

# 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment Society

## Deeds not Words



Special Edition

*Regulars, By God*

October 2019

### 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day, June 4-7. 2019



This Special Edition of the **22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment Society Newsletter** has been produced because the information and photos gathered during our visit to Normandy would have overwhelmed the regular issue of the Newsletter. After you have seen this Special Edition we hope that you will agree that such an experience was best shared with the Membership in this manner.

The adventure began in the autumn of 2016 when we learned of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment France. This is a group of French and Belgium citizens who have formed a re-enactment group that not only dresses in period correct uniforms, has period correct equipment but has studied the actions of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment from the time the Regiment landed on Utah Beach until the end of World War II. About a year into

our e-mailing with the 22<sup>nd</sup> IR France an invitation was extended to Members of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment Society to attend the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day. This invitation was announced in the Newsletter and further discussed at the Atlanta reunion. **Mark Woempner, DMOR, HHC, 1/22, 2001-2003** and his wife, Carrie, **David Milewski, DMOR, Charlie Co., 1967-1968** and his wife, Judy and I along with my wife, Gail, signed on for the trip. 22<sup>nd</sup> IR France was notified and they began to make plans for the visit.

In January I contacted a reputable travel agency and was told that every hotel in the Normandy region had been booked a year in advance of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary date. I immediately contacted **Loic Parent, President of 22 IR France**, and told him of the information regarding quarters availability. About an hour later I received an e-mail response from Loic with details of a 4 bedroom, 3 bath house in Normandy that we could rent for a reasonable price. I made the contact and rented the house. I mention this because this is one of many times that Loic and his associates came to our aid before and during the visit.

Our next search regarded air travel. After doing some searching, David found that the least expensive and most direct way for him and Judy to get to Paris was to fly to Boston and then on to Paris. Good News was that Gail and I would meet them in Boston and join them on the same flight. Mark and Carrie would travel from San Francisco directly to Paris. More Good News was that our flights were scheduled to arrive within 20 minutes of one another.

The day came and we all set about traveling. A delay in the flight out of Boston would set us back about an hour. When we landed, David sent Mark the info on our car rental so that he could get the process in motion. Enterprise couldn't find the reservation and the entire process was held up until David, Judy, Gail and I got through customs. More delays. Another rental agent showed up and was able to find the reservation. However, the vehicle was not at our location, we had to be transported. We had a four hour drive ahead of us and were now over two hours late in getting started. There were more problems when we returned the vehicle. Lesson, stay away from Enterprise Car Rental.

Well, we found our way to the village where we would be staying. After driving through the village three times looking for the street where the house was supposedly located we were waved down by a woman who owned the house. Apparently, we were not the first group of travelers who couldn't find the house, which was well hidden on a driveway that ran off of what appeared to be another driveway. I am providing UTM coordinates, go to Google Earth and enter 30U588513.94 E, 5499480.20 N and you will see the house. Note that the driveway to the north, hidden under the

trees was how the house was approached from the main road. I have provided this information in defense of Mark's comments; see below, about my inability to navigate. I will bring my personal GPS equipment with me on all future expeditions.



**Normandy Quarters**

We settled into the house and awaited Loic and David Jacques arrival. Loic knew that we would be tired from the trip and had offered to bring pizza, soft drinks and wine to the house. Our hosts arrived, as promised, and after introductions and the realization the neither Loic nor David spoke any English, Carrie and I did our best by combining our limited abilities with French to hold a conversation. I made it known to Loic that I thought he spoke some English because of all the e-mail conversations we had exchanged over the past 18 months. Loic produce his cell phone and spoke into it, the result was the phone providing a translation. We were saved! Better yet, the cell would translate French to English or English to French. Carrie and I were not going to develop migraine headaches attempting to correctly translate all the conversations that would take place over the next few days. I quickly named Loic's cell "Magic Box", the name stuck.



**First Meeting, David Jacques, Loic Parent and Jim May**

### **Day One, June 5:**

The next morning found us in the village of Emondeville, which was about a ten minute drive from the rental house. I'm providing UTM coordinates so that the reader can see the quaintness of the area.

#### **Raising the 48 Star American Flag**

30U619964.64 E, 5479812.15 N.

correct. They flew a 48 Star American Flag, which they treated with more reverence than many Americans presently treat our American Flag.



**Raising the 48 Star American Flag**



**Church in Emondeville**

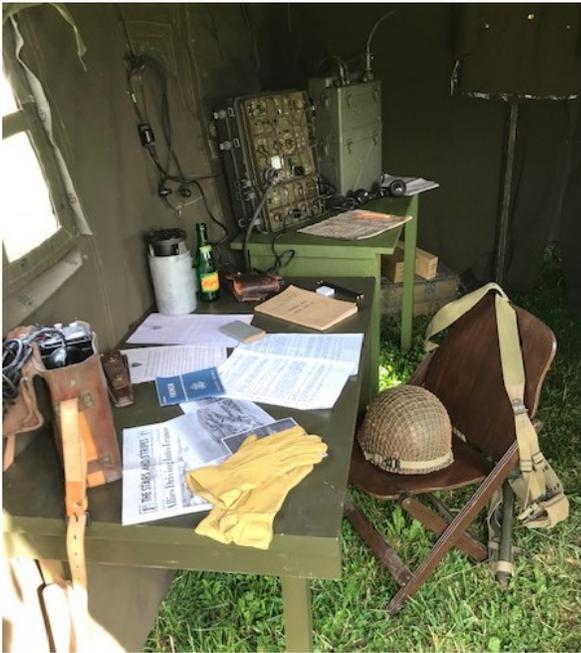
We met with Loic and David and followed them to a field where 22<sup>nd</sup> IR France had set up their camp. The accompanying photos will show the authenticity of the efforts of our French friends. Everything they wore, every tent, every piece of equipment, every vehicle was WW II



**Vince Leveque's Jeep**

The camp was located near the ocean and not far from Utah Beach. The UTM coordinates are 30U621223.73 E, 5480367.66N. A broader view will reveal how close to the ocean and Utah Beach the camp was located. It was time for introductions.

While there is a hierarchy of members in 22<sup>nd</sup> IR France, I will not attempt to



**Commo Tent All WW II Correct**

present that order, I will simply list the member's names in alphabetical order of last names starting with David Jacques, Giles Levesque, Vincent Levesque, Erwan Pacary, Loic Parent, Theophile Odaert, Erwan Pacary, Dominique Vanharen, Philippe Vandooren and Julien Woestyn. Before we began our two day tour, Julien presented each of us with booklets that contained the program we would follow and a complete history of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment's activities from the landing on Utah Beach on 6 June to the reduction of the German defenses in Quineville on 14 June. The action on 14 June left the Germans with no natural defenses against the advances being made on their northern flank. We were invited to breakfast. The French eat lightly in the morning. We had bread and pastries with coffee. During breakfast we were asked if there was anything in particular we wished to see or do. Prior to the visit, we, David, Mark and I, had agreed to follow whatever program that the Re-Enactors planned for us. Their suggestion was that we visit Omaha Beach and then move on to the Utah Beach sector where the 22<sup>nd</sup>

Regiment had fought. This was fine with us, so we headed out.

The Omaha Beach site is spread out over a long length of narrow road that is designed more as a broad walking path than a road. To the West is the ocean and to the East is the American Cemetery. While walking along this path I found myself about midway along its length starring down a long slope that lead to the landing area. I could not believe what I was seeing. I looked to my left and saw that David and Mark were also starring down this long slope. We all had the same thought, who would pick such a place to land troops? When one considers that this slope was known to be defended by massive bunkers as well as machine gun bunkers, there is no good reason for selecting the site. Had it not been for the US Navy Destroyers coming into shallow water and firing their 5 inch guns into the bunkers the attempted landing on Omaha Beach would have been a complete failure. In fact, the frontal assault did not succeed. Very few, if any, made it up the slope. It wasn't until troops came around from the rear of the machine gun bunkers and silenced them that the slaughter ended.



**Slope on Omaha Beach Landing Site**

The American Cemetery is beyond impressive. The Headstones go on for

what seems like forever. A photo of one, that of John A. Inman, 22 INF. 4 DIV. accompanies this writing. Mark, see below, notes that more than 50 Headstones of 22<sup>nd</sup> IR Soldiers are present in this Cemetery. I cannot find the words to properly convey the feelings that came over me while looking out over this Cemetery. I was humbled, sad and proud of the young men for making the ultimate sacrifice so that I might live the free life I have lived.



**American Cemetery**



**22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Soldier Marker**

We left the Cemetery and stopped in town for lunch. Our hosts had arranged for us to have a private tour the German Bunkers at Azeville. The 22<sup>nd</sup> IR had fought its way to this battery on June 7, 1944. It took days to reduce the battery at Azeville and its supporting battery at

Crisbecq. These shore defense batteries had been set up not only to defend against invasion from the sea, but from land. The accompanying photos will provide the best explanations as to what we saw. What the photos do not show is the interconnection between the fortifications along the Normandy Coast and how each of the major bunkers were protected by lesser bunkers. Fire Support Bases, FSB's, in Vietnam were set up so that they could provide mutual support in the event of attack. The idea may have come from the way the Germans had arranged their batteries.



**Private Tour of the Azeville Bunker Complex**



**Azeville Bunker, Front of Main Gun Port**



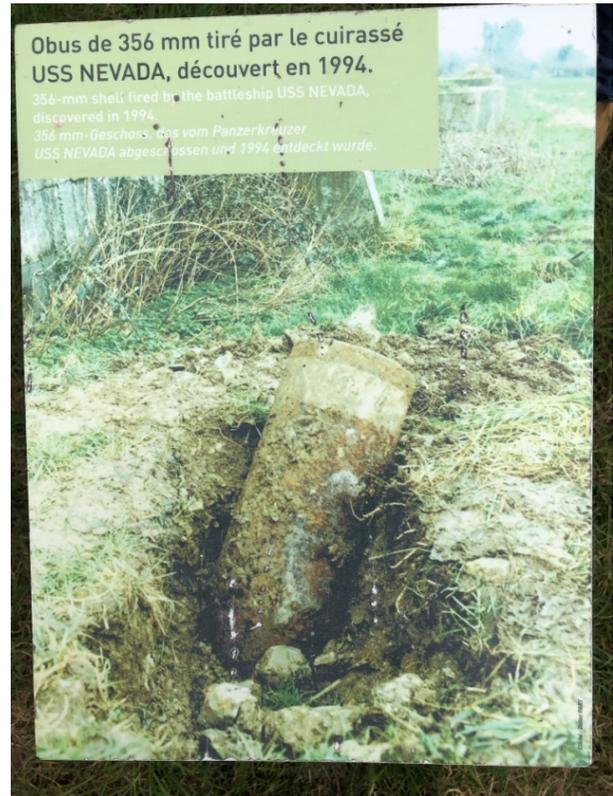
**Azeville Bunker Main Gun Mount**



**This hole was made by a 14 inch shell fired from the USS Nevada. The shell passed through the main gun port without hitting the gun. It did not explode but did pass through not only the rear wall of the gun port but passed through another corridor wall before burying itself in the ground behind the bunker. The concussion from the strike killed the entire gun crew.**



**Supporting Bunker with Machine Guns**



**This is a photo of the unexploded shell. The shell was found in 1994, buried behind the bunker.**

While we were traveling from place to place we were amazed at the numbers of WW II Army vehicles we saw, not on display, but on the roads. M-38 Jeeps, Deuce and a Half Trucks, Ambulances, you name it, they were everywhere, and they were filled with re-enactors. And, all in tribute to those who came to save them.

We returned to the camp site to find that Isaac Curtis Phillips had arrived. Curtis, as he prefers to be called, is a Veteran of Dog Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Curtis landed on Utah Beach on D-Day and fought his way with the 22<sup>nd</sup> IR across France. He was wounded three times; the third time on September 17, 1944 was serious resulting in his evacuation to the rear where he spent three weeks in a comma. He remained in the rear and

after the war married a Belgium woman. They lived in the States for a brief period and then returned to Belgium where he still resides. Besides Mr Phillips we found that family, friends and neighbors of the camp site were gathering. And, they were bringing food. Trays of different hors d'oeuvres and quiche were passed while all joined in conversation. Julien, Theophile and Dominique did much of the translation. Again, Carrie and I were grateful. It was now that I realized that the respect that the Re-Enactors had for those who rescued Normandy from the Nazi's was wide-spread among the citizens of this land. I asked a school age child, through one of our translators, how they knew about D-Day. I was told that they learn all about the war in school. This cannot be said by American school age children. They are taught very little, if anything, about the sacrifices made by their ancestors in World War I or II. But I digress.

In addition to the 22<sup>nd</sup> IR WW II Guidon, Vietnam Guidon and AFG-IRAQ Guidon we had brought with us a "D", 1-22 IR Guidon that Mark would present to our hosts as a gift from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment Society. The Guidon was well received with many posing for photos with it. It was getting late and we'd had a very long day with another just as long in store for the next, so headed for our quarters.



**Mark inviting Loic to place the "D" Guidon with the other Regimental Guidons**



**Group with Curtis and Guidons**



**Mark presenting the Re-Enactors with 22<sup>nd</sup> IR Challenge Coins**



**Mark presenting "D," 2/22**



Gail and Jim



Mark and Jim



Carrie and Mark

### American Soldiers with French Girlfriends

#### Day Two, June 6, D-Day:

We were up and showered earlier so that we could go to McDonald's for breakfast. A cell phone search had located the McDonald's a mere 8 miles from our quarters. So, it was off to Egg McMuffin

Land. Well, not so fast. McDonald's would not open until 10 AM. Apparently, the French, at least in Normandy, don't eat the type of breakfast that we are accustomed to. We were all wondering how the term "French Toast" came about?? Anyway, we took a different route to the camp site where we ate more bread and pastries. Mark kept saying, in a low tone, "meat, I need meat."

Our hosts had planned our day with a visit to Hiesville where a memorial ceremony would be held at the edge of a field where gliders had landed on the early morning of D-Day. A monument has been erected to memorialize General Pratt and all those members of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne who died there. A contingent from the 101st Airborne would be joined by local French Officials and Re-Enactors to memorialize the sacrifices made by all of those who served in the 101st Airborne on D-Day. It was at this site that I began to see the great attendance of French citizens. Old, middle-aged, young parents pushing strollers and teenagers had come

to pay respect to the Americans who had come to liberate them from the Nazi menace. The French have not re-written History. They knew, as a people, that they were under the tyranny of the Nazi's in 1944 and they knew then as they do now that it was the Americans, British and Canadians who came to free them. Speeches were made in French and in English; wreaths were laid all in recognition of the sacrifices made 75 years ago. Impressive reverence was on display. After the completion of this memorial we would travel to the La Colombiere, site where the first field Hospital in Normandy had been established.



**M 29 Weasel**

Mark and I returned to the Memorial site just as the speeches and wreaths were laid by the French to honor those who had come to save them. We learned that this Hospital treated Americans and the French who were wounded during the fighting. Again the French in Normandy have not forgotten who came to save them. After the ceremony had completed, Colonel Escandon, the Officer leading the 101<sup>st</sup> Honor Guard, approached me and asked if I knew Rob Schexnayder. (Our 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment hats and shirts identified us.) I told him that I knew Rob and that we were Members of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Old Goats Squad. He replied that he had served in the 10<sup>th</sup> Mtn with Rob and was well aware of the Old Goats Squad. He went on to say that the 22<sup>nd</sup> Old Goats Squad was unique and the envy of other Battalions.



**Active Duty 101<sup>st</sup> Soldiers and Re-Enactors Honor Guard at Pratt Memorial**

At the La Colombiere site, in addition to the Monument there is a display of WW II Military equipment. Mark and I gravitated to this area so we could examine the equipment. We found one, a Wiesel, see accompanying photo, very interesting. The version we saw carried a three man crew and was equipped with a Browning M-1 machine gun. In contrast to the track vehicles of today's Army the Wiesel looked like kid's toy.



**Colonel Escandon, WW II 101<sup>st</sup> Soldier and French**

Our next stop would be Utah Beach. Much of what we experienced can best be explained by looking at the accompanying photos. What you won't see is what I did after laying the rose I had in the water. I'll first explain. At the last reunion Joe Motil attended he told a story about his landing on Utah Beach. He said that when the ramp dropped he ran as fast as he could to the sea wall while yelling "The pale faces are coming, the pale faces are coming." He went on to say that he had no idea then or now why he yelled what he did. After placing the rose in the water, I turned and ran to the sea wall yelling, as Joe did, "The pale faces are coming..." over and over until I reached the sea wall. When I stopped I was greeted by groups of people on both sides staring at me with uncertain looks on their faces. With tears in my eyes I explained why I did what I did and in who's memory I did it. The people around me relaxed now knowing I wasn't a mad-man and gave their approval to my efforts to pay my respects to Joe as well as all of those who went ashore on D-Day.



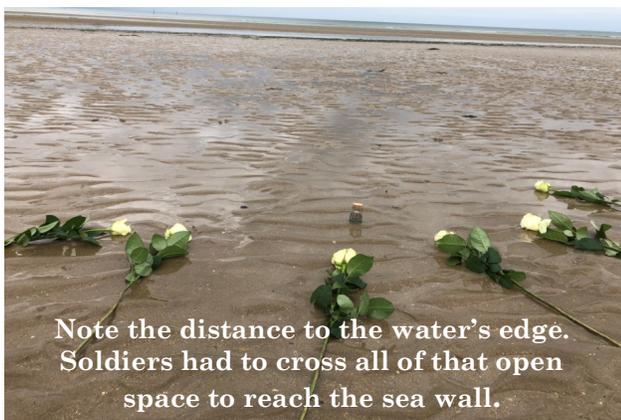
**22<sup>nd</sup> IR France on Landing Craft**



**Entire Group**



**4th ID Monument**



Note the distance to the water's edge. Soldiers had to cross all of that open space to reach the sea wall.

After taking many photos we left Utah Beach and returned to camp where we found that Erwan, the Official Cook, was char-broiling steaks to order. All the fixings were also served. It was a fine meal and Mark finally had meat. After lunch we proceeded to Chateau de Fontenay which is referred to as Fontenay Castle. This site was a Command and Control Center for the Germans in the Normandy Region. For

days attempts were made to drive the Germans from this granite structure, but none were successful. The Germans in the Castle, realizing that they were going to be surrounded, blew up the interior of the building as they made their escape to the east.



**Chateau de Fontenay in its present state.**



**An examination of the granite window surrounds revealed many bullet strikes.**

While we were at the Castle we were approached by two men, in Re-Enactor garb, informing us that we were on private property and had to leave. We made no argument and began to follow the men. I noticed that one of these men had a 4<sup>th</sup> ID Patch on his uniform. I told him that we were 4<sup>th</sup> ID. It was then that he noticed our 22<sup>nd</sup> hats and said that he identified with the 22<sup>nd</sup> IR and pointed out his historic vehicle lettered up in 22<sup>nd</sup>

fashion. We were now invited to see their private museum. The museum was in an old stone barn. There was a 12 foot apple press in the center of this barn. There must have been many apple trees in this area at one time. On display were all types of authentic equipment items, American and German that had been found in the area. The owner had a story about each item, what it was and where it was found. What started out as an accusation of trespass turned into a friendly visit with “thank you’s” and handshakes when we were leaving.

After leaving the Castle we drove a short distance where we visited a formal museum. We were well received by the owner of this museum who presented us with Normandy Memorial Coins. In turn, Mark presented the owner with a 22<sup>nd</sup> Challenge Coin and David presented the owner with a VN 222 Challenge Coin. When we entered the museum we found that it had been built around another support bunker. We agreed that German soldiers stationed along the Atlantic Line spent most of their time pouring concrete



After visiting the Museum and the surrounding area where more support bunkers were located, we went to Sainte-Mere-Eglise, the famous site of where the paratrooper got hung up on the church steeple. The town was filled with people,

so much so that the roads through the town were closed. We had stopped earlier in the visit and shopped for coffee, snacks and other items but now we were looking for beer. Mark found what we needed and bought enough beer for whatever contingency might arise. We brought the beer back to camp with us. I asked our Hosts if there was any ice and was met with a questioning look. Our Hosts assumed that I wanted to put ice in a glass with the beer, something they had never seen. I explained how Americans prefer their beer chilled by placing the bottles in ice. Lessons learned.



### **Sainte-Mere-Eglise**

**The parachute has been placed on the 'wrong' side of the steeple so that it faces the town.**

We returned to the camp site where friends and families were gathering for an evening visit. Again, hors d'oeuvres, quiches and pastries were being served. Good News was that we had beer to drink. There were many fine conversations with those who came to visit, some spoke English, which put less strain on our interpreters.

It was late with many of the families and friends now gone, so we decided to head back to our quarters. We had to pack for our drive back to Caen where we would catch our flight to London the next day. Thanks and Good-Byes were exchanged with promises to keep in touch made. When we got into our vehicle we found that our Hosts were nowhere in sight. As we drove from the field onto the lane, we saw that our Hosts were standing on line where they presented us with a hand salute as we passed by. This was a special end to a very special visit. I hope that this story, which will be shared with 22 IR France, expresses the thanks and gratitude that they truly deserve for making our Normandy visit a precious memory.

**Jim L. May, HMOR**

### **Mark's Comments:**

The 22nd Infantry Regiment Society team journey begins with a long flight from the United States to Paris (3-4 June). Although that journey 75 years ago for the 22nd Infantry soldiers that would storm the beaches of Normandy on D-Day were not measured in hours, but in months on a ship

across the Atlantic to England then training and organizing for the assault.

We conducted linkup operations at the Charles De Gaulle airport in Paris followed by a beating by the rental car company for several hours in negotiations to finally acquire transportation resources for “our final assault” to the Normandy region. Jim May the consummate logistician had everything in hand and assigned Dave Milewski as the driver fighting through the traffic filled with French drivers while Woempner slept (snored) through the entire battle!

Jim’s logistical prowess was not matched by his navigational skills as we wondered for an hour trying to find our bivouac site for the coming days of the 75th anniversary...luckily the owner of the VRBO spotted us driving by their village (for the 3rd time) waved us down and hand carried us to the house where we would stay for the next 3 days. We were thankful as Dave was drained from 24 hours of sleeplessness.

We settled in, just in time to receive the 22nd Infantry Regiment Society Re-Enactors that brought the class I supplies for the evening. Then 4 pizzas and a bottle of wine later along with a lengthy discussion using the “magic box” (cell phone with French to English translator application) had us organized for the linkup with the entire team at Emondeville the next day.

Refreshed after a much-needed night of sleep the US contingent (Jim, Gail, Dave, Judy, Mark, and Carrie) headed for linkup operations the morning of 5 June. Using the most visible landmark, the village church, as our target, made the linkup near seamless. From there we followed our Hosts down country lanes to their bivouac site. It was a site to see with a half a dozen tent (circa 1940s) and 2 fully restored Willie’s jeeps with 4<sup>th</sup> ID and 22nd Infantry markings.

The team was famished and our Hosts provided us sustenance in the way of bread and pastries. This proved to be standard fare in Normandy for the remainder of time in

France. We then took a tour of the bivouac site with its multitude of all things from the 1940s...even an “Ivy” bar comprising half of the GP medium tent, where we would party with our comrades for the remainder of the evenings in Normandy. The other half of the tent served as the mess hall. The next item on the agenda was the raising of the American flag (period perfect with 48 stars). This mission was taken seriously, with reverence, and precision the members of 22 IR France.

Our next mission was an escorted tour of the Omaha beach museum and cemetery. Our hearts were filled with the bravery and sacrifice by the allied forces that occurred those 75 years gone by. As we walked among the more than 9000 head stones (more than 50 bore the 22nd regiment imprinted on them) our hearts were filled with admiration and sadness at the same time. As I cried both during the tour and the writing of this article, it reminds me once again what my father told me many times as a child and what is written on his tombstone: “Freedom is not Free”. In the case of D-Day the freedom of the French people were paid for by the blood of Americans, Brits, and Canadians most of whom were under 20 years of age.

Looking down from the escarpment held by the German forces in their concreted fighting positions and bunker complexes, I found it amazing that we (the Allies) would dare such an improbable - impossible task. The will of the men that accomplished that task in the face of those odds should humble the most arrogant of fighting men and soldiers. Over 8000 allied soldiers died in that one day. I wonder at the steel and courage displayed that day to do the impossible.

The cemetery was filled with visitors fawning over the wheelchair bound D-Day Veterans. It made my heart glad to see the respect and notoriety that each WWII Vet received throughout the entire trip; yes they were the “Rock Stars” of this 2 day event. Much of the cemetery was in preparation for the arrival of President Trump and President Macron the next day. All in all, a notable experience, one that will stay with me to my death.

### **David Milewski's comments:**

When I first decided to go on this trip I realized I had developed several preconceived ideas on what to expect. I did not expect to be able to communicate with our hosts due to the language difference nor did I expect to be warmly welcomed by the French people. I was wrong on all accounts. Research has shown that the majority of things we worry about never happen. This was proven once again on this trip.

We were welcomed like royalty and we were able to communicate with limited English spoken and the use of the "Magic Box" which translated our conversations. The sincerity of our hosts welcoming was not lost on a language barrier. You could tell by emotions by facial and body posture, their thoughts were genuine and sincere. They continually displayed an appreciation for what our soldiers did in taking back France from the Germans. They mentioned several times if it wasn't for our help during WW II they would still be under German rule. I did not expect to hear so much thankfulness. I witnessed their expressed gratefulness while watching tears flow down their cheeks.

It was an honor and privilege to represent the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment Society on this trip. I have made new memories as well as lifelong friends in a country I never expected to travel in. To my Friends in Normandy I write, I will be back.

**Make plans now to attend the 2020 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment Society Reunion in Dallas TX on June 4-7, 2020. The 76<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to the D-Day Invasion. Hear, Mark, Jim, and David in person tell of their experience during t their visit. Hear the stories that were not fit to print.**

**Make your hotel reservations today, and send your registration form to Martin.**