



DUXFORD



My D-Day adventure started at the Imperial War Museum in Duxford, England. It's one of the best aviation museums in the world, and where beautifully restored versions of the kinds of planes that were used on D-Day can be seen. You can even take a ride in some of them!



There are many large hangars at the museum, where we saw planes from throughout history being fixed up by experts. We saw the same planes that were used on D-Day to attack the enemy along France's northern coast, to fly in Allied paratroopers, and to bring in tons of supplies.

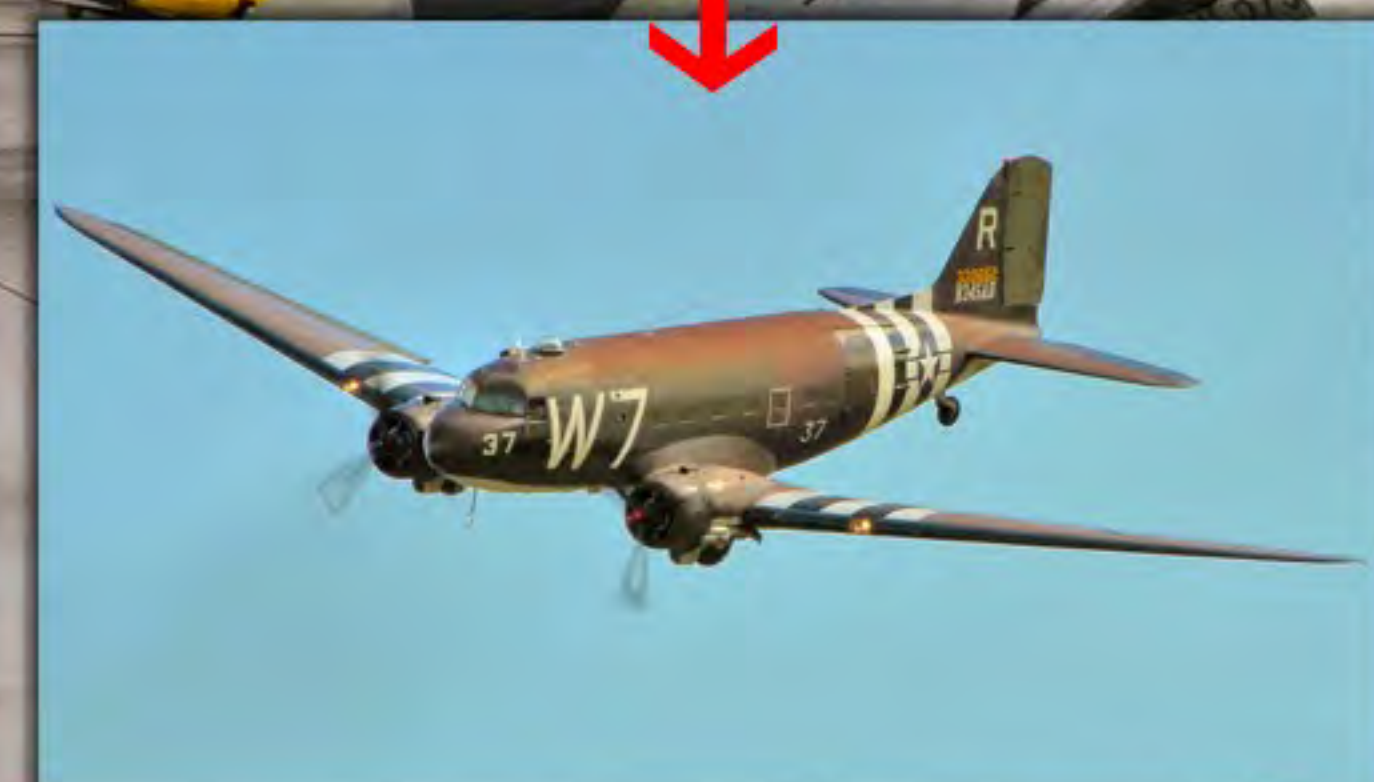


Republic P-47D
Thunderbolt

This historic Douglas C47a was one of over 800 C47s that dropped paratroopers, equipment and supplies behind enemy lines in France on D-Day. Sergeant Lopez, a character in my book, would have jumped out of a plane like this.



Grumman F8F Bearcat



Out on the flightline the Sally B, a beautiful B-17G Flying Fortress bomber starts up with a smokey and noisy ROAR!



CLICK FOR VIDEO





Ball Turret

Emerson Electric Type A-2A-1 Lower Ball Turret

On some B-17s and B-24s, a gunner sat inside a ball turret to help defend the underside of the aircraft from enemy fighters.

The position of Ball Turret Gunner was viewed by aircrew as one of the worst positions in a heavy bomber. It was small, cramped, and there was no room for the gunner to wear a parachute. The machine-guns were noisy and hot, and the shell casings would build up around your feet.

In fact, partly because the gunner was squashed into the turret so tightly, and protected by an armour-plated door, this position was one of the best places to avoid combat wounds. It was, however, difficult to get out. The guns needed to point straight downwards for the door into the aircraft to open. If the aircraft was damaged, the mechanism might not work.



Technical Sergeant Earl J. King looks out between his twin guns, from his cramped position in the ball turret.



Two of the B17G's thirteen guns were aimed by the ball turret gunner, squished into a little rotating ball set into the belly of the big bomber. I admire the bravery of these men!



On September 30, 1940, this German Messerschmitt Bf 109E crash landed in England. The pilot was captured and British soldiers stood guard.

The experts at the IWM Duxford have re-created the scene, and fixed up the old plane beautifully, don't you think?



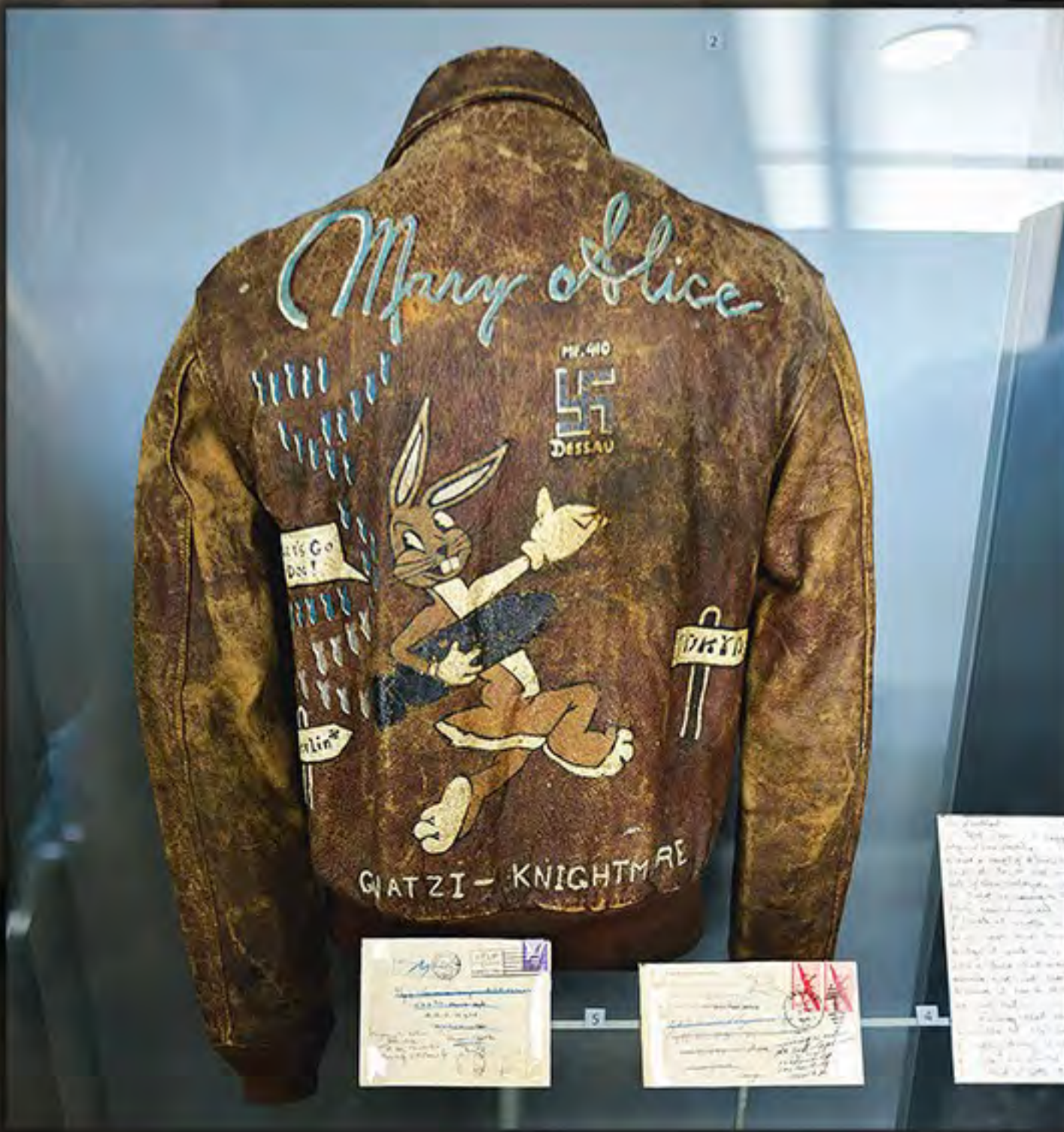
A German V1 flying bomb, a jet-powered aircraft that was as smart as it was evil. Hundreds of these “doogiebugs” were launched from northern France against targets in England. This deadly Nazi campaign was called “The Blitz.”



This unique display includes the V1's launcher, controller, and a dummy rocket for setting up the launching system.



“We came under heavy fire coming off the English Channel” said Victor.



So much to see at IWM Duxford!
It helped me imagine some of the
scenes, people & equipment in
I Survived The Battle of D-Day, 1944.





THE D-DAY STORY
PORTSMOUTH

From Duxford we drove south to the English coast.
In the Portsmouth, we visited The D-Day Story,
a museum all about D-Day.

It's also home of the Overlord Embroidery,
a 272 ft-long mural made of hand-stitched fabric.
Its 34 panels tells the story of D-Day
and the Battle of Normandy.



The Overlord Embroidery



Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery,
nicknamed "Monty," was in command
of all Allied soldiers during the
D-Day Invasion and the
Battle of Normandy.

In this room we learned about 'The Plan' and met the commanders in charge of carrying it out. Admiral Ramsay, General Montgomery and Air Chief Marshall Leigh-Mallory were in charge of sea, land, and air forces with General Eisenhower as the Supreme Allied Commander, assisted by Air Chief Marshall Tedder.



Monty's famous beret was on display.



"My hat is worth three divisions. The men see it in the distance. They say, 'There's Monty', and then they will fight anybody."

Nazi Generals ordered the construction of an 'Atlantic Wall,' all along the north coast of France to defend it from invasion. This model shows all the features: barbed wire, pillboxes, machine gun pits, gates, log ramps, and mines. These measures made the invasion difficult, but not impossible!



The French Resistance and the Battle of Normandy

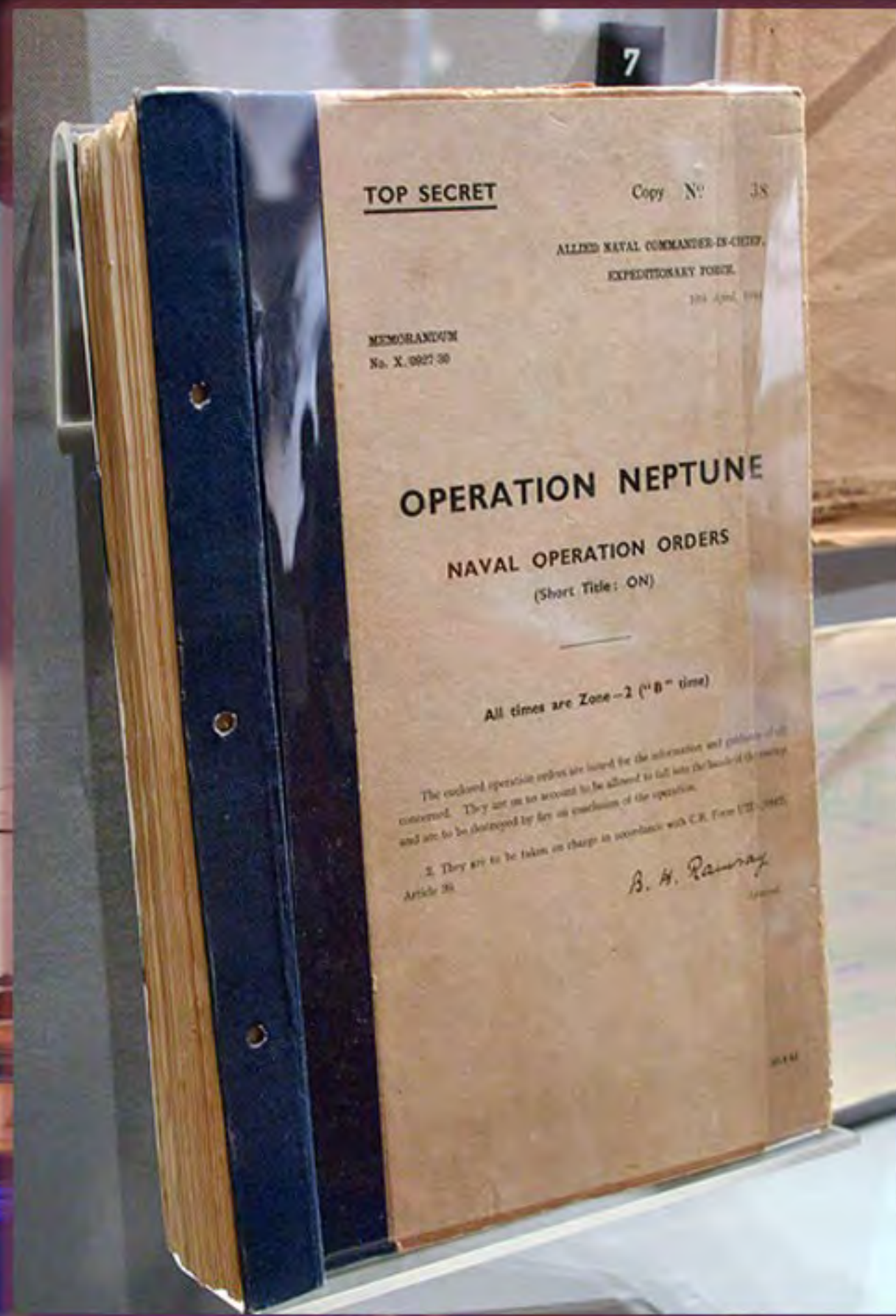


Arm bands worn by French Resistance fighters.



From chapter 3, I Survived The Battle of D-Day, 1944:

“The Resistance was like a small army, but not with soldiers. Its members were regular people – writers, shopkeepers, farmers, doctors, and teachers. They stole Nazi secrets for the Allies. They blew up Nazi trains loaded with weapons and tanks. It still shocked Paul that Mr. Leon had been in the resistance.”



Secret orders and map book for D-Day



A compass hidden in a button helped guide resistance fighters.



This suitcase radio was used by the Resistance to get their orders for destroying rail and communication lines on D-Day.



Tens of thousands of these Type C drop containers were parachuted down to French Resistance fighters by brave pilots from England. Inside were weapons, food, radios, clothes and many other supplies to support a secret army behind enemy lines.



Drop Container Type C

USAAF and RAF bombers did not drop only bombs on German-occupied Europe. They also dropped weapons and other supplies to resistance fighters, in parachute drop containers.

As a single-section drop container, the Type C

He was treated like
an animal





The Overlord Embroidery tells the story of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy in 34 panels that were hand-stitched by super-talented women at the Royal School of Needlework in London. It took five years to create this masterpiece. I could have spent all day looking at all the amazing details!



ENGLAND

The Portsmouth harbor is a large and busy place, with cargo, passenger and military ships going in and out to sea. To cross the English Channel like the 150,000 brave Allied soldiers did on D-Day, we took a large ferry boat for the 6 hr. journey.



© Brian Burnell

We saw the HMS Queen Elizabeth, England's newest aircraft carrier.



FRANCE

The Port of Ouistreham

Being out on the water, miles off the coast of England, made me appreciate how brave those thousands of D-Day soldiers were. I could imagine them squeezed into their landing crafts, being scared and seasick, and not knowing how their day would end.

Crossing the English Channel



“The day has finally come,” Mr. Leon said softly.
“I don’t know everything; this is still top secret. I can tell you that the Allies are sending a massive force across the English Channel. This will be the largest invasion by sea in the history of the world — thousands of ships. Tens of thousands of men will be coming ashore on the beaches of Normandy, including right here in Le Roc.”





Our guide Sylvain took us to a hedgerow, “a wall of thick, towering bushes,” as I describe it in Chapter 4 of my book. On D-Day they were the perfect hiding place for enemy soldiers and equipment. Seeing them up close gave me the idea for how Paul finds Sergerant Lopez.



“Paul gazed up through the branches, searching for the bird. Something wet dropped onto his head. It was streaked with blood, He cautiously stepped aside, and looked up. Paul Froze at what he saw. His mouth fell open but he was too shocked to scream.”



CLICK FOR VIDEO



Our next stop was Colleville-sur-mere, a small village above the cliffs of Omaha Beach. Here I am at the town hall, which was celebrating the 74th anniversary of D-Day. In the windows were pictures of the local people welcoming the American soldiers in 1944.

OMAHA BEACH



BUNKERS



Up on the cliffs above Omaha Beach, Sylvain showed me several bunkers where the Germans had their weapons aimed at Allied soldiers trying to get off the beach. Hundreds of these forts can still be found above Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno & Sword beaches.



I asked our guide Sylvain to describe the defenses that the German soldiers had built above the D-Day beaches to stop the Allied invasion.



CLICK FOR VIDEO





Being high above Omaha beach and learning about the German defenses helped me imagine the action at the end of my story.



“I’m going to try to get one of those Nebelwerfers to blow. He pulled the pin from the top of the grenade and tossed it. It landed in front of one of the Nebelwerfers. “Get down, Paul!” Mr. Leon cried. KABOOM! It worked! The soldiers scattered, clearing the way for Mr. Leon and Paul to rush back toward the hedgerow.”

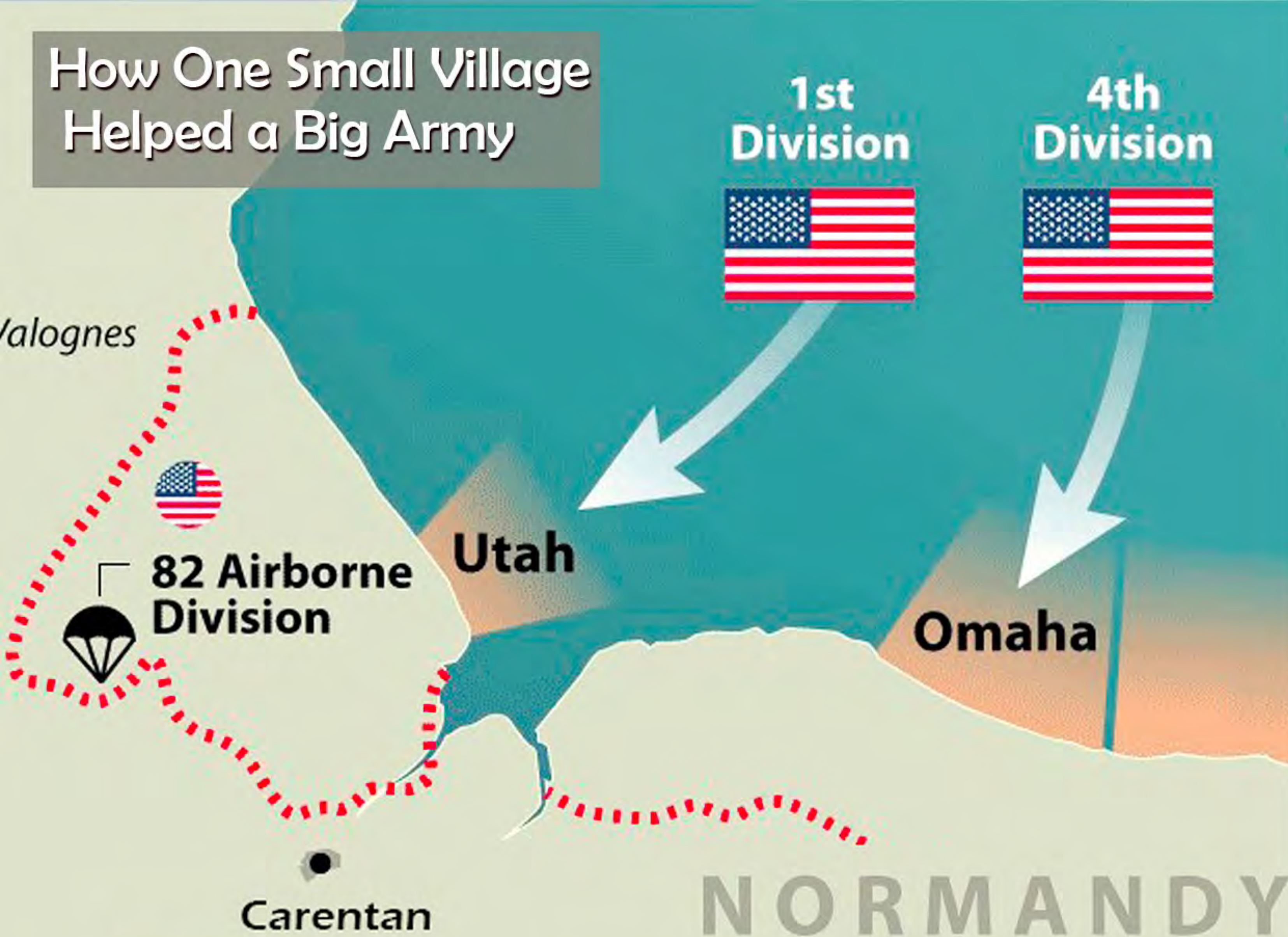


CLICK FOR VIDEO

As I walked along Omaha Beach I thought about the many brave soldiers who were killed or injured here 75 years ago.



How One Small Village Helped a Big Army



Graignes

"The feelings that rose up inside Paul, brighter than all the others, were hope and pride. Mr. Leon was alive. The people of Le Roc hadn't given up. They were fighting back!"

The village of Graignes is close to the Normandy beaches. Its people helped protect American paratroopers on D-Day after they dropped far from their landing zone. The Americans fell into a huge swamp and lost a lot of their gear.

The people of the village, led by Mayor Voydie, hid the Americans, fed them, and helped them find their missing equipment. This helped the soldiers fight off a powerful German tank division. Sylvain arranged for us to meet Mayor Voydie's daughter, Denise, who was a teenager in 1944.



Denise Voydie

Even though Le Roc is a made-up village in my book, visiting with Denise and her friends helped me understand what life was like for a young person in France, living under the Nazis.

Meet Denise and her friends Jeanette and Gaston, who survived D-Day and the Battle of Graignes



Denis Small
Mayor, Graignes-Mesnil-Angot



Sylvain Kast



Denise Voydie



Jeanette Decaumont



Gaston Decaumont

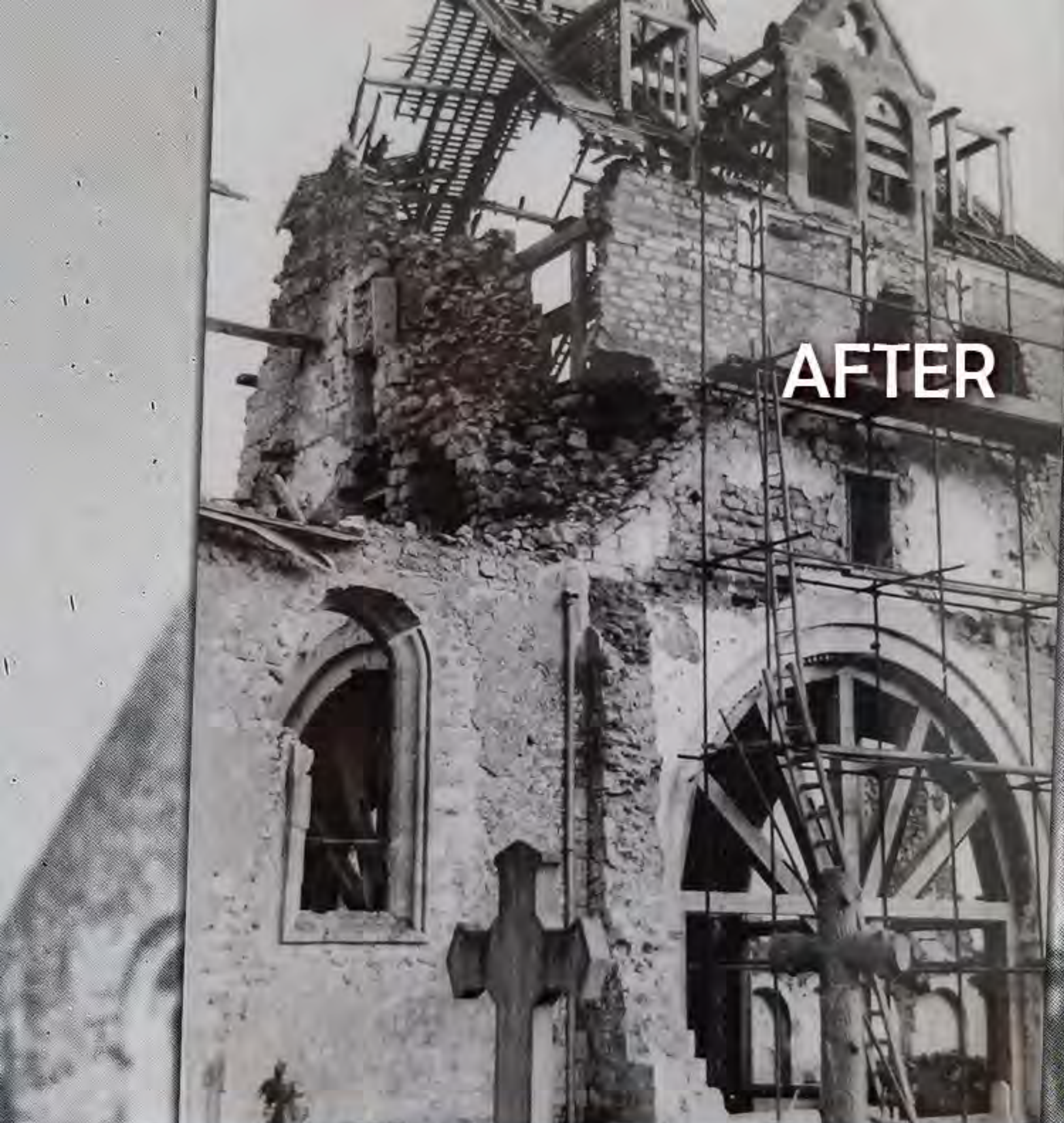


“The Germans patrolled each day... they (took) our hay, wheat and livestock...”

“One day three Germans soldiers arrived and took my father away. We weren't sure if he would come back.”



“We saw the German soldiers coming (to attack) the town and my sister said “are you staying or leaving?”



AFTER



BEFORE

The beautiful church in Graignes was built on high ground. The bell tower was the perfect lookout spot for American soldiers. The damage from enemy attacks was so bad the church was never fully rebuilt.

Church of Saint-Michel



This is all that's left of the old church. It's a memorial to the people of Graignes and American soldiers who were killed or injured trying to stop parts of the German army from getting to the coast.



Graignes' new church !

MÉMORIAL FRANCO - AMÉRICAIN

INAUGURÉ LE 12 JUIN 1949
PAR MR DAVID BRÜCE
AMBASSADEUR DES U.S.A. EN FRANCE

IN MEMORY OF THOSE CITIZENS OF GRAIGNES
AND THE AMERICAN SOLDIERS WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES
IN DEFENSE OF GRAIGNES DURING THE PERIOD 6-12 JUNE 1944

EN MÉMOIRE DES VICTIMES
DE LA LIBÉRATION DE GRAIGNES

AUBRIL LOUISE
BAZIRE LOUIS
DEFORTESCU ADRIEN
DUJARDIN EUGENIE
FOLLIOT ISIDORE
FOLLIOT GEORGES
FRANÇOISE LUCIEN
GIRARD EUGENIE
LEBA... CHARLES
LE... RT
... RITE

LEDOLLEY EDOUARD
LEFRANC MARCEL
LERECULEY MARIE-LOUISE
LERSIER ROSALIE
LESCALIER ALINE
LETRESOR EMILE
LUCE ANDRE
MARIE AUGUSTE
MARTIN GERMAINE
MARTIN JULES

MAUGER ALBERT
MIGNOT OCTAVE
MURON ERNEST
... DESIRE
... JOSEPH
... MADELEINE
... PAULETTE
... LOUIS
... JUIS
... ES

... D. JOHNSTON
... K. BOGART
... AHAM SOPHIAN JR.
... ONAS O. AHMAD
... LMER F. FARNHAM
... ELMER F. HOFFMAN
... OWELL C. MAXWELL
... RANCIS J. MCCORMICK
... ELSON F. HORNBAKER
... ARRY W. MURRAY
... ARVIN H. ALLEN
... ORGE S. BARAGONA
... ANLEY K. BLACK(RAAF)
... BENTON J. BROUSSARD
... ROY M. CALLAHAN
... WALTER L. CHOQUETTE
... KENNETH B. GUNNING

CPL. JESUS CASAS
CPL. REUBEN F. LEMPKE
CPL. WILLARD J. LUCAS
CPL. JAMES M. NAFF
CPL. LEO J. PACKHAM
CPL. EDWARD J. PILLIS
CPL. JESSE J. RUSHING
CPL. THOMAS J. TRAVERS
T/5 JOHN MCNALLY
T/5 RICHARD E. REESE
PFC. ALLISON T. BLISS
PFC. ROBERT W. BRITTON
PFC. GEORGE A. BROWN
PFC. RICHARD J. HOFFMA
PFC. SHUFORD N. HUMPH
PFC. GRADY W. LLOYD

... VE
... J. ... TINEZ
... M ... DEN
... LLER
... LLICAN
... EBELING
... NILES
... PREMO
... PYTEL
... EAVES
... ROCKWELL
... SS
... N. STACHOWIAK
... E. TILLET
... WEISS
... R. WOODALL
... ZIELINSKI





American survivors of the
Battle of Graignes come back to
visit with their French friends
and celebrate the many
anniversaries of this historic event.

Mr. and Mrs. Decaumont, Graignes, 1994
Daughter & son-in-law of Mayor Alphonse Vo
Frank Costa, 507th PIR

I will never forget my visit to Graignes and so appreciate the time and stories that Denise, Jeanette, Gaston, and Denis shared with me. The bravery of the people of Graignes is truly inspiring.



The Battle of Sainte-Mère-Église

Another famous D-Day battle took place in a village called Sainte-Mère-Église, near Graignes. American paratrooper private John Steele landed on the steep roof of the church but his parachute got caught on one of the steeples. Hanging from the roof, he played dead while fierce fighting was going on in the street below. Today there's a replica of him hanging exactly where the real Private Steele was caught up.



The Amazing Airborne Museum





At 12:02 AM on D-Day, the first of 13,100 American paratroopers jumped out of their C-47 Skytrains like this one, pulled their ripcords, and floated down into dangerous enemy territory. At this museum you can see a lot of the airplanes, equipment and weapons used by these Airborne soldiers to help push the Germans out of France.



Each man is carrying over 100 pounds of equipment.



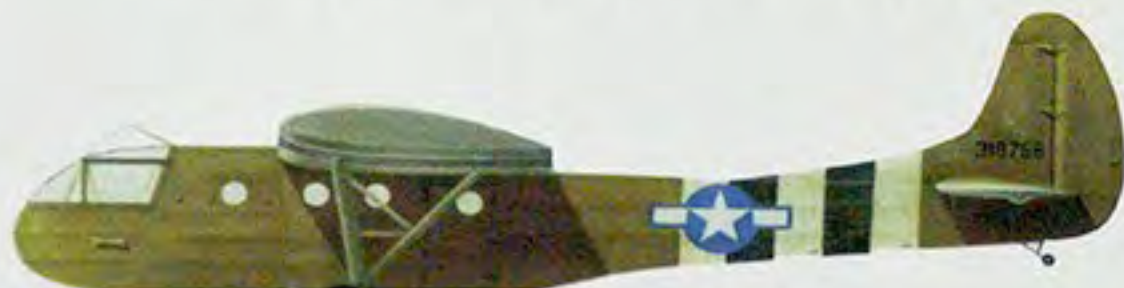
Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower



American paratroopers in their C47 Skytrain.



Douglas C-47 Skytrain - towed the gliders



Waco CG4-A Glider - made in the U.S.A



Horsa Glider - Made in England



Gliders had no engines.
They were towed over the
English Channel by C-47's,
then released and glided
down to their landing zones.



U.S. Army
Glider Badge

312 glider missions were flown on
D-Day, carrying troops and weapons.
In total 3,900 troops were delivered
to Normandy on gliders.

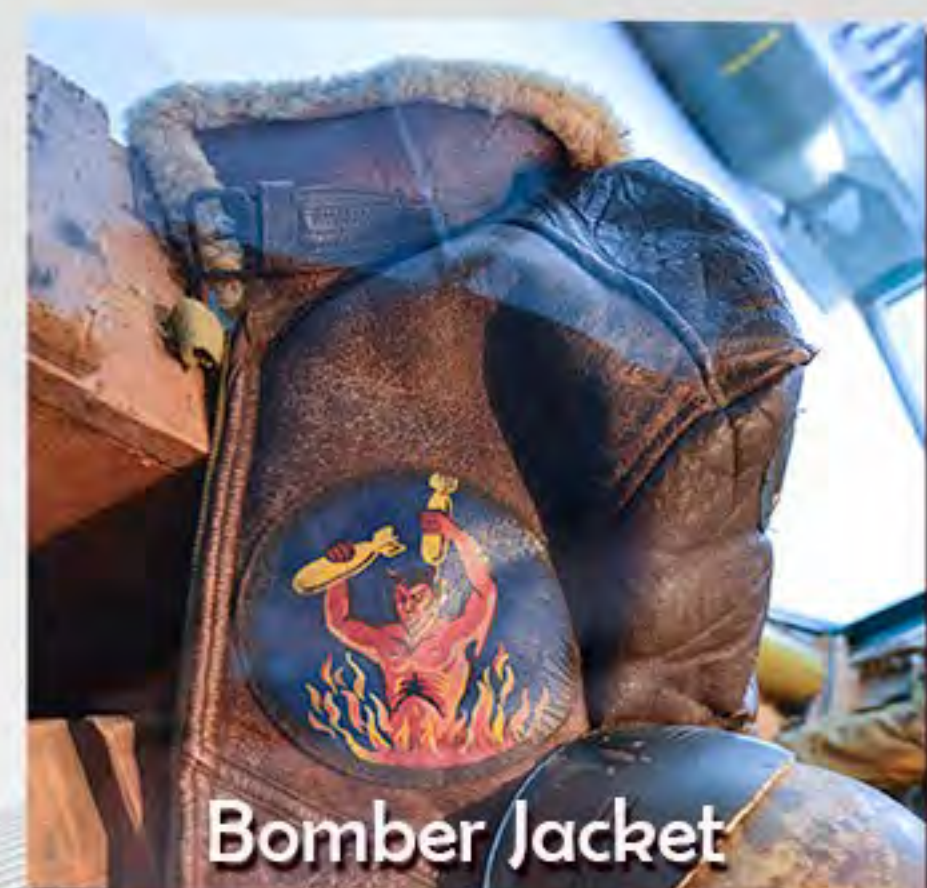




Jedburgh Commandos



Reunion of D-Day Soldiers



Bomber Jacket



Brave Lt. Dolan



Commando Knives

In its three large buildings, the Airborne Museum has so many things so see and learn about. As Americans, we should be proud that so much history and detail about D-Day is preserved at this fascinating place!



German Weapons



Derailed by the Resistance



Sabotage Equipment



Thanks for joining me on my research trip for I Survived The Battle of D-Day, 1944. Research is so important for anything we write, whether it's in-person research, or using books or other print or online sources. See you next time!



Acknowledgments:

Sylvain Kast, Normandy Guide

Denise Voydie, Gaston & Jeanette Decaumont, Denis Small

Airwolfhound (Photographer)

The Airborne Museum, Sainte-Mère-Église, France

Airfix.com

Brian Burnell (Photographer)

Scott Dawson, Illustrator, I Survived Series

The D-Day Story, Portsmouth, England

Imperial War Museum, Duxford, England

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