



Task Force Normandy 65 Joint Information Bureau  
Release #N2009-06-3-01

<http://www.eucom.mil/english/Dday/Dday.asp>  
June 3, 2009

## Chance meeting brings cavalry sergeant face-to-face with D-Day veteran

By Tech. Sgt. Michael Voss  
435th Air Base Wing Public Affairs Office

**SAINTE MERE EGLISE, France** -- Although sun and waves come together to create a serene picture of Sainte Mere Eglise today, it was once the site of one of the bloodiest battles in history.

On June 6, 1944 -- D-Day -- French, U. S. and other allied forces stood together to fight the German occupiers of France. During the battle for the beaches of Normandy, paratroopers from American, British and Canadian forces landed along a 50-mile stretch of the Normandy coast. It was largest single-day amphibious invasion in history, with 160,000 troops landing that day.

Each year since the liberation of Normandy, allied forces have come here to honor those who fought here that day.



COURTESY PHOTO

Sgt. 1st Class Steve Selvage of the 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment gets an autograph from 91-year-old D-Day survivor Ralph Manley in Sainte Mere Eglise, France, June 1. The two met while Selvage was in the town during his unit's participation in events commemorating the 65th anniversary of the Normandy invasion.

Today many of the survivors of the invasion have passed away or become too ill to make the long journey here to join in this week's events marking the 65th anniversary of D-Day, but their legacy lives on through the lives of active-duty servicemembers. One of those still-serving troops, Ohio native Sgt. 1st Class Steve Selvage, said he has waited 22 years to see the Normandy beaches and participate in commemoration ceremonies here.

"I have wanted to get here since my first year here in Germany. I just never had the chance,"

said the 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment Soldier. "It is a great honor."

Although Selvage's role here escorting distinguished visitors to the ceremony is a busy one, he has had a bit of time before the ceremony to take in some of the sights and sounds of the historic area.

Almost as if it happened according to plan, when Selvage packed his gear and Class A uniform for the week, he made room to pack a very special item: a book by Stephen Ambrose he's had more than 10 years.

"I brought the book, 'D-Day,' which I have read at least three times," said the 23-year veteran. "I brought it strictly for reference when seeing some of the sights."

On one trip into Sainte Mere Eglise, Selvage, a father of three -- including one son serving in Iraq -- spotted an older gentleman in a leather bomber jacket passing by and overheard a couple British Soldiers say, "There goes Ralph Manley." He immediately set out to meet the 91-year-old D-Day veteran.

"Before we knew what was going on, he was screaming about his book and a pen," said Selvage's career-long friend, Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Martin.

Without knowing what to say, he approached Manley, book in hand, just hoping to hear the first-hand tale of a surviving D-Day veteran.

"These guys are legends. They accomplished something I could never imagine," said Selvage. "I think it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Selvage could not have been more right. Many of the survivors are now in their 80s or older, and Selvage is retiring from the Army in the next couple months.

Of the more than 154,000 allied forces that landed on Normandy, an estimated 10,000 were killed, wounded, missing or captured, and as the years have passed, more and more of those who survived the invasion have passed away or are now too elderly for a trip here.

While listening to Manley's story, Selvage said, the veteran noticed the D-Day book in the sergeant's hand. He reached for the book, opened its cover and signed a small memo inside.

"It was really enough that he would just sit and share his experiences with us," said Selvage. "He really didn't have to sign it for the experience to mean any more to me."

Although Manley is not mentioned in the book by name, it didn't lessen the experience for those who listened to his story.

"Some people may say that just because he wasn't mentioned by name in a book that he was just an average GI," said Martin. "But to me, these guys are legends."

Later at his tent before lights-out, as Selvage took time to rest and reflect, he looked back through the book pointing the autograph to other Soldier friends and sharing his experience.

"You know, my household goods are being picked up for my retirement next week and my

wife was a little upset about the timing of me coming here, but she didn't say anything," said Selvage. "She knows how important this has been to me."

"You really just could not imagine what it was like until you stand on that beach or talk to one of the original veterans of that day in person," he said. "These guys always will be heroes in my book."



**Follow us on Twitter: @USArmyEurope or @US\_EUCOM**