

## A Soldier and Artist in Normandy

The recent events marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the WWII D-Day invasion at Normandy prompt me to tell you about a man I recently met. I was in a consignment shop, drawn to a painting of a boat at the docks. It was a peaceful image, with bright and colorful brushstrokes. The signature of the artist, C.R. Sawdey, was neat and legible, like a draftsman's signature on a blueprint. I decided to see what I might learn about the artist.

I found a newspaper article from 2009 about Charles Ray "Bud" Sawdey of Fairport, who received the Insignia of Chevalier (Knight) of the French Legion of Honor, France's highest award to a non-citizen, at a ceremony at Rochester City Hall. Bud Sawdey took part in the Normandy invasion and the liberation of France in June of 1944. I learned that Bud and his wife Marilyn lived in Bushnell's Basin for many years, but more recently have resided at Packett's Glen, the former Fairport High School building on West Avenue. Soon I was fortunate to have an opportunity to meet the Sawdeys at their home in the majestic old high school.



Charles Ray "Bud" Sawdey

Tall and lean, with a quick smile, Bud Sawdey recalled stories from his war years, with the Fifth Engineers Special Brigade, the first to hit the beach at Normandy, often with vivid detail. He described his experiences, from basic training to his unit's arrival in Scotland, and landing on the beach at Normandy seventy years ago. In total, Sawdey spent over three years in the Armed Forces, and served 28 months overseas in the European theatre of war.

C.R. Sawdey graduated from Geneva High School in 1939, and pursued his interest in art at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts in 1942, the Biarritz-American University, France, in 1945, Rochester Institute of Technology, and post-graduate study at the New York-Phoenix School of Design in New York City. His education and training led to a successful career as a commercial artist.

Bud and Marilyn showed me many of their wonderful paintings, often landscape views. One painting was different from the others. Bud painted it while lying on the ground at Omaha Beach, Normandy, just a month after the invasion in 1944. He hunkered down in front of a statue of a cross, and began to paint, using crayons dipped in water in his helmet. Suddenly Bud heard an engine in the sky, and looked up to see an old German biplane headed his way. He thought he might not get the chance to finish the painting, but just as quickly, an American plane eliminated the threat. The painting of the cross at Omaha Beach is displayed in the Sawdey home.

After listening to Bud's stories, I knew I had to go back to the consignment shop and buy the painting that started me on this unanticipated journey. I stopped to visit the Sawdeys once more, this time to reunite him with the painting, and to see what he could tell me about it. Bud created it from his memory of a boat tied to the dock in Scotland, near where the Fifth Engineers Special Brigade first touched European soil in 1943. The painting now has a place of honor in our home, and helps me to appreciate the service and sacrifice of those who have served our country.

*Written by Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian*

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