Senior Spotlight

By Nan Mahon

Sixty years after allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy and began the liberation of Europe, Harold Wiener made a vow to the children in the town of Evran, in Brittney, France. "I told them my wife Nancy and I would contribute financially to help build a school library with history books about World War II," he said. In March, 2005, the small library dedicated to Nancy and Harold Wiener opened as an addition to Jules Verne Elementary School. Harold and his daughter, Susan, were there for the ceremony. Nancy had passed away in late 2004.

Wiener first went to France as a young soldier assigned to the 922nd Engineer Aviation Regiment. The twenty-year-old private first class from Sacramento boarded the troop transport HMS Queen Elizabeth, along with 12,000 other American soldiers on August 20, 1943 bound from New York City to Gourock, Scotland. "Our regiment was part of the IX Engineer Command and our mission was to build, maintain and defend air bases for the Ninth Air Force in Europe," he said. Transferred to England, the regiment built bases in Birch, Wormingford and Wethersfield. On April 1, 1944, they moved to Great Barrington in Oxfordshire to prepare for the invasion of France.

On June 6,1944, the greatest military assault in history took place under gloomy skies on the German occupied beaches of Normandy, France. From the air, sea and land Allied Forces attacked the 50 mile stretch of beaches known as Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword. Troops, numbering 175,000, came in 5,000 ships and 1,300 air craft. Almost 10,000 would be wounded, captured or die. One hundred thousand would fight their way across France to free the country from the German army occupation. Utah and Omaha beaches were the landing beaches for American forces. From June 7-12, the 922 regiment went in waves to Omaha Beach where 34,000 Americans had landed. Their job was to locate places to build airfields, set up an operational base and execute emergency evacuations. "We were right behind the infantry as they liberated Paris on August 25", Wiener said.

Harold Wiener
England 1944

Insurance Agency, a general insurance brokerage, and eventually became a vice-president. He retired in March of 1989.

When Wiener went back to Normandy to attend the 65th anniversary of the invasion, 2009, he was one of the few selected to sit on the main platform behind President Barack Obama, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, England's Prince Charles and Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

During his time in Normandy, the key to the City of Le Molay-Littrey was presented to Wiener as a visiting survivor of his regiment, it was a symbol of gratitude to the US soldiers who saved their city. "When I am in that part of France, people come up and say thank you." Wiener said. "They will never forget."

The former soldier always spends time visiting the cemeteries where American comrades-in-arms are buried in land far from their homes. The rows of white crosses remind him of the costly sacrifice that freed France. "June sixth is a big event in Normandy," he said. "They celebrate it every year."

Harold in his home office with his medals from the war.

Wiener still contributes to the school library and has warm relations with the people in Evran. "They teach their children to remember the war," he said. "This will go on forever." **SM**

Nan Mahon lives in Elk Grove and is both the Cover Story and Senior Spotlight writer for Senior Magazine. She is also the author of Junkyard Blues, a thrilling motorcycle ride through Texas, California and Mexico behind a Vietnam vet running from the drug Cartel.

Discharged in 1945, Wiener returned home to Sacramento where he was born, raised and graduated from the brand-new C.K. McClatchy High School in 1940. He went to work for James Burpo