

French Consul General Visits Lamorinda, Pays Tribute to Veterans of Normandy

By Laurie Snyder

"We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields and in the streets. We shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender." – Winston Churchill



Three Normandy veterans swap stories. From left: Leonard Snyder (Orinda), Warren Jensen (Concord), and Bill Armstrong (Walnut Creek). Photo Ohlen Alexander

When British Prime Minister Winston Churchill uttered those words before the House of Commons in 1941, he knew the world was in for a long, difficult fight. The "War to End All Wars" (World War I) had left behind the dormant seeds of despair, waiting for the wrong gardener to cultivate them into fields of hatred and horror. Less than a decade later, Adolph Hitler appointed himself for the job. By World War II's end, 25 million men, women and children had been wounded with more than 50 million killed. Many were soldiers; many more were innocent civilians.

On Feb. 2, Pauline Carmona, Consul General of France in San Francisco and Orinda Vice-Mayor Victoria Smith reminded listeners just how close the world came to oblivion as they led a special ceremony at the Orinda Community Church honoring those who helped end Hitler's reign

of terror. Joined by Bill Cooper, Scoutmaster Emeritus of Orinda Boy Scout Troop 237 who organized the event with help from Scouting authorities and VFW Post 8063 (Lafayette), Carmona saluted 14 East Bay residents who fought in the June 6, 1944 Allied invasion of Normandy: Leonard Snyder and Richard Hersey (Orinda); Hilbert Seiwert (Lafayette); Benny Jordan (Moraga); Bob Hitchcock (Benicia); Jake Larson (Martinez); Bill Armstrong, Daniel Franklin, Chuck Sapper, Bob Tharratt, Herbert Smith (Walnut Creek); and Lynn Freeman, Warren Jensen and Earl Mortenson (Concord).

"Far from being weakened by the vicissitudes of history," noted Carmona, "the state of the friendship and the alliance between France and the U.S. is very strong" – bolstered by the belief of their citizenry in freedom and democracy. "People of my generation were allowed to grow up in a

free country," she said, because American soldiers came by the thousands 70 years ago to help save her nation, freeing Paris on Aug. 25, 1944.

Many of the 3 million troops liberating France during Operation Overlord were former Scouts, including Medal of Honor winner Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, the only general to land during D-Day's first wave, and Colonel James Rudder, commander of the Army's 2nd Rangers which suffered a 50 percent-plus casualty rate as men scaled 100-foot cliffs and attacked the Nazi artillery at Pointe Du Hoc. A full 75 percent of the medals awarded for World War II heroism overall were in fact pinned to the chests of former Scouts, according to a 2008 speech by Vice Admiral Richard Gallagher, former deputy commander of the U.S. European Command (now U.S. Navy, ret.). ... continued on page B2



Taxis to Hell and Back: American soldiers head from a Coast Guard landing barge toward the Normandy beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Photo Public domain, U.S. Library of Congress, Robert F. Sargent

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