

Creating sculpture of DeGlopper is labor of love for Youngstown sculptor

Susan Geissler is looking forward to June 5 unveiling of her work

BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI

On Jan. 31, 2020, sculptor Susan Geissler of Youngstown invited relatives of Charles N. DeGlopper and members of the DeGlopper Memorial Expansion Committee into her studio for a final inspection of the life-sized sculpture of Grand Island's World War II hero, U.S. Army Private 1st Class Charles N. DeGlopper. At that time, the unveiling was scheduled for D-Day, June 6, 2020, and the finished clay sculpture still had to be transported to Loveland, Colorado for a two-month, 13-step process to have it sealed and cast to bronze before installation in the park bearing his name at the corners of Baseline Road and Grand Island Boulevard.

"When they were all here, I unveiled my finished clay sculpture of Charles DeGlopper that I created from studying the detail in several photos, from research my husband, Peter Henderson and I had done and from many conversations with Ray DeGlopper, his wife, Anita,



Ray DeGlopper, left, and Susan Geissler discuss the unveiling of his uncle's statue during a meeting last week in her Youngstown studio. (Photo by Michael J. Billoni)

and his brothers, Charles and George," Geissler explained during a recent interview in her quaint Main Street studio on the shores of the lower Niagara River in downtown Youngstown. "I asked a simple question: Does it look like Charles DeGlopper looked at the Battle of Normandy as his eyes peered down the barrel of his Browning automatic rifle?"

"Quite honestly, they were all amazed

with the image I had created of him, and Ray said he is looking right at me and so did Peter," she said. "However, the more I looked at it, the more it did not appear he was looking into the eye of the German enemies he was shooting so his troop could escape unharmed. Suddenly, I did not like it. So, after everyone had left, I cut off his head and re-sculpted it. The finished product is just where I wanted

him to be. It made all the difference in the world because now when you look at him, you can see his piercing eyes looking directly into the eyes of his enemy."

The DeGlopper sculpture was completed in time for last year's unveiling, which was postponed until 9:45 a.m. June 5, 2021, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been securely and secretly stored and only seen by Ray DeGlopper and family members. It will continue to be covered when project manager Dan Drexelius arranges its transportation and delicate installation on the granite base at the site. The Island Dispatch was permitted to see the finished sculpture under strict guidelines photos would not be taken.

Only one word describes what we saw: "Wow!"

Geissler's attention to every detail of this soldier is magnificent. She truly captured what it was like at that moment for the 22-year-old member of Company C, 325th Glider Infantry, which was advancing to secure a bridgehead across the Merderet River at LaFiere, France. At dawn, the platoon had penetrated an outer line of machine guns and riflemen, but in doing so they had become cut off from the rest of the company. Vastly superior German forces began a decimation of the stricken unit and put in motion a flanking maneuver that would have completely exposed the American platoon in a shallow roadside ditch where it had taken cover.

Despite coming under increased fire, the 6-foot-7 Pfc. DeGlopper stood up and

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Charles N. DeGlopper Memorial Statue and Killed in Action Plaques Unveiling Saturday, June 5, 2021, 9:45 a.m.

Grand Island Boulevard at the corner of Baseline Road



JOSEPH A. L'HUILLIER
December 29, 1938 - July 25, 1968



Captain (Capt.) L'Huillier enlisted in the Air Force, arrived at the Niagara Falls Air Base as a helicopter pilot and became a jet fighter pilot flying F-100 Aircraft for four years.

Capt. L'Huillier accepted a commission in the Air Force about a month before the departure of the 107th Tactical Fighter Group to Vietnam in May 1968. The 107th had been activated in January, three days after North Korea captured the US Intelligence Ship Pueblo.

Capt. L'Huillier was piloting a ground support mission that was shot down by enemy fire in Quang Tin, South Vietnam. He was the first member of the 107th to be killed in action, is buried at Arlington National Cemetery and received many commendations including the Purple Heart.

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Taquito Lindo Artisanal Tacos

Taquito Lindo Artisanal Tacos is coming soon to 1849 Grand Island Blvd. The previous restaurant at that location,

the Viking Diner, closed on March 13. The original eatery at the site was the Clown House, which opened in May 1955. The building also previously housed the Islander Restaurant and McMahon's Family Restaurant.

Pizza Amoré

Pizza Amoré's second location is now open at 1030 Payne Ave. in North Tonawanda. The Grand Island location is 2024 Grand Island Blvd.

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