

Leader

Copley resident a humble hero

Ceremony will mark dedication of La Rue Col. Parsons in France

By Kathleen Folkerth

COPLEY — Adam Parsons doesn't consider himself a hero. But enough people do that a street in a French village will be named for him next week.

Parsons, an 85-year-old Akron native who is currently a resident of Sumner on Ridgewood in Copley, was the co-pilot of The Argonia, the C-47 plane that lead the way over Normandy on June 6, 1944.

Parsons is proud of his duty but doesn't like being singled out. When his caretaker, Sandy Murray, told him one day that he's a hero for his service, he angrily disagreed, she said.

"He said, 'I was only doing the job I was supposed to be doing. I'm not a hero,'" Murray said.

Parsons was a member of the 94th Flying Training Squadron and 439th Troop Carrier Group. The latter was stationed in Chateaudun, France, a town about 60 miles southwest of Paris, in November 1944. According to Gary Hartman, vice president of marketing for Sumner on Ridgewood, the squadron fought against the Germans to free the city and its air base, which the Americans kept under their control until the war's end.

In 1972, Parsons organized the first of many reunions of the group there, at which many townspeople participated. Reunions also took place in 1975, 1980, 1981, 1990 and 1994. In 2003, Parsons hosted a reunion in Akron, with several families from Chateaudun, the sons and daughters of the residents during wartime, attending.

Last year, one of Parsons' fellow veterans suggested that a street be named after Parsons for organizing the reunions and keeping lines of communication open between the residents and the veterans. The mayor and city council agreed.

"I was embarrassed when they said they'd name a street after me," Parsons said. He'd rather the squadron be honored.

But La Rue Col. Parsons will be the new name of the street.

While Parsons is humble about the reasons for the honor, his son-in-law said the French people of that region hold Parsons and his fellow squadron members in high regard.

“The people of France recognize what he did in the war,” said Art Knight, of Cuyahoga Falls. “The people of France look at these men as the liberators of their country and they teach their children the same.”

The street’s dedication will take place on the morning of Oct. 13 in Chateaudun. Knight and his wife, Parsons’ daughter Jackie Parsons Knight, will be there to represent Parsons, who is too ill to travel. But via a live feed provided by Freedom Calls, an organization that sets up teleconferencing for active military members, Parsons will be able to participate from the Manor House at Sumner on Ridgewood.

His other daughters, Anita Parsons, of Florida, and Pam Schnee, of Rhode Island, will be with him. Several squadron members are expected to join him at the event as well.

Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic also is scheduled to attend, and he has proclaimed the day Adam Parsons Day in Akron, Knight said.

Parsons graduated from Garfield High School in 1938 and enrolled at The University of Akron, where he played football and wrestled. He enlisted in the army in 1941, becoming an infantry officer. He later applied to be an officer in the 506th Airborne. He also had applied to become a pilot and eventually entered training. He could have been a bomber pilot, but when the Troop Carrier Squadron was being formed with the Airborne division, he was assigned to that because of his background with the group.

In his role as pilot, the unarmed planes he flew dropped everything from paratroopers to supplies. At Normandy, “he dropped people he had trained with as paratroopers,” Knight said.

“He flew in every major mission the Airborne was used for in World War II,” Knight said.

At one point Parsons flew in supplies for men in the 82nd Airborne.

“They were surrounded,” Knight said. “Some men still call him because they’ve never been able to thank those guys.”

Knight said Parsons has been on a program on the History Channel speaking about his experiences. He also attended the premiere of “Band of Brothers,” the 2001 HBO miniseries, where he met Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks.

After World War II, Parsons returned to Akron and married Mary Zaha. He owned and operated Curtis Steel and Supply along with his sister and brother-in-law, Eva and Earl Poinar. He remained an active reservist though, so when the Korean War began in 1950 he was back on duty.

After his stint there, he decided to remain in the Air Force, and he and his family lived all over the country. He retired with the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1966 from the Air Force and returned to Curtis Steel, from which he retired in 1986.

A lifelong fitness buff, Parsons even got himself in the Guinness Book of World Records in 1986 for doing 1 million push-ups in one year. Knight said Parsons, who was 65 at the

time, would faithfully do 3,400 push-ups a day, splitting it up into 300-400 at a time throughout the day.

“He’s always lived the life of a Boy Scout,” Knight said. “Adam is the last of the great spirits of our country.”



Adam Parsons, shown in his early military days, will be honored next week with a street named for him in Chateaudun, France.

Photo courtesy of the Parsons family