

**Speech of Sally Harper** (Daughter of SNAFU pilot Lt. James P. Harper)  
Merville-Franceville - France - June 7, 2014

My father was born in 1921 and raised in Los Angeles California, the son of a motion picture theater owner and a former stage actress. He had an ideal childhood growing up in Los Angeles & Corona California, spending idyllic summers & winters at his family cabin in Lake Arrowhead.

He was barely 21 when he enlisted in the Air Force and only 23 years old when he flew his Dakota, The SNAFU-Special, over Normandy. In all, he flew 19 missions on the SNAFU from June 6 1944 to April 22, 1945, he was the pilot of the plane for less than a year in total, but his bravery was to be recorded in history. The things he accomplished in that time will live forever in the hearts & minds of the French people and it is amazing to see the way he is honored here.

Somehow I think my father knew the importance of his part in history, he carried a dog-eared copy of himself in the pilot seat of SNAFU in his wallet all of his life, until the day he died. Being a bit of a prankster, he loved nothing better than showing it to straight-laced people, explaining the meaning of the acronym, SNAFU, and he was always highly amused by their shocked reactions to the forbidden f-word, surprisingly not much has changed, there is still controversy over this word, even today!

He would be delighted to see the way his beloved plane has been restored to it's original condition, I wish he could be here to see it in person, sit in the pilot seat one more time and meet all of the the wonderful people who worked so hard to bring it back to Normandy.

My father won his medals for valiant, brave and exceptional service in four of his missions, the first Air Medal was a Paratroop over Normandy on D-day, the first Oak Leaf Cluster was over Southern France, 2nd Cluster over Rhine Germany, and the 3rd Cluster over Bastogne, his final paratroop.

We learned many things about my father from the other pilots, Gene Noble & Hank Moreland. His fellow pilots nicknamed him "Hot Shot" Harper, and they told us stories of his daring piloting, including flying circles around the Eiffel Tower, and swooping new recruits down to ground level showing them "how we cut the wheat in Normandy".

Eight Dakotas went into Bastogne, and only 3 returned, The SNAFU flew through a sky "black with gunfire" and was severely hit by enemy gunfire. Lt. Harper bravely landed the plane safely despite the missing landing gear. Hank told us that after the Battle of Bastogne, my father was never the same person and suffered severely from post-traumatic stress. After the war my father said he tried, but he could never bring himself to fly again, for him, the fun was gone from flying forever. When I hear these stories, I am in awe of the this brave young man and his accomplishments, he was an exceptional pilot and soldier.

After the war was over, my father celebrated in Paris with his fellow pilots and the French people. He told me he found these two German medals on the streets of Paris, which he kept until he died. They both signify the bravery of the German Soldiers and my sisters & I would like to dedicate them to the Batterie Merville Museum to display.

It is heart warming to see the reverence, respect, and love with which the French people embrace these brave men who battled along side them for their freedom seventy years ago. I wish my own country showed this kind of reverence, attention and love for our Veterans who gave their all for their country in any war.

To commemorate the 70th anniversary of D-day, we would like to present the medals that my father earned flying The SNAFU-Special to the people of France in honor of all the brave men who lived and died for the freedom and liberation of France and the World. When my father died at age 84, he thought his brave service was forgotten, so I am proud to say that now the whole world knows the story of his heroism!

Please accept my thanks and deepest appreciation on behalf of my father.

As a peace lover, my dearest wish is that we can all learn to live in peace, and that we somehow put an end to the terrible destruction of wars everywhere in the world.