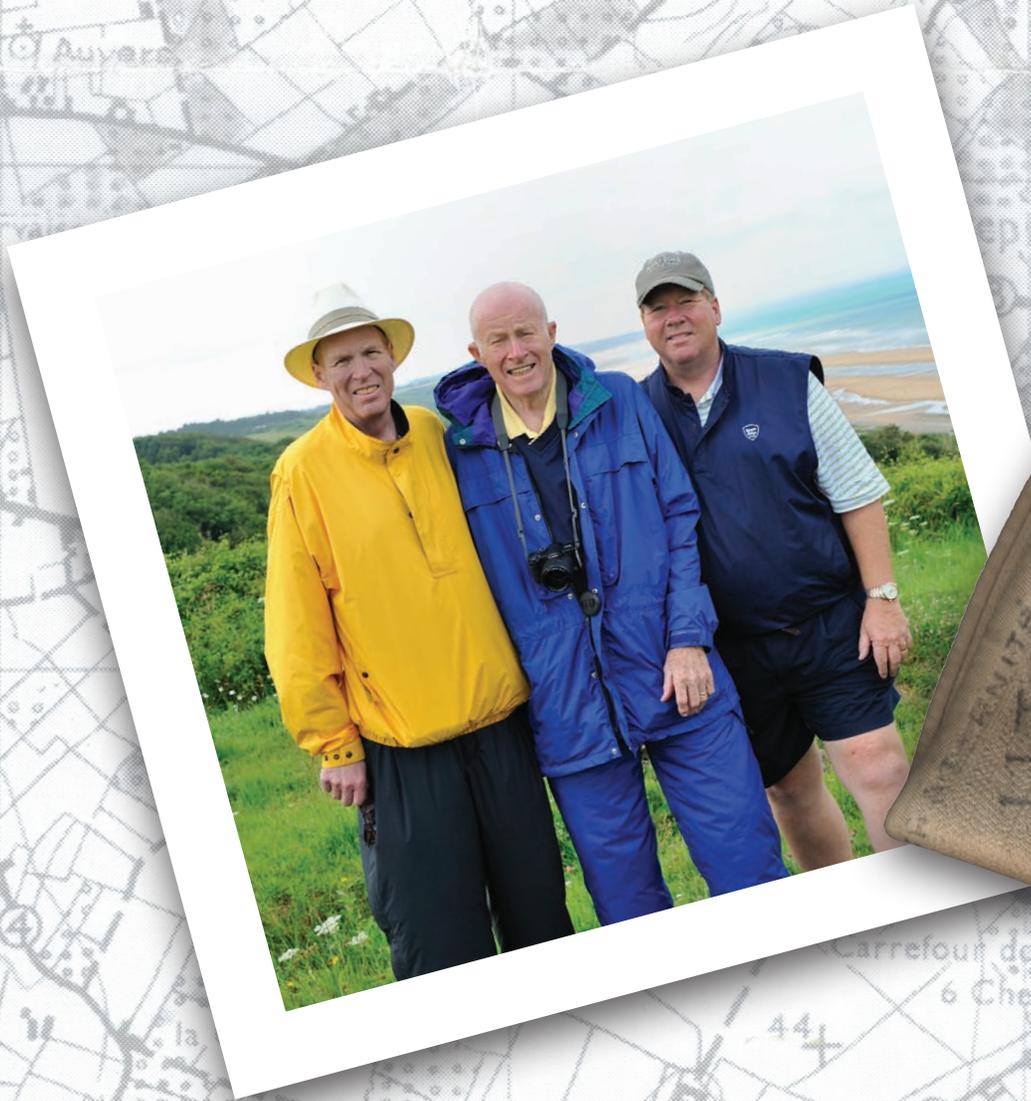


The Chicago Kid Returns

A Thunderbolt in Normandy 65 years later





The Chicago Kid Returns

A Thunderbolt in Normandy 65 years later

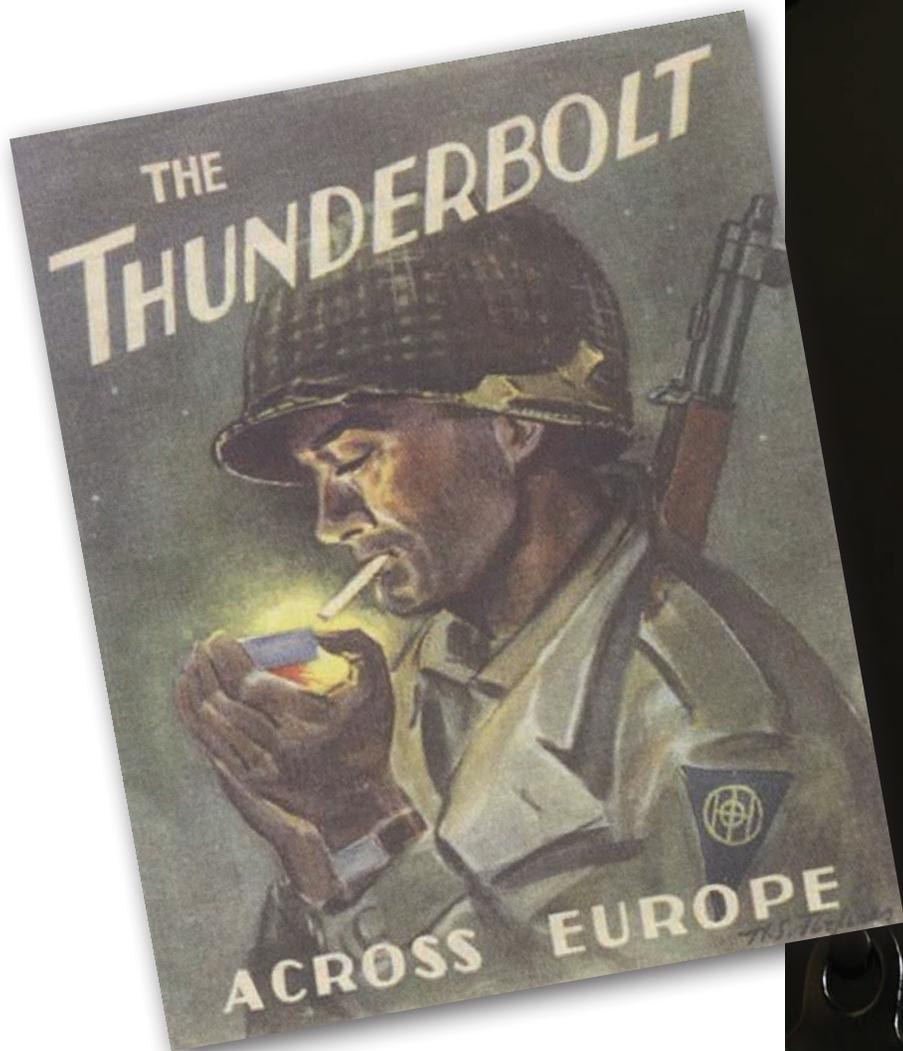
In 2006, as Eric became more and more interested in World War II, he began to ask Dad what he did in the war and where he fought. While Dad was reluctant at first, he began to open up about his war-time experiences.

Eric began researching the history behind Dad's 83rd Infantry Division and specifically the 331st Regiment, which Dad was a part of. Ultimately, this led Eric to the vicinity of Méautis, France where the 331st Regiment fought their first major battles in Normandy on the morning of July 4, 1944.

In 2007, Lisa and Eric left for France to see first hand the role the Americans had in the liberation of Normandy. They toured the entire Utah and Omaha Beach sectors, but specifically, Eric and Lisa spent time in the area of Méautis walking the hedgerows and, using Eric's research, tried to identify the areas where Dad fought.

After getting home and telling the story to Dad, both Dad and Dave became very interested in making the trip themselves. Dad particularly became very interested in seeing where he fought as a 19 year old soldier and impact the 83rd Division had in the Normandy campaign.

With this background, the planning began for the Chicago Kid's return to Normandy with his two sons. Our goal was to be with Dad on those same fields where he fought... 65 years later to the day.



SUPREME HEADQUARTERS
ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE



Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!

Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

Dwight D. Eisenhower



Andrew Wayne Kunkel, 36 686 408, was assigned to 83rd Infantry Division, Company L, as a private and trained at Camp Breckenridge in Kentucky. On or about April 16, 1944, the 83rd Infantry landed in England after crossing the Atlantic on the George Washington in preparation for the invasion of France.

The 83rd Infantry Division "The Thunderbolts" landed at Omaha Beach between June 21st and June 24th, 1944 after being battered in a bad storm in the Channel. The 83rd Division replaced the 101st Airborne on the front lines in Normandy.





Dad trained at Camp Breckenridge in Kentucky. While at the camp, Dad annotated a book highlighting life in Camp Breckenridge with his own commentary. Dad particularly liked shooting and this was his favorite part of basic training. He eventually qualified as Expert on the M1 Garand Rifle.



Later in the war and after being wounded, Dad worked for the Stars and Stripes newspaper in Paris and, while there he collected a few newspapers to take home. The newspapers and the Camp Breckenridge booklet show what life was like for a 19 year old soldier in the early 1940's.

CONTINENTAL EDITION

1 fr.

THE STARS AND STRIPES

1 fr.

Daily Newspaper of U.S. Armed Forces

in the European Theater of Operations

Vol. 1 No. 20

Printed "Somewhere in France"

Wednesday, July 26, 1944

ALLIES OPEN TWIN DRIVES IN NORMANDY

On Other Fronts

Soviet Armor Speeds Drive For Warsaw

A huge Russian motorized force yesterday sped down the plain between the Bug and the Vistula, some 100 miles from Warsaw.

The Soviet armor, consisting of 150 tanks and 150 motorized rifle regiments, is now within 100 miles of the city.

As the Red Army advances, the Poles are being urged to join the fight. The German garrisons in the area are being surrounded.

Hitler Decrees Mobilization Of All Men and Resources

Adolf Hitler decreed yesterday total mobilization of all manpower and resources in the Reich and occupied territories.

The decree, issued from the Führer's headquarters in the Berghof, demands that every man of military age be mobilized for the war effort.

The decree also calls for the removal of all non-essential personnel from the armed forces.



3,000 U.S. Aircraft Make St. Lo Sector an Inferno, Then Ground Troops Strike

British and Canadian forces launched co-ordinated attacks on the St. Lo sector of the Normandy battlefield yesterday.



The attack, which preceded the thrust by U. S. First Army troops against German positions at the western end of the Normandy front, was supported by heavy bombers.

ALLIED EVENTS HEAVY BOMB ARMOR WORKS DISTURB TROOPS

U. S. FIRST ARMY HQ, Normandy, July 25—Although the initial attempt to overthrow Hitler's

About 500 escorted Italy-based U. S. heavy bombers yesterday made the first Allied attack on the

The attack, which preceded the thrust by U. S. First Army troops against German positions at the western end of the Normandy front, was supported by heavy bombers.

THE WEATHER

Forecast for Nice-Marseille area — Wednesday, continued fair; maximum temperature, 80.

NICE-MARSEILLE EDITION

THE STARS AND STRIPES

Daily Newspaper of U.S. Armed Forces

in the European Theater of Operations

BLUE
COAST
FINAL

Vol. 1—No. 85

Wednesday, June 6, 1945

ONE FRANC

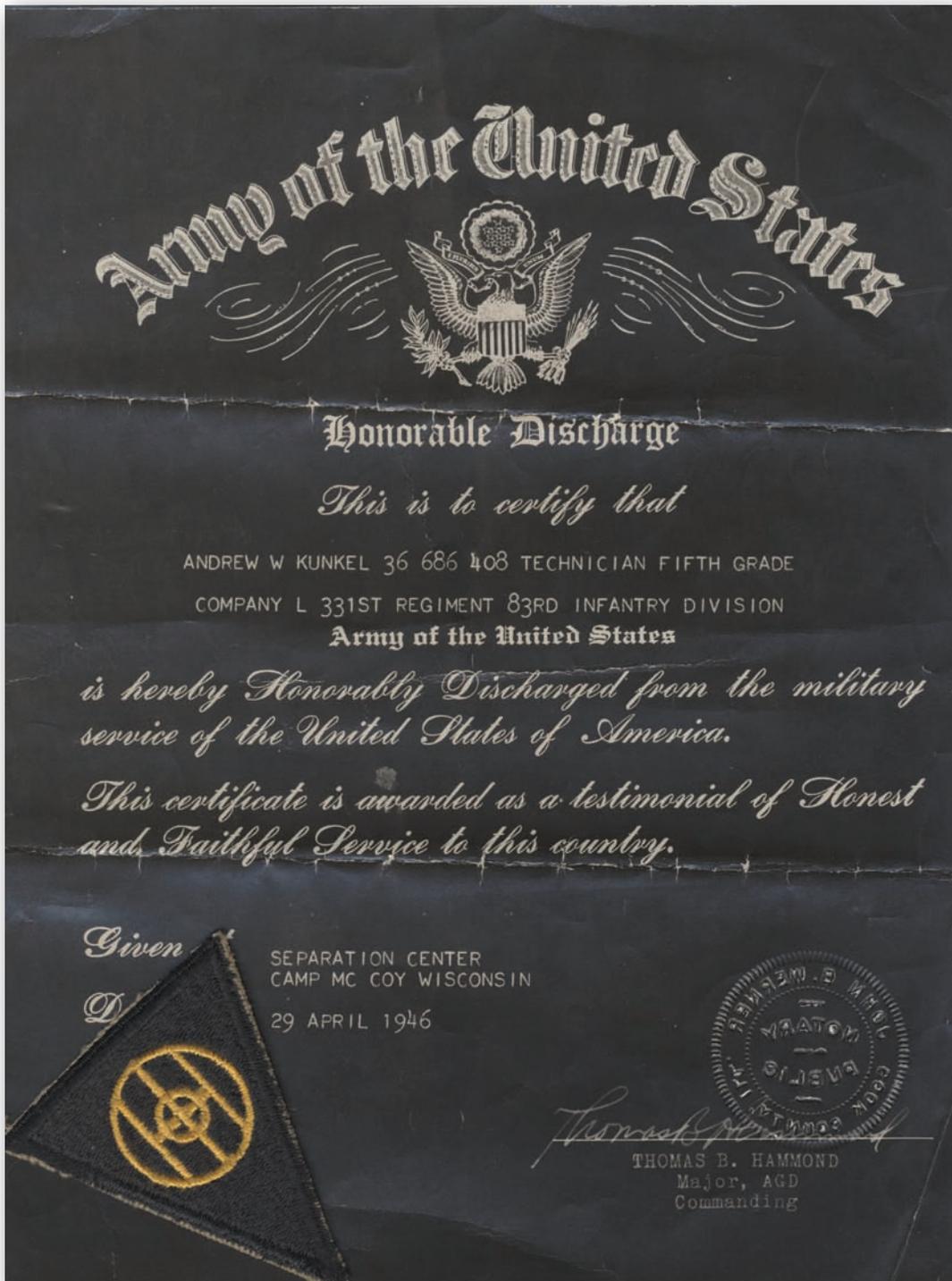
INVASION, 1944



On these pages, Dad is shown with his Army buddies during the war. These pictures are after his service in Normandy and include his assignment with the 16th Reinforcement Depot at Compiègne and his work with the Stars and Stripes Newspaper later in the war.

In the center picture on both pages, Dad is holding a captured German officer's baton and is admiring a phonograph record which he made to be sent home to his father.





On the left are Dad's Honorable Discharge Papers from the war. At the end of the war, he was a Corporal; Technician Fifth Grade. He fought in the Normandy Campaign, and received a Purple Heart for wounds received in the vicinity of Méautis, France on or around July 5, 1944.





While at Camp Breckenridge, Dad had everyone in Company L, 331st Regiment personally sign the Company photograph. This proved very helpful in determining who he fought with and who was killed in action.

Dad's good friend, Pfc. Robert Strang (#149) is seen standing next to Dad (#150) in the upper right hand corner of the picture. Pfc. Strang was killed in action in the battle on July 4, 1944 in Méautis, while he and Dad were crawling through the field next to each other.

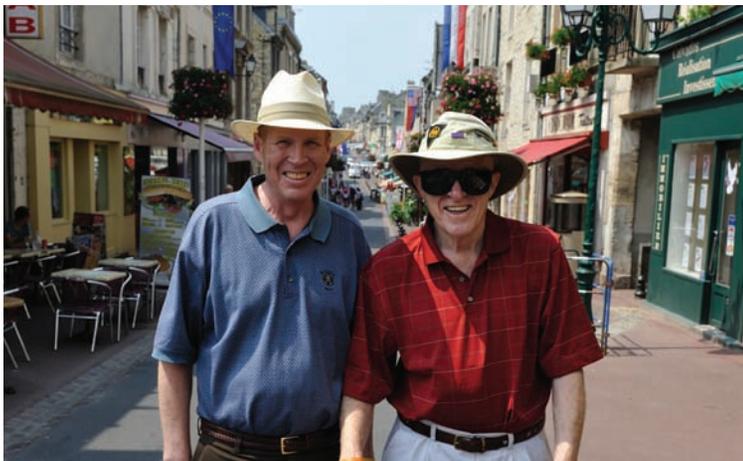
Pfc. Strang is buried at the Soldiers' Home National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

1 Theodore Hancock	35 James E. King Pfc.	69 Nicholas J. Verick Pfc.	102 Thomas Mitchell Pfc.	135 James A. Matthews Pfc.
2 Richard Pulaski	36 James J. Murray Pfc.	70 Sgt. H. Wagner	103 William H. Terry S/Sgt.	136 Connell James Pfc.
3 Vidal Pascho Vill.	37 H. Stewart H. Bradley	71 Carlo Adolpho Pfc.	104 Arthur H. H. H. H. H.	137 Sgt. Earl Johnson
4 William Stewart	38 Chester H. H. H. H.	72 Harold H. H. H. H.	105 Clyde E. Clothier	138 Nick T. H. H. H.
5 Frank Anderson	39 Robert H. H. H. H.	73 William H. H. H. H.	106 Edward H. H. H. H.	139 Lawrence E. H. H. H.
6 H. H. H. H. H. H.	40 Arthur H. H. H. H.	74 William H. H. H. H.	107 Henry H. H. H. H.	140 Kenneth P. H. H. H.
7 George H. H. H. H.	41 Alexander H. H. H. H.	75 Charles H. H. H. H.	108 Edward H. H. H. H.	141 David H. H. H. H.
8 Paul H. H. H. H.	42 William H. H. H. H.	76 Edward H. H. H. H.	109 Donald H. H. H. H.	142 Herman H. H. H. H.
9 Joseph H. H. H. H.	43 Robert H. H. H. H.	77 William H. H. H. H.	110 James H. H. H. H.	143 Eugene H. H. H. H.
10 Robert H. H. H. H.	44 Manuel H. H. H. H.	78 Robert H. H. H. H.	111 Harry H. H. H. H.	144 Edward H. H. H. H.
11 Charles H. H. H. H.	45 George H. H. H. H.	79 Robert H. H. H. H.	112 Charles H. H. H. H.	145 Joseph H. H. H. H.
12 David H. H. H. H.	46 Robert H. H. H. H.	80 John H. H. H. H.	113 Walter H. H. H. H.	146 John H. H. H. H.
13 John H. H. H. H.	47 William H. H. H. H.	81 Robert H. H. H. H.	114 Charles H. H. H. H.	147 John H. H. H. H.
14 James H. H. H. H.	48 Edward H. H. H. H.	82 George H. H. H. H.	115 Edward H. H. H. H.	148 Douglas H. H. H. H.
15 Donald H. H. H. H.	49 John H. H. H. H.	83 James H. H. H. H.	116 Charles H. H. H. H.	149 Robert H. H. H. H.
16 Paul H. H. H. H.	50 John H. H. H. H.	84 Edward H. H. H. H.	117 Eddie H. H. H. H.	150 Andrew H. H. H. H.
17 Robert H. H. H. H.	51 Donald H. H. H. H.	85 James H. H. H. H.	118 William H. H. H. H.	151 Sgt. Jack H. H. H.
18 Pfc. H. H. H. H.	52 James H. H. H. H.	86 James H. H. H. H.	119 John H. H. H. H.	152 Sgt. Charles H. H. H.
19 Pfc. H. H. H. H.	53 Margery H. H. H. H.	87 Ed H. H. H. H.	120 John H. H. H. H.	153 John H. H. H. H.
20 Bill H. H. H. H.	54 Carl H. H. H. H.	88 John H. H. H. H.	121 John H. H. H. H.	154 James H. H. H. H.
21 Al H. H. H. H.	55 Art H. H. H. H.	89 Edward H. H. H. H.	122 Wallace H. H. H. H.	155 Fred H. H. H. H.
22 Earl H. H. H. H.	56 M. H. H. H. H.	90 Robert H. H. H. H.	123 Smith H. H. H. H.	156 James H. H. H. H.
23 Frank H. H. H. H.	57 Larry H. H. H. H.	91 Charles H. H. H. H.	124 Mike H. H. H. H.	157 William H. H. H. H.
24 Arthur H. H. H. H.	58 Bob H. H. H. H.	92 Joseph H. H. H. H.	125 Daniel H. H. H. H.	158 Jack H. H. H. H.
25 Alvin H. H. H. H.	59 William H. H. H. H.	93 Joseph H. H. H. H.	126 John H. H. H. H.	159 Larry H. H. H. H.
26 Fred H. H. H. H.	60 Eugene H. H. H. H.	94 Joseph H. H. H. H.	127 John H. H. H. H.	160 Wm. H. H. H. H.
27 Abraham H. H. H. H.	61 Walter H. H. H. H.	95 John H. H. H. H.	128 William H. H. H. H.	161 Steve H. H. H. H.
28 Ralph H. H. H. H.	62 Arthur H. H. H. H.	96 William H. H. H. H.	129 Wm. H. H. H. H.	162 James H. H. H. H.
29 Marvin H. H. H. H.	63 Paul H. H. H. H.	97 Charles H. H. H. H.	130 Leonard H. H. H. H.	163 Richard H. H. H. H.
30 Marjorie H. H. H. H.	64 Alvin H. H. H. H.	98 Richard H. H. H. H.	131 James H. H. H. H.	164 Richard H. H. H. H.
31 Paul H. H. H. H.	65 Thomas H. H. H. H.	99 Fred H. H. H. H.	132 Arthur H. H. H. H.	165 Leonard H. H. H. H.
32 George H. H. H. H.	66 Andy H. H. H. H.	100 Roy H. H. H. H.	133 Albert H. H. H. H.	166 Frank H. H. H. H.
33 Joseph H. H. H. H.	67 Roy H. H. H. H.	101 James H. H. H. H.	134 Wm. H. H. H. H.	167 James H. H. H. H.
34 William H. H. H. H.	68 Bruce H. H. H. H.			



On the day before we left for France, Dad wanted to try on his old combat boots. He could still get into the boots 65 years later! With a helmet, duffle bag and trench knife, he is ready to go back to France!





On July 2, 2009, we landed at Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris. After renting a car, we drove to our home base in Bayeux. We stayed at Hotel Churchill and wandered the small streets of Bayeux for dinner. The Bayeux Cathedral is spectacular including the main sanctuary and crypt below the church.



For our first night in Bayeux, we ate at a small Norman restaurant's sidewalk café. We each had French Onion Soup and a giant bowl of fresh mussels (moules) in a white wine sauce. Très bon!

Eric got an important email from work and since he forgot his glasses, he could not read it. Dad helped out in the lower left hand corner!



Eric gets up at 5:00 AM, excited to start his overview tour of Omaha Beach area and the British and Canadian Beaches. First though, is a stop at a sidewalk café for a petit déjeuner with café au lait!



Dad takes off on his own... where's Wayne?





Our first stop is Port-en-Bessin along the French Coast. Port-en-Bessin was featured in the movie "The Longest Day." The town, along with Bayeux were taken by Allied forces early between June 6 and June 8, 1944.





Following the coast to the east, we headed to the Longues-sur-mer battery. This battery had 4-150mm guns and were heavily bombarded by Allied ships in the early stages of the invasion.

Dad and Eric are viewing the gun emplacements while Dave wants to take a closer look down the barrel! The bunker in the upper right hand corner was used in the movie "The Longest Day."





The beach below Longues-sur-mer battery. Here is an example of the loose shingle rock that was on all of the beaches on D-Day.

On the opposite page, Dad attempts to “shoot” us with his cane!



Next, we visited the artificial port of Arramanches, also known as Port Winston. The Germans predicted the Allied Forces would land at a place where there was a significant deep water port.

The tides along the Norman coast vary as much as 15 feet and it takes a deep water port to support the amount of equipment and troops that would come ashore in an invasion.

The ingenious Allies brought their own port with them and sunk it in the English Channel. These are the remains of those artificial harbors.

As we walked on the beach with Dad, you can see the tide fluctuation.





Dave is standing next to one of the connecting bridges, which was part of a Mulberry Harbor.

Dad and Dave are standing next to a German 88mm gun. Dad commented that these were one of the most feared weapons by the infantry.

He said that when you were in a hedgerow, first you would see a flash of light, then feel the explosion, and finally you would hear the sound of the gun. These very fast, flat artillery rounds proved to be devastating in hedgerow fighting.

While enjoying our gelato, Dave and Eric found it difficult to imagine what it was like 65 years ago.





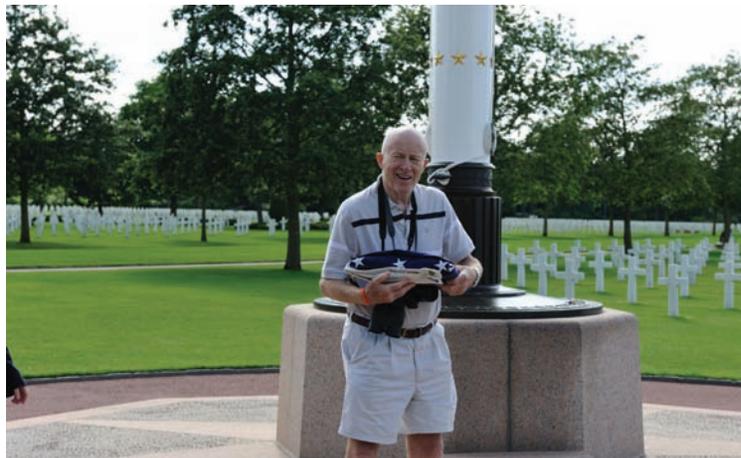
Prior to our trip, Eric had arranged with the Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-mer for Dad to lower the American Flags at the Cemetery on Friday, July 3, 2009. It was here we also met up with Jean Paul Pitou and his friend Christine, who were our friends and guides throughout the trip.

At the cemetery, we met our hosts, Mr. Anderson and Stephanie, and before we lowered the flag we visited the graves of a few soldiers Dad remembers from his Company. The first, Pfc. Harold Budnick was killed on July 4, 1944 in Méautis. Pfc. Joseph Hummel was killed later, probably in the battle for Sainteny. In total, there are 8 soldiers from Dad's company buried at the cemetery.



Stephanie took some wet sand from Omaha Beach and rubbed it on the tombstone so the name on the tombstone became more visible. The Normandy American Cemetery has 9,387 graves along with 1,557 names of the missing in action.

There are over 400 soldiers buried at the Cemetery from the 83rd Division.



At 5:00 PM, Dad lowered both the American Flags at the Normandy American Cemetery. Taps was played and a crowd gathered around to watch. It was a very touching and memorable event as Dad carefully folded the American Flag.

The cemetery presented us with a gift of two flags, American and French, which were placed in front of one of the tombstones during the 65th Anniversary of the D-Day Invasion.

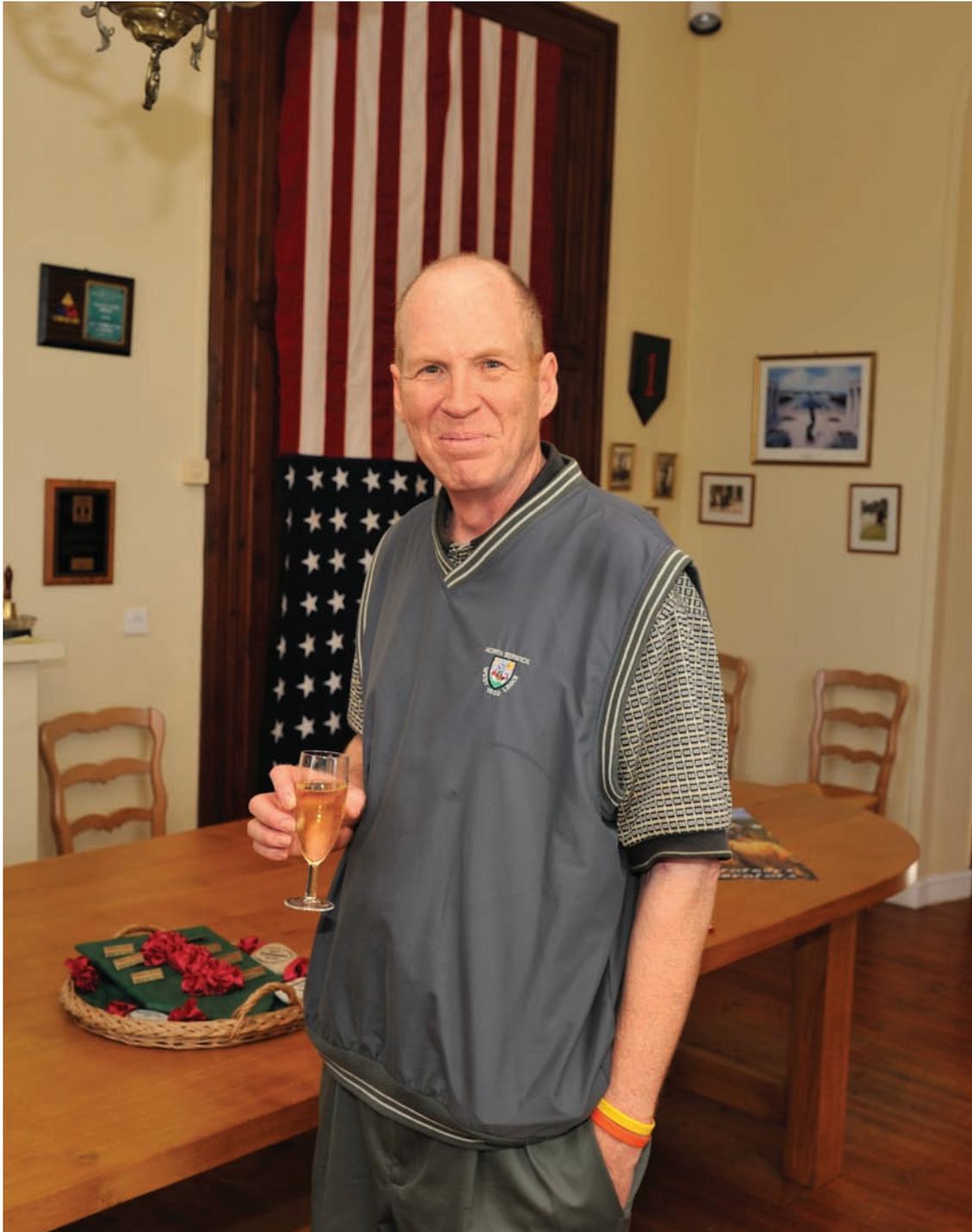




At 6:00 PM, we met the Mayor of Colleville-sur-mer, Mr. Patrick Thomines. In the Mayor's office, Dad was greeted by the Mayor and a few residents who thanked him for his service in the Normandy Campaign.

They presented him with a medal commemorating the 65th Anniversary of the D-Day Invasion, an engraved rock from Omaha Beach and a small bottle of Calvados pressed especially in honor of the invasion and liberation of France.





We were honored with champagne toasts, cookies and witnessed first hand the special friendship between the citizens of Normandy and the United States.



The town of Colleville-sur-mer. The mayor's office is on the left center of the picture.

Below is the two part message used over the radio in 1944 to alert the French Underground that an invasion was coming within 24 hours.



On the morning of July 4th, we met Jean Paul Pitou at Omaha Beach. Jean Paul is our expert on the 83rd Infantry Division; with his guidance, we followed the path of the 83rd Division from where they landed at Omaha Beach's Vierville Draw, all the way to Méautis.

Dave is standing next to one of the most difficult bunkers to be taken during the invasion. This is where the 29th Infantry landed and where the name "Bloody Omaha" came from.

The upper left hand corner is the area on Omaha Beach where the 83rd Division came ashore.

Dad remembers landing at Omaha and coming ashore on one of the Mulberry's. The bottom picture was taken as the 83rd Division came ashore.

Could that be Dad?

Look at the 3rd soldier back on the right hand column!





We continue to follow the path of the 83rd Division into Carentan, passing the towns of Sainte Laurent-sur-mer, Formigny, Trévières, Bricqueville, Colombières, Isigny-sur-mer, Cantepie, Auvers and finally Méautis.

In the upper right-hand corner, an American Bailey Bridge is still in use today.



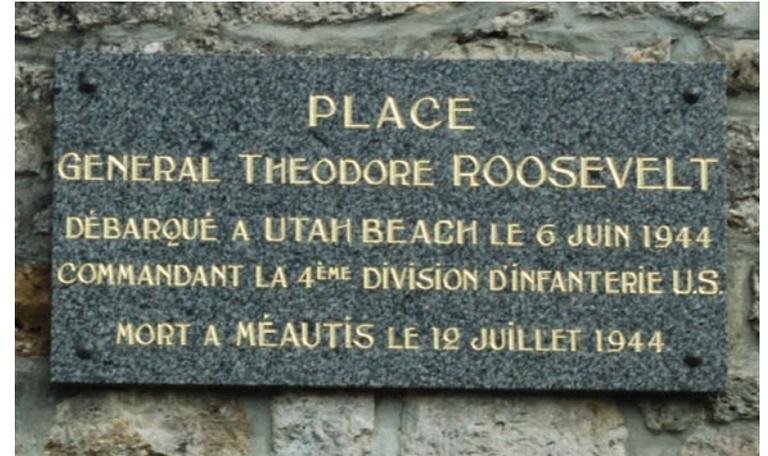
On the left are some before and after pictures of the main cathedral in Méautis. The steeples of most of the churches in Normandy were destroyed during the battles as they could serve as observation posts for artillery fire.

In Méautis, we met Mr. Léon Leahy and began investigating the local farm fields to confirm where Dad had fought.

After years of research to determine the location of this field, we walked to the field that Eric thought was the right one and Dad looked at it and said “no, that’s not it!”

We came back to Méautis at lunch only to realize that over 60 people were milling around the town with flags and cameras waiting to participate in a ceremony at the location of a monument to General Theodore Roosevelt, who died in the town of Méautis in 1944.





During the ceremony, Dad placed flowers at the monument and speeches were given by Mayor Mette and other dignitaries. Both national anthems were sung, while Mayor Mette and the town of Méautis were honored with Dad's presence on this very important day in their history.





The ceremony continued at the monument for the 9th Airforce. The 50th Fighter Group flew P-47 Thunderbolts from this location.





After more speeches, red, white and blue balloons were released into the air.

As before, the speeches were very special, with a great deal of honor being paid to the American soldiers that fought on their soil.









The entire town congregated in a tent erected nearby, where we drank and toasted to the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Méautis, and the fact that our Dad was with them on this important day.

Dave is with Mr. Herbert Daniel in the upper right hand corner. Mr. Daniel is an expert on Winston Churchill and has written numerous books. He actually lived in Woodstock, Illinois for a while and loves Chicago prime rib.



AUTIS
41



Mayor Mette presented Dad with a special medal from Méautis, along with speeches by local government officials.

The mayor commented that this was a very bad day in 1944. Over 1,450 American soldiers were either killed or wounded in the liberation of their town on July 4, 1944. They are honored to have our Dad, who fought in that battle, here 65 years later with his sons to celebrate this occasion with them.





During the ceremony, Dad took a French Flag and an American Flag and placed them in his cane.

A great ceremony, and a great day!







While in Méautis, we met Mr. Bertrand Marie, who owns the farm at Les Ormeaux. We continued touring the fields around Méautis searching for the field where Dad fought in 1944.

The Normandy cows are particularly curious. While talking to the group, Eric turned around to find about 15 cows staring at him from about 10 feet away!

Eric commented that one of the ways the American Infantry was able to identify the locations of Germans in the hedgerows was to look for the cows. The cows would stand and stare at anyone in their fields.





This is one of the farms in Méautis. Dad felt this could be one of the buildings he remembers, however it was on the wrong side of the road.

The rubble in the field in the bottom picture are the remnants of the foundations of a house that was destroyed in the battle.

One of the landmarks we were looking for was a house or barn that Dad could see from the hedgerow. However this destroyed building was in the wrong location.





On the facing page, we are standing in the middle of one of the “sunken roads” in the area where Dad fought. The hedgerows are at least 8 feet tall on either side with large shrubs and trees on top. Soldiers would have been dug in on either side of the hedgerow.

Dad commented that this would not have been his hedgerow since he was in a single hedgerow, not a sunken road.

Next to it are pictures from the battle where American GI's are fighting over the top of the hedgerow and dug in along the base.

While we were walking these hedgerows, we climbed up to the top to see what it looked like for a soldier peering over the top with the Germans positioned in the opposite hedgerow.

Better keep your head down!



After touring more fields in Méautis, Mr. Bertrand Marie invited us to Les Ormeaux for some cider he makes on his farm.

While in his kitchen and talking about where we are going next, Mr. Léon Leahy presented us with a small box containing shrapnel he dug up on his farm as a memory of Dad's battle around Méautis. Mr. Marie then came into the room with a 105mm howitzer shell casing that he dug up on his farm and presented it to Dad as a memory of his battle in the vicinity of Méautis. This shell was fired in the battle of Méautis around July 4, 1944. Both very special memories.



The Les Ormeaux farm was fought over by the Germans and Americans on July 4th and 5th. Germans occupied the house and the Americans attacked from across the flooded fields, ousting the Germans from the house room by room. The house still stands today as it was in 1944.



We traveled further south down D-971 to the town of Sainteny. This was the prime objective of the July 4th battle, but it took weeks to get this far, not the day or two that was predicted. The fighting in the hedgerows was indeed very difficult and costly.

The images on the left are before and after photographs of the church in Sainteny, which was heavily damaged during the battle.

The church was completely rebuilt by the citizens of Sainteny after the war.



Some statistics from the month of July, 1944:

July 4. 83rd Division loses 1450 men to advance only 200 yards.

July 5. One Infantry Regiment is reduced to 400 men (out of 2500 at the start).

July 6. 83rd Division advances 1500 yards towards Sainteny with 750 more soldiers and officers lost.

July 9. 4th Division gains 400 yards and 83rd gains 700 yards. The battle rages. Sainteny is captured and lost several times. Fighting even takes place in the churchyard amongst the tombstones.

July 10. Town of Sainteny is liberated.

In total, it took nearly 20 days of fighting to liberate Sainteny and the areas of Auxais, Marchesieux, Hotot, Tribehou and Bois Grimot.

This fighting was over only 5 kilometers with losses averaging 2000 soldiers per kilometer. That is an average of 500 casualties per day.





We attended a Memorial Mass in Sainteny for all of the soldiers and civilians killed in the battle for the village. Outside of the church, Dad is honored with a medal given by Mr. Michel Lepourry, the Mayor of Sainteny.

After placing flowers at the monument for the civilians and a monument honoring the 83rd Division, a celebration in the center of the town was enjoyed by all of the citizens, along with Dad, Dave and Eric.



Local newspaper reporters were present in both Méautis and Sainteny to cover the ceremonies. Mr. Michel Lepourry proudly wears a large American Flag tie while speaking to the residents of Sainteny.

Jean Paul and Christine treated us to an outstanding Norman lunch at Christine's parents in house in Sainteny. We dined on multi-course traditional Norman food and outstanding cheeses from the region.

Méautis
Méautis commémore la Libération

Maria-Christine Mette a offert à Wayne Kunkel la médaille de la commune de Méautis.

Samedi 4 juillet, Méautis a tenu à fêter sa libération à l'occasion d'une cérémonie en présence de Wayne Kunkel, vétérans de la 83^e Division d'Infanterie. Moments d'émotions pour ce vétérans puisque cela faisait 65 ans, jour pour jour, qu'il avait été grièvement blessé sur cette commune. Il s'est vu remettre par Marie-Christine Mette, maire de Méautis, une médaille « symbole de notre commune. Grâce à votre courage, la paix règne chez nous depuis soixante-cinq années ».

Sainteny
Cérémonies du souvenir

Lors de la cérémonie, un des vétérans, Wayne Kunkel, a été décoré.

Samedi 4 juillet, 65 ans après, la commune de Sainteny a tenu à marquer le début des combats sur son territoire.

Après une cérémonie religieuse, des dépôts de gerbes au monument aux morts ainsi que devant la plaque commémorative apposée au mur de la mairie, Wayne Kunkel, vétérans de la 83^e Division d'Infanterie, présent à ces cérémonies, s'est vu remettre la barrette commémorative de Normandie Mémoire, en signe de remerciements.





On July 5th, we went back to Méautis determined to find the field where Dad fought. Dad was focused on finding the house behind the road where his Battalion headquarters was located. Dad remembers this to be a “U” shaped farmhouse with a courtyard in the middle, and it was across the road from the battlefield.

We found this house, which was ultimately destroyed during the war. In talking to the owners, during 1944 it was a “U” shaped house with a courtyard and we were still able to see some of the old foundations.

The owners drove Dad out to the far end of the field in a four-wheel drive truck and we visited the hedgerow. While Dad could not see over the top of the hedgerow, he did feel that this location was promising. Dad asked if there used to be an orchard across the road from the house and the owners confirmed that an orchard existed during the war.



That did it!

Dad remembered the house and the orchard as he walked back and forth from his position on the front lines. Now it is a matter of finding the actual field and the answer lies on the opposite side of the hedgerow.

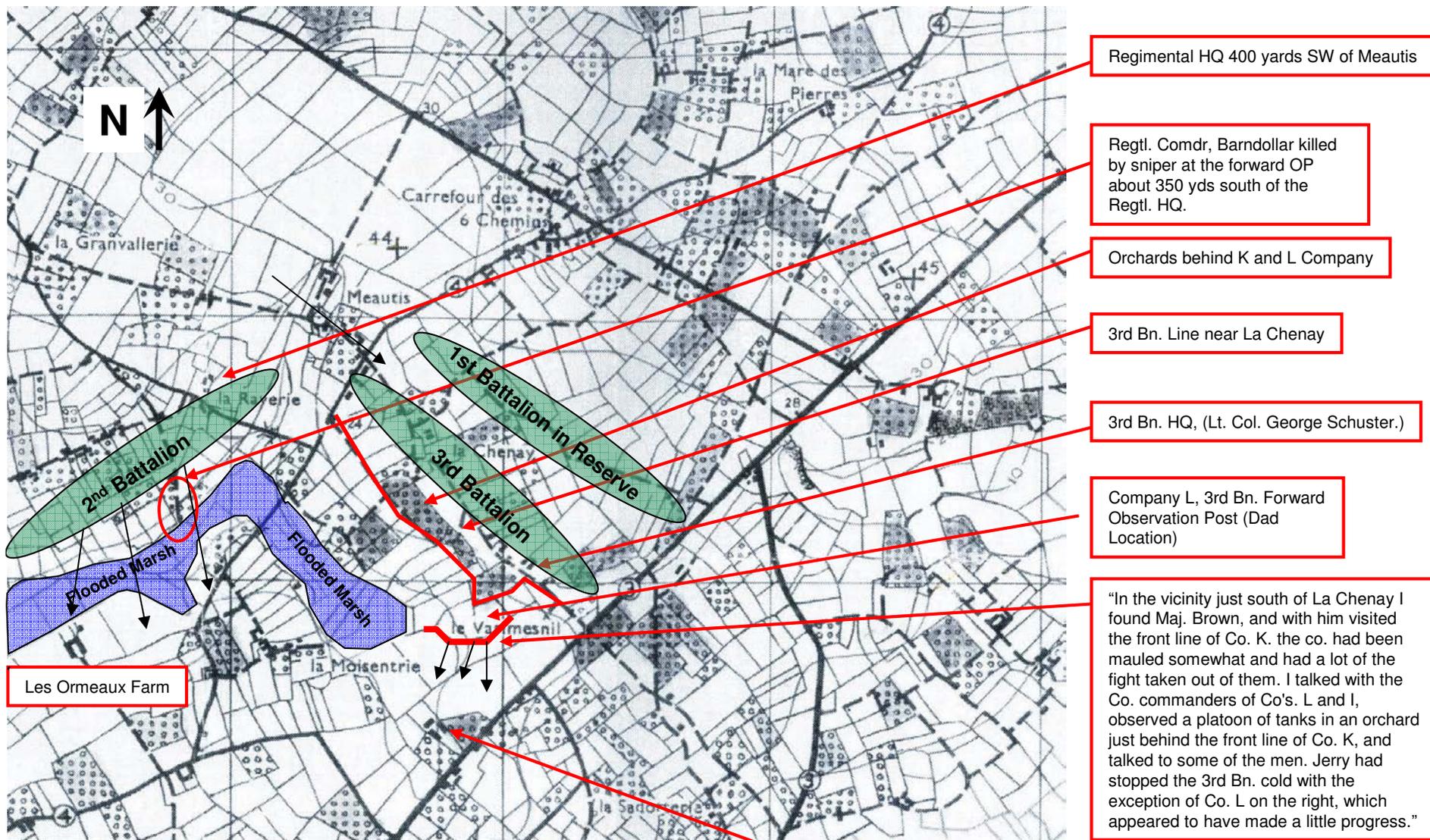
After walking the field, we were invited back into the kitchen of the farmhouse and drank some cider with the owners. The owners gave us a bottle of home-distilled Calvados in an old wine bottle.

They taped a label on the bottle, which said in French... “Eau de Vie, Normandie” Translated to mean “Water of Life, Normandy”. We proudly took the bottle home as a special memory of our trip.





Notes are from after action report of Henry Neilson, 1st Bn. Commander.



This is a map from 1944 shows the location of the battlefield with notations taken from various sources including the 331st Division after action reports. This research helped us find the location of the field.

The map was given to us by Stephen Lee, owner of the Ivy House, Utah Beach. This map shows the actual hedgerow configuration in 1944.

Regimental HQ 400 yards SW of Meautis

Regtl. Comdr, Barndollar killed by sniper at the forward OP about 350 yds south of the Regtl. HQ.

Orchards behind K and L Company

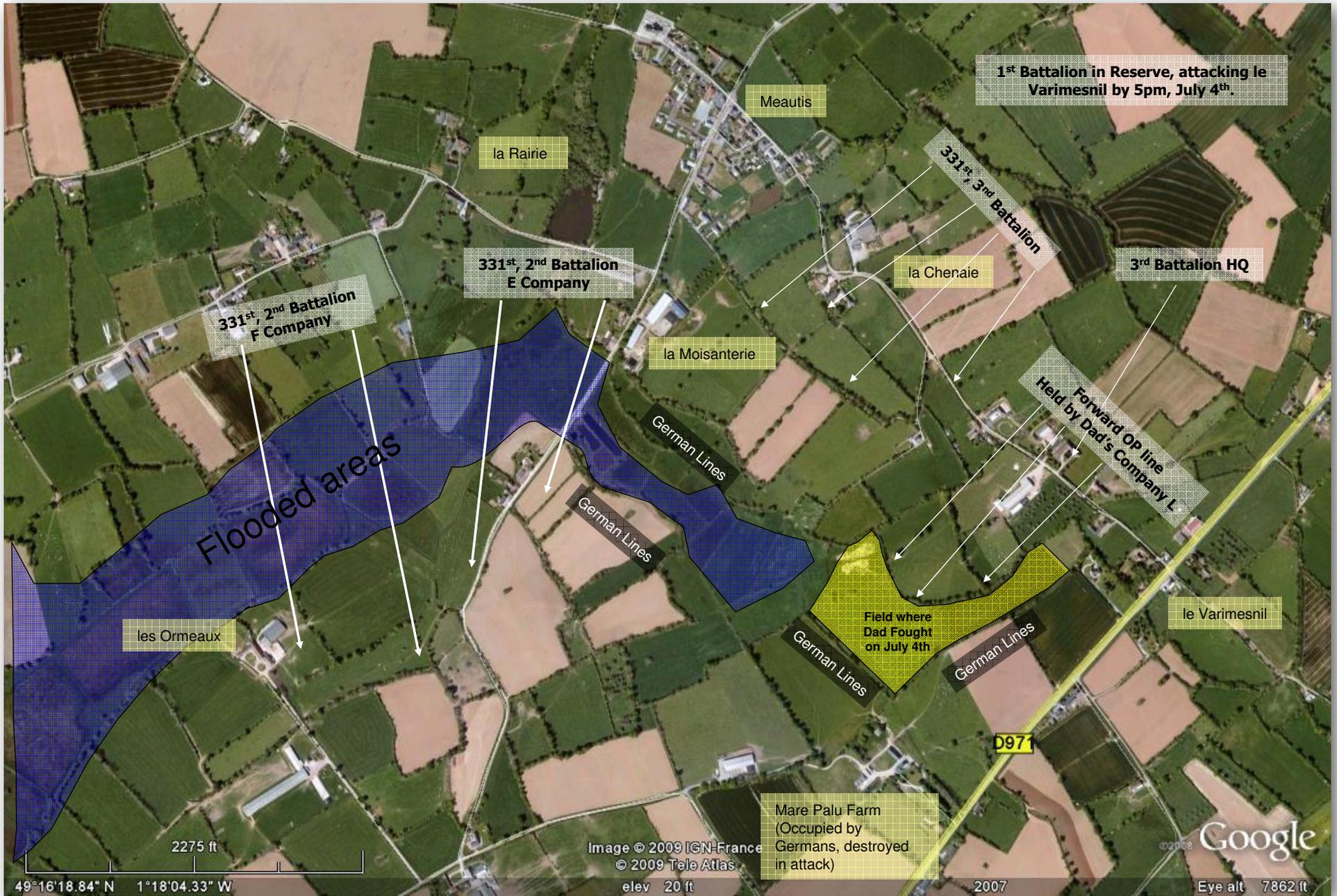
3rd Bn. Line near La Chenay

3rd Bn. HQ, (Lt. Col. George Schuster.)

Company L, 3rd Bn. Forward Observation Post (Dad Location)

"In the vicinity just south of La Chenay I found Maj. Brown, and with him visited the front line of Co. K. the co. had been mauled somewhat and had a lot of the fight taken out of them. I talked with the Co. commanders of Co's. L and I, observed a platoon of tanks in an orchard just behind the front line of Co. K, and talked to some of the men. Jerry had stopped the 3rd Bn. cold with the exception of Co. L on the right, which appeared to have made a little progress."

Mare Palu Farm, occupied by Germans



A current day aerial photograph of the battlefield with notations as to the location of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 331st Regiment. Dad was on the left side of the battlefield with the left flank resting close to D971. The Mare Palu Farm in the lower right hand corner is the farm complex Dad was able to see from the battlefield.

We visited Mare Palu farm, owned by Mr. Christophe and Alexandre Regnault. This is the farm Dad's company was fighting towards. The farm itself was destroyed in the battle, and has been rebuilt in front of where it existed in 1944. The Regnault's allowed us access to their farm and we walked through the fields of grass and corn to get all the way to the opposite face of the hedgerow we visited earlier that morning.







Once we made it all the way back to the hedgerow, Dad was able to turn around and take in the sight. The field fit all of the memories... slight uphill view to a farm, a large 200-300 yard open expanse before the German held lines, single hedgerow, orchard behind and courtyard-shaped house behind the road.

We found the field where Dad fought as a 19 year old soldier. This is the field where Dad's Company L was reduced from 167 soldiers to just over 30 in a matter of minutes on the morning of July 4, 1944.

This is the field where his friend, Pfc. Robert Strang was shot and killed next to Dad while they were trying to make progress in a direct frontal assault of the German lines.

These fields were occupied by the 17th SS Panzer Brigade and 6th Fallschirmjäger Regiment, some of the most experienced and toughest German fighting divisions in the war.





Leaving the fields of Méautis, we followed the path of the 83rd Infantry as they pushed towards Sainteny. Our first stop was the town of Auxais, France. This was the scene of a major battle and the church of Auxais was destroyed, where it remains today as it was in 1944; a monument to all soldiers who fought in the area.

The stone marker on the left, while hard to read, is a tribute to the 83rd Division and their fight across a flooded marsh down a single road towards Marchesieux. The 83rd Division had to cross this Tribehou causeway, fully exposed and suffered numerous casualties in the battle.

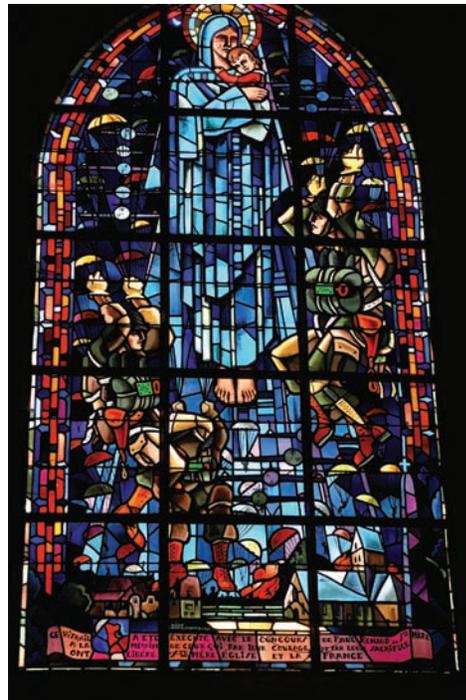


Back in Sainteny, we met with Mr. Michel Lepourry, the Mayor of Sainteny. He showed us the Flag Room in City Hall, which is dedicated to the memories of the 83rd Infantry Division and the liberation of Sainteny. After this we enjoyed a few drinks in the local bar with the Mayor and Jean Paul Pitou.



D 423

3,5 STE MÈRE-ÉGLISE



Ste. Mère Église was one of the early morning objectives of the 82nd Airborne Division on June 6, 1944.

The church was made famous by Cpl. John Steele, who hung from the church after his parachute got caught on the bell tower.

The stained glass windows in the church have been replaced over the years with stained glass depicting the battles that occurred in the village on June 6th and later.



Dave and Dad are standing in the Ste. Mère Église museum which is on the site of the barn that caught on fire the night of June 6, 1944.

On the facing page, we are visiting the La Fiere bridge which was the site of the largest small arms battle of World War II. La Fiere and Chef du Pont are the only two bridges that cross the Merderet River. Holding these bridges were critical to getting the 4th Infantry Division and armor off of Utah Beach.

After days of battle, the 82nd Airborne was running low on ammunition. Lt. Dolan, when told that they are under attack and facing retreat, told his men, "I cannot think of a better place to die, we stand and fight."

The 82nd Airborne stood their ground and repulsed the German counter attack and held the bridge.







While visiting the Ivy House for lunch, Eric talked with Stephen Lee who owns the Ivy House. Eric expressed interest in collecting some WWII artifacts, especially anything from the 83rd Division.

Steve purchased the helmet from a farmer in the vicinity of Tribehou who found it in the fields in 1944. The helmet shows evidence of hard use during the war with the initials "A.P." inside the webbing. The helmet and liner are of the correct vintage and the inside of the helmet shows soap rings from the soldier using it as a wash basin. Best of all... Tribehou was liberated by the 83rd Division and this helmet was in the battle and used by the 83rd Division.

Dad purchased the helmet for Eric as a treasured memory of the trip.





Utah Beach

We visited Utah Beach and walked the beach and bunkers where the landings occurred.

The landing area was actually 2 km south of the intended landings and this is where General Theodore Roosevelt declared that the war starts from here.

We gained a great perspective on the magnitude of the beach and bunker defenses established by the Germans.









Angoville au Plain is the location of a famous battle of the 101st Airborne, and the heroics of two medics; Robert E. Wright and Kenneth J. Moore of 2nd Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) who volunteered for the military and were made medics with little or no prior training.

The town was captured and lost numerous times and the medics used the church as an aid station, where they assisted everyone including Americans, Germans, and the citizens of Angoville au Plain. Over 90 people were treated at this aid station and only two soldiers died.

One of them died laying in the pew on the right. In honor of the soldiers and citizens who were treated here, the town has left the pew, and the entire church for that matter, as it appeared after the soldier's death, with blood stains where the soldier spent the last days of his life.

The patron saint of this church is Saint Sebastian, who ironically is the patron saint of soldiers.

The church's stained glass windows have been replaced over the years by the residents of Angoville au Plain. They pay homage to the 101st Airborne and specifically to Robert Wright and Ken Moore.

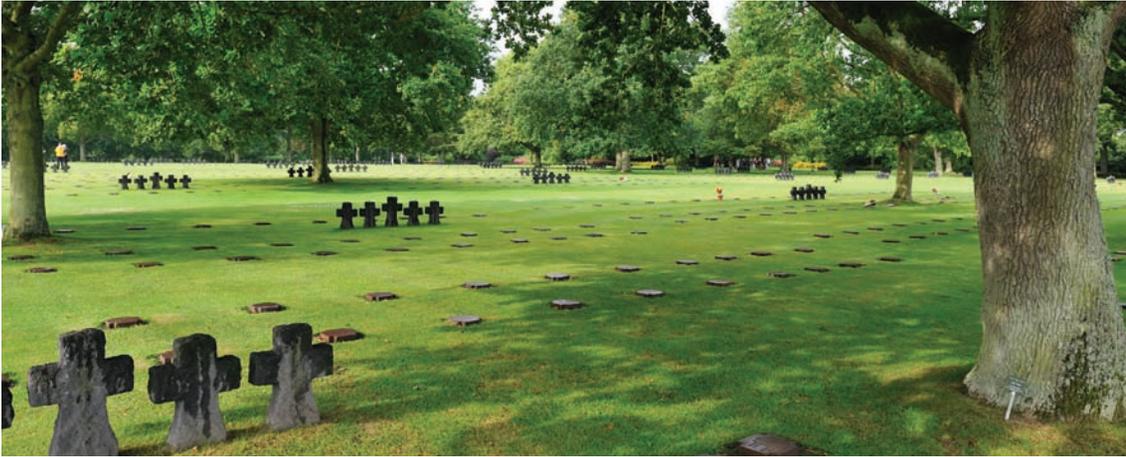
After encouragement from the town, these two men have made numerous trips back to the town to attend weddings, funerals and births. This is a great example of the special relationship the people of Normandy have with the American Soldiers who fought in their fields and towns in 1944.



Twelve plane loads of paratroopers from the 3rd Battalion, 507th PIR, 101st Airborne were dropped deep into German territory in the town of Graignes on June 6, 1944. For over a week, the residents of Graignes protected and fed the American troops, helping them hold off the Germans. After a week of fighting, the Germans finally mounted a massive attack and overtook the town. The French citizens helped the Americans flee across the flooded marsh on boats towards Carentan. The French citizens and American soldiers left after the battle were executed by the Germans and the church along with most of the town was destroyed. The picture shows the remnants of the church as it stands as a monument to the brave citizens and soldiers.

History has shown that this battle was critical in holding the 17th SS Panzer Division outside of Carentan, which allowed the Americans to liberate Carentan on June 13th and 14th.





The German Cemetery at Le Cambe. The tombstones are black lava rock and are low to the ground. A stark contrast to the American Cemetery in Normandy. There are over 21,000 soldiers buried in this cemetery.

Unlike the American Cemetery, which is revered by the French citizens, this cemetery has to be maintained by volunteers from Germany through private donations.

The American Cemetery, on the other hand, was deeded to the Americans after the war to honor their fallen soldiers.







Dave and Dad are sitting outside of one of the bunkers on Pointe du Hoc waiting for the rain to stop. Pointe du Hoc is the site of the Army Rangers' dramatic and brave climb up the cliffs from boats on the morning of D-Day.



With pouring rain outside, Dad, Dave and Eric take comfort in an underground German bunker.

On the facing page, the stark landscape of Pointe du Hoc has been preserved since the war. Still present are huge craters and holes, which were caused by the Air Force and Navy bombardment of the German bunkers and guns.

The cliffs of Point du Hoc are about 100 feet high and were breached in the first hours of the battle despite the German resistance on top of the cliffs shooting down towards the American Rangers.







We visited the museum at Omaha Beach and Dave and Eric are standing next to some of the relics from the battle.

On the opposite page, Dad gets an overview from Alan (our tour guide from Battlebus) of the bunker complex WN 62 which was one of the last German strongholds on the morning of D-Day. The complex could only be taken from the rear as the frontal assault was too deadly.

Dave is walking on top of WN 62 with the underground tunnels connecting the bunker complex.







Here, Eric and Dave are on top of WN 62. From this position, you can see first hand the sight lines the Germans had on the incoming ships during the morning hours of June 6, 1944.

Also, the vastness of the beach as the tide goes out can be seen. D-Day occurred at low tide so all German defenses could be exposed.









We visited two other German bunker complexes, WN 60, on top of Omaha Beach, and WN 68.

WN 60 overlooked the entire beach with high cliffs in front. This position was not taken until 2:00 PM in the afternoon of D-Day.

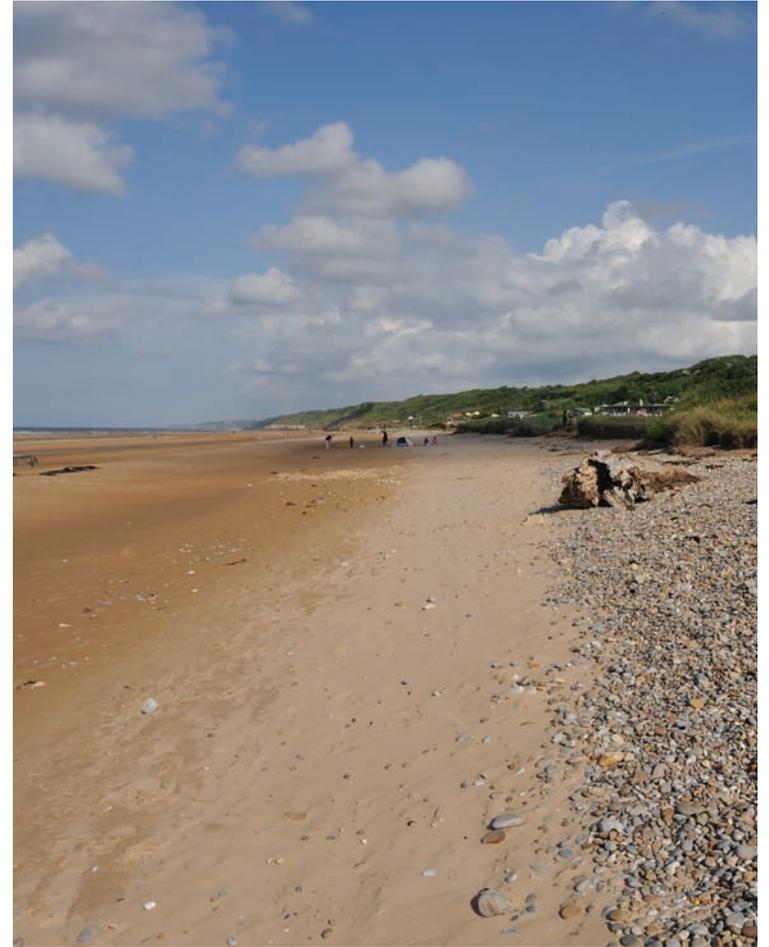
WN 68 is located just west of the American Cemetery and you can see a 1944 picture of American troops coming ashore, winding around the bunker. 65 years later, we are standing in the same position.





The photographs to the left are of Omaha Beach at low tide. The openness of the beach is stunning and we marvel at how the American soldiers fought across this beach with virtually no cover, while under intense German fire from the cliffs.

These three pictures show the Vierville Draw sector, which includes the Charlie, Dog Green and Dog White landing zones of the 29th Infantry Division. Casualty rates exceeded 90% in the early hours of the invasion on this stretch of sand.







On the left, Eric, Dad and Dave walk Omaha Beach in the Easy Red Sector. Once again, the impact of the tides are shown clearly and standing on the beach can only evoke thoughts of what it could have been like for the soldiers on that morning.

Showing what we fought for, while we are on the beach at Easy Red, five young French women run past us heading to the surf, shedding their clothes as they run. Dad immediately jumps up, adjusts his binoculars, and Dave and Eric start chanting...

“I see London, I see France, I see someone’s ...”





The next day, we began our tour following the path of Easy Company of the 101st Airborne from their parachute landings on D-Day to their battles in defense of Carentan.

Dad's 83rd Infantry Division ultimately replaced the 101st Airborne on the front lines in the vicinity of Méautis. This tour provided Dad with a perspective of what happened prior to his arrival on the front lines.



The Marmion Farm was a gathering point for the 101st Airborne in the vicinity of Ravenoville. This farm is untouched since the war and many famous photos of GI's were taken here. Note the picture in the lower right hand corner in a then and now configuration.







Easy Company's first major offensive was at the Brecourt Manor Farm near Sainte Marie-du-Mont. This farm had four 105mm guns focused on Utah Beach. Easy Company attacked the position, destroyed all four guns and protected the infantry coming ashore that morning. The battle tactics used here are still taught at all military academies.

On the right, Eric, Dad and Dave are holding one of the legs from the guns at Brecourt Manor; truly a piece of history. Below, Eric and Dad are seen along the hedgerow which contained the 105mm guns.





In the center of Sainte Marie-du-Mont, Eric, Dad and Dave are standing in front of the monument for the town center. A famous photo was taken of the 101st Airborne standing in front of the same monument on June 6, 1944.

The statue on top of the monument is of a French Soldier standing on and holding down the wings of a German Eagle. This was created after World War I in memory of that victory. When Germany invaded France in WWII, the town removed the statue and buried it in a field so it would not be destroyed. It was put back on top of the monument after the war.





While visiting the Dead Man's Corner Museum, Eric and Dave test out a German 88mm gun. This gun was used both as an anti-aircraft and field artillery weapon.

The Dead Man's Corner Museum is one of the better museums in Normandy. What is unique is that this museum is a private collection and the 101st Airborne and specifically, Easy Company from the 506th PIR have donated quite a few items including a personal collection from Major Dick Winters of Easy Company.

The top picture is of the road connecting Carentan and Auvers. This is the road where Easy Company was attacked.

Lt. Winters led his men up this road under intense fire, taking on a German machine gun located in the building at the end of the road.

The bottom picture is the building which was the aid station for the 101st Airborne on Rue Holgate.





In our last day in Normandy, we all agreed that we needed to go back to the American Cemetery. We wanted to spend more time touring the cemetery and taking in the incredible beauty of this place of honor for our fallen soldiers. Dad and Dave are walking along the Wall of the Missing in Action, where there are 1,557 names inscribed on the wall.

The Normandy Cemetery contains the graves of 9,387 soldiers who fought and died in the Normandy region. The center of the cemetery features a large reflecting pond and a sculpture entitled, "The Spirit of American Youth."





As we are overlooking Omaha Beach, Dad is approached by Francoise Rouxel-Le Roux and her husband Claude. After asking if Dad is a veteran, she hands Dad a yellow rose and says in broken English, "This rose is for you... thank you for what you did. I will never forget the Americans and what they did to liberate us from the Germans."

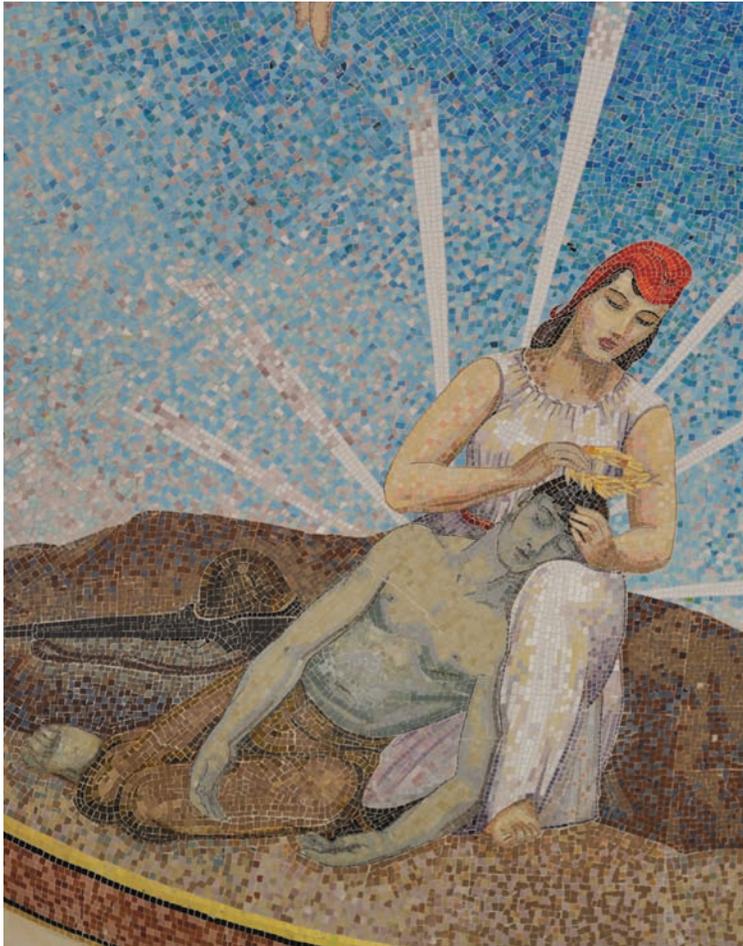


Francoise continued to tell her story of how she was a young girl in the early 40's. During the invasion on June 6th, she remembers coming out of her house in La Haye-du-Puits, which was in the 82nd Airborne Sector. She saw three American soldiers hanging from their parachutes in the trees. She thought to herself that they looked so peaceful... they were sleeping. With tears welling up in her eyes, she looked at us and said "They have been sleeping for a long time."

As we continued walking up the sidewalk and we entered the main section of the cemetery, Francoise stopped, put her head in her hands and started crying. She looked up and outstretched her arms towards the graves. She said that these are all her friends... and she will never forget what they sacrificed for her.



Francoise has sent us her memories as a young girl in France during the war. This was truly a very special moment for us all, as we continue to experience first hand how much our sacrifices meant to the Norman people. What a fitting conclusion to our trip!



IF EVER PROOF WERE NEEDED THAT WE
FOUGHT FOR A CAUSE AND NOT FOR CONQUEST
IT COULD BE FOUND IN THESE CEMETERIES. HERE WAS
OUR ONLY CONQUEST: ALL WE ASKED... WAS ENOUGH...
SOIL IN WHICH TO BURY OUR GALLANT DEAD.

GENERAL MARK W. CLARK
CHAIRMAN, AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION, 1969-1984

There is a small chapel
in the middle of the
cemetery with an
outstanding mosaic of
an angel watching over
our soldiers in battle and
caring for a fallen soldier.

**The engraving
on the wall says
it all.**



As we continue to walk through the cemetery, we found a tombstone for Pfc. Charles Gilbert with the 331st Infantry, 83rd Division who died on July 4, 1944. This soldier died on the fields where Dad fought and we walked just a few days earlier.





Dad, Dave and Eric enjoying some time amongst the beautiful flowers of the Normandy Cemetery.



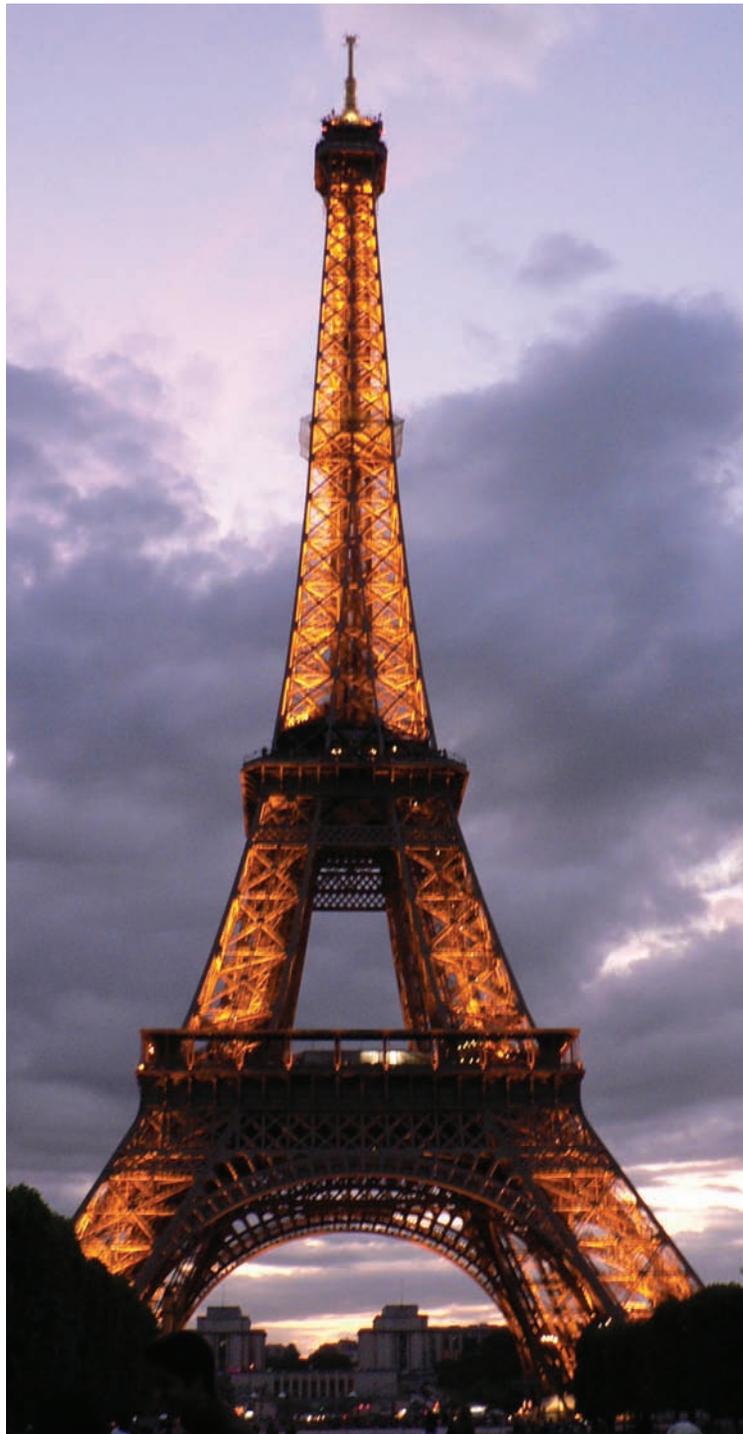


On the way to Paris, we stopped at the Pegasus Bridge Memorial. The British fired the first shots of the Normandy invasion in the early hours of June 6, 1944. The bridge itself was a very important objective to take and hold so the British troops landing at Juno and Gold beaches could come ashore and move towards Caen.

Dad is seen in the upper left hand corner of the facing page with a veteran of the British battles around the bridge. His job was to blow up the telephone poles and trees (asparagus poles) the Germans has stuck in the ground to impede the glider landings.







Dave and Eric are enjoying the “City of Lights” that evening at the base of the Eiffel Tower.

After dusk, the tower puts on an impressive light show. Dad is convinced the Eiffel Tower will change colors during the show; we say no.

Dad was reluctant to go back to our hotel until after he saw the colors change.

The colors never did change!



What a view!

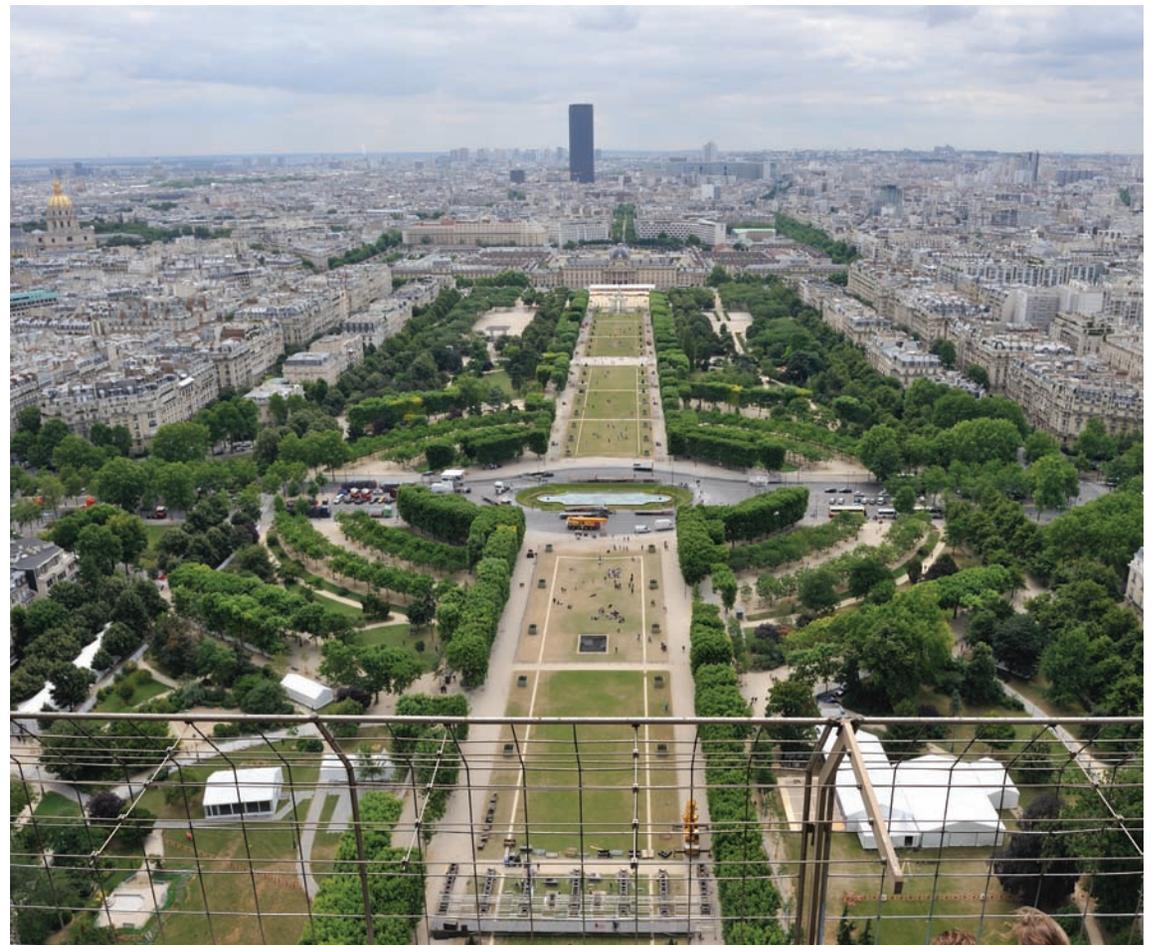
From the top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris.





The Trocadéro is above and is directly across the Seine from the Eiffel Tower.

Dave and Dad are standing near our Paris home, the Hotel Relais Bosquet, in the Rue Cler neighborhood.



On the opposite page, we head over to 123 Champs-Élysées. Dad worked and lived here during 1945 for the Stars and Stripes newspaper. The building is now an office building and was locked when we arrived.

Eric used his real estate expertise to sneak in however, and we were able to see the lobby area. Dad commented that it has changed a lot...it is much nicer now!



Taking a break on the Champs-Élysées at the sidewalk café, Fouquets; we enjoyed some wine and beer. Dave and Dad both have to have Glacé (ice cream), Eric sticks with wine.

C'est la vie!





Eric asked Dad before the trip where the GI's would hang out at night in Paris. Dad could not remember the name so Eric gave him a hint... "Dad, does the phrase Pig Alley mean anything to you?" Dad proclaimed that was it!

So we took Dad on the subway, much like he would have done as a GI in Paris, to the stop called Pigalle. This is the home to the Moulin Rouge Les Folies Bergere and other clubs and bars frequented by the GI's.

The American GI's took the name Pigalle and converted in slang to Pig Alley for the shows that were there during the war.

Another trip down memory lane for Dad!





Coming out of the subway station at Pigalle, we find just what Dad and the other GI's enjoyed about this area. We think Dad took more pictures here than anywhere else on the trip!

To the right is the famous Moulin Rouge along with some vintage WWII cartoons of Miss Lace, that Dad kept along with the Stars and Stripes newspapers.





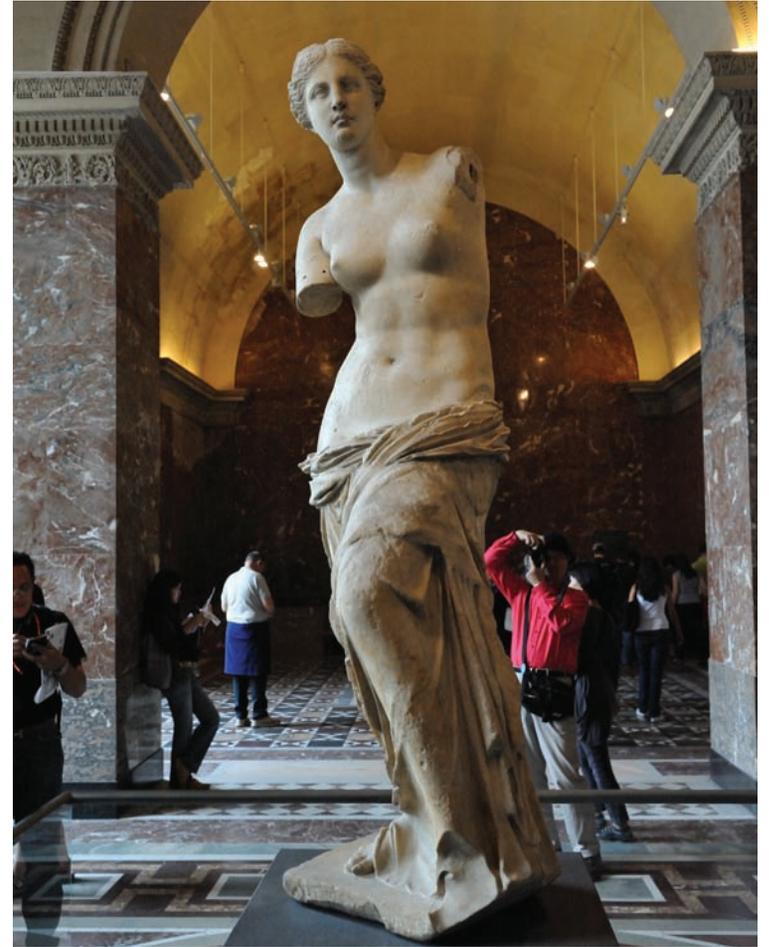
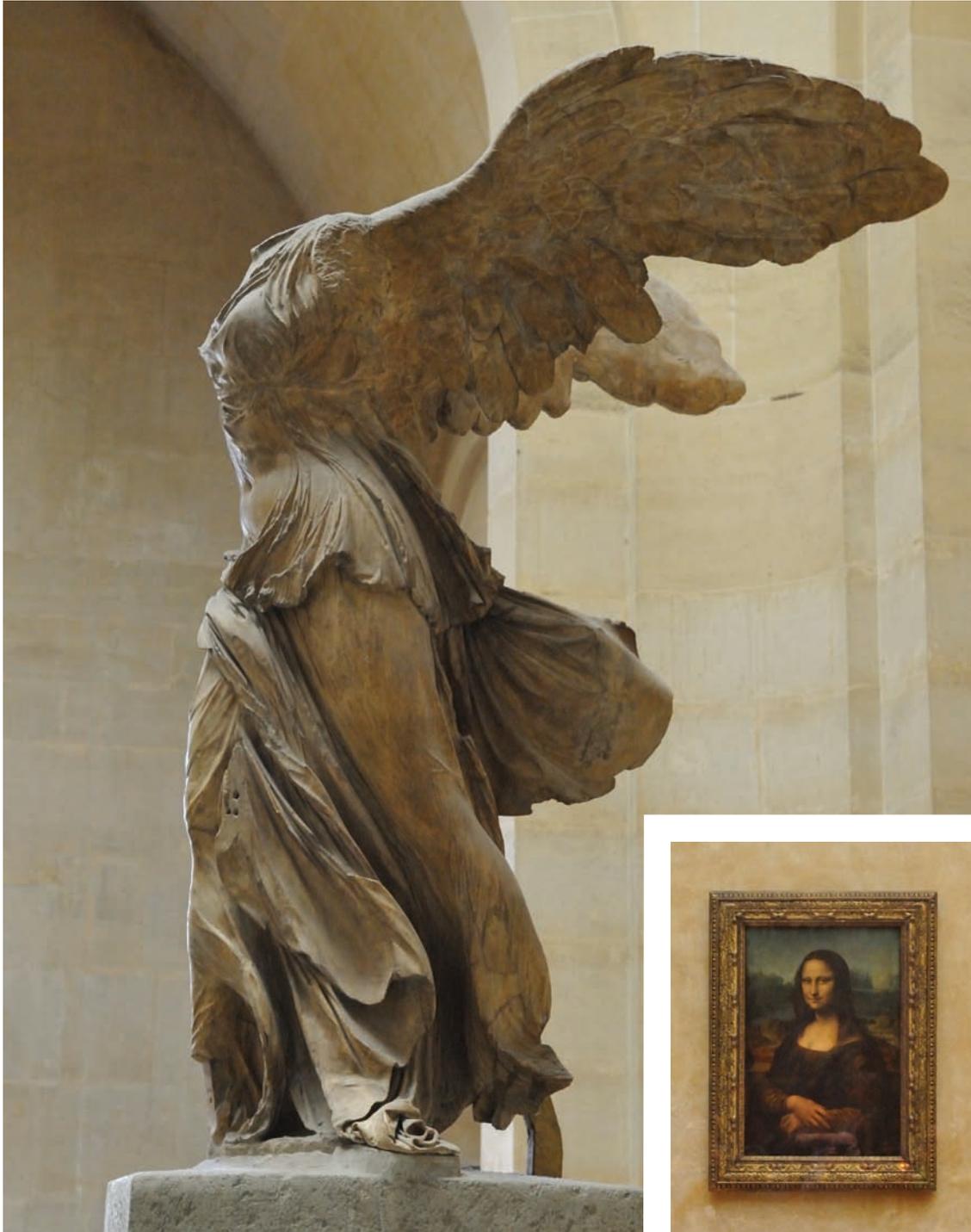
The Basilique du Sacre-Coeur is in the Montmartre district of Paris.

Located up on a hillside overlooking Paris this area is renowned for the artists and performers that live and work in this area.

On the facing page, is an exterior photograph of the Louvre, which we will visit next.









While at the Louvre, we saw such masterpieces as the Mona Lisa, the Winged Victory and Venus de Milo.

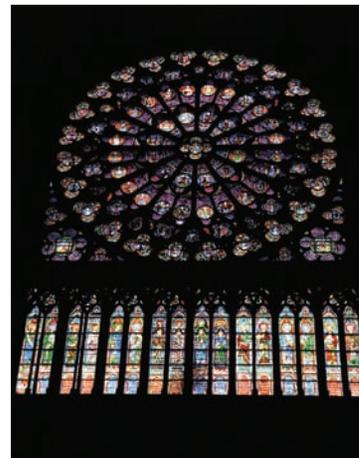
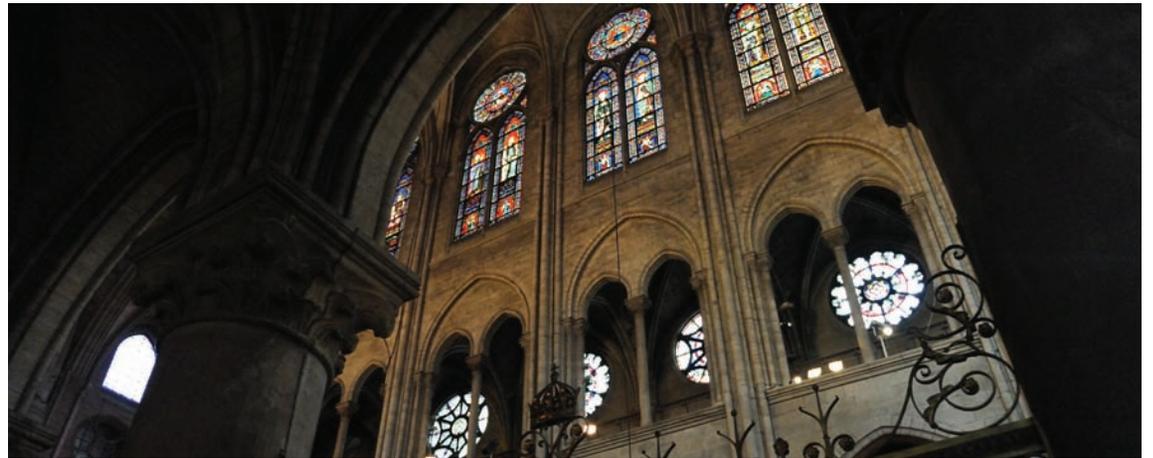
The Louvre is huge and it is a lot of walking. Above, Eric and Dave are planning the next steps, only to look up and see Dad sleeping in his chair!

Long day.



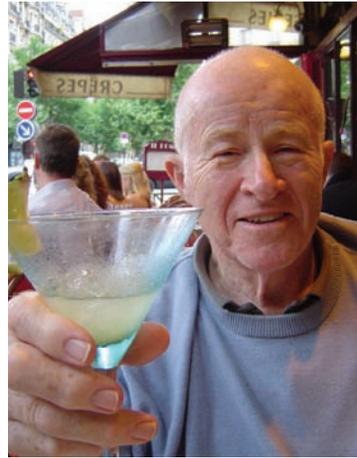


Dave is on a bridge across the Seine in the Latin Quarter. Dad is seen leaning against a railing on the Eiffel Tower overlooking the Seine in 1945.



No trip to Paris would be complete without a stop at Notre Dame Cathedral. It is a beautiful place with a lot of history.

The cathedral is awe inspiring and the stained glass, including the famous Rose Window is incredible.



This is our last day in Paris and we have dinner at a sidewalk café. Dave and Eric enjoy some escargot and Dad has a margarita. We each ordered a desert in the upper right hand corner. Who ordered which desert?

On the opposite page, we are back home in Eric's backyard. Eric, Dad and Dave are raising the glasses, with the Calvados brought back from the farmer in Méautis. We are toasting to a great trip and a wonderful experience for all of us.

Dad commented on the way home that this trip was the most rewarding trip he has ever taken. The return to Normandy not only helped him understand where he was fighting as a 19 year old American soldier, but what he was fighting for and how much his efforts meant to the Norman citizens even today, 65 years after the battle.



Thank you!

We would like to thank a few people who helped us make this a very memorable return to Normandy. The genesis of this trip started over three years ago as Eric began researching the 83rd Division and specifically where Dad was, as a very young American soldier.

None of this would be possible without the assistance of David Curry, whose website honors the 83rd division and his father, who fought and died in Gey, Germany. The resources on Dave's website proved invaluable in Eric's research.

In 2008, David Curry introduced Eric to Jean Paul Pitou, a French citizen who lives in Normandy. Jean Paul has dedicated himself to the 83rd Infantry Division and everything they did to liberate Norman villages such as Méautis and Sainteny. Jean Paul worked with Eric for almost a year prior to the trip planning where we would go and helping Eric unravel the records so we could find the field where our Dad fought.

We are also thankful for the Norman citizens referenced in this book for their help and gratitude. You have all said that you will never forget what the Americans have done for you, well, we also will never forget what you have done for us in making this a once-in-a-lifetime experience for our family.

Also, of special thanks, is the hard work and incredible talents of Dave's daughter, Stephanie Kunkel, without whom the book could not have been put together. Stephanie heard what we wanted to do and used her talents to help us tell the story in this book. Thank you very much.

So, Dad, your son's are proud of you and what you have accomplished in your life. We are pleased that we were able to experience this with you and we will never forget what happened during July 2009.



Pommenau

Aussaie

Auyers

Cantepie

Douville

la Gervaiserie

la Mare des
Pierres

Carrefour des
6 Chemins

Meautis

la Granvallerie

48

46

30

44

45

3

4

4

4