

York County veteran posthumously honored with France's highest award

Nov. 14-2010-YORK, Pa -- Veterans Day was a very special event this year for the Snyder family in Yoe.

"It's kind of like history in the making," Sam Snyder, the Yoe Council president, said Thursday.

Snyder and his family were invited to the French Embassy in Washington D.C. the day before Veterans Day to accept The French Legion of Honor on behalf of the late Clinton R. Snyder, Sam Snyder's father. The French Legion of Honor is awarded by the president of France and is France's highest award, Sam Snyder said.

Clinton Snyder, who was born in North Hopewell Township, served in WWII in the 823rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. Sam Snyder discovered in the early 1980s that his Dad had earned medals, beyond one Purple Heart medal, that he never received. Sam Snyder found out that in some cases, foreign governments needed to be contacted for his father to receive the medals.

Sam Snyder contacted the French embassy in 1995 and learned he needed to provide documentation. That's when he discovered the following story of what his father did around Mortain, France in August 1944.

Snyder said he found out that after the Allied invasion, the Germans tried a counter-offensive. Clinton Snyder was assigned to the 30th Infantry division at a road block just east of Mortain.

During the early morning hours of Aug. 6, 1944, the German spearhead of that counter offensive came through Clinton Snyder's area. His tank destroyer gun and battalion was the first to be overrun.

They tried to make their way to a hill west of town known as Hill 314. They got about a half-mile when Snyder realized that the gun commander wasn't with them. It was that person's job to take the firing pin off the gun if they had to abandon it, to make the gun inoperable.

Snyder told Herb Fielding, the other soldier who made it out with Snyder, to hold up and he would go back and retrieve the pin. About an hour went by and when Snyder returned, he had the firing pin and was

wounded. He never told Fielding how he got wounded other than it was a shrapnel wound.

The two made it to the top of Hill 314, where they teamed up with men of the 120th Infantry Regiment. They remained there surrounded and cut off for the next 11 days. During that time they engaged in hand-to-hand combat and fought back at least four German attacks trying to dislodge them from the hill.

When they were finally rescued, of the 1,200 men who had been on Hill 314, only 297 came off. This became known as the famous "lost Battalion" and for Snyder's actions during this time frame, he earned the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation, the POW/MIA medal and the French Croix de Guerre, also known as the French Cross, and the French Fourregerre, which is a unit award.

Clinton Snyder died in May 2005, so Sam Snyder accepted the award on behalf of his father on Wednesday.

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