal Construction Battalion was awarded its first Meritorious Unit Commendation.

Technician 4th Grade Weller departed the European Theater after the Germany's unconditional surrender. He was discharged in July 1945, following four years, two months and eight days on active duty.

Following his return from the war, Mr. Weller took a job at the Ontario Knife Factory in Franklinville. He then went to work at several local garages before eventually retiring from John Hardy Chevrolet and Ripley's Garage. He married Gloria Myrick of Franklinville. They had two children, William and Connie. After Gloria's passing in 1989, Mr. Weller married Stella Moore. Today, Mr. Weller is the proud grandfather of many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"We owe our veterans our profound gratitude, especially to those who volunteered in the defense of their nation during World War II. It was a privilege to take part in this ceremony to pay tribute to Technician 4th Grade Weller for his courage and dedication. We deeply appreciate his service to not only our country, but also the nation of France, and countless other people worldwide," said Senator Young.