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Reenactment groups bring D-Day era alive for visitors to events commemorating 65th anniversary of invasion

By Sgt. Fay Conroy

21st Theater Sustainment Command Public Affairs Office

SAINTE MERE EGLISE, France -- Maurice Lancelot is not an American Soldier, but he is dressed like one.



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Maurice Lancelot, a member of the Normandie Souvenir Avenir World War II reenactment group (foreground, wearing cap), talks to visitors at the Airborne Festival in Sainte Mere Elgise, France, June 3. The festival, which coincides with events in the area commemorating the 65th anniversary of D-Day, features historic vehicles, weapons and other equipment in recreated World War II settings.

Lancelot is a member of Normandie Souvenir Avenir, which means “Normandy past and future.” He is one of many reenactors who have set up camp in the field behind the Airborne Museum here in preparation for events commemorating the 65th anniversary of D-Day.

It took the reenactors four months to build up the camp as part of the Airborne Festival, a collection of several reenactment group exhibitions which will continue through this week's commemorative events. The festival includes numerous examples of vintage cars from the World War II era, machine guns, aircraft, military vehicles, and tents meticulously set up to mimic the living conditions of Soldiers during World War II.

Lancelot's camp consists of a small hospital infirmary, a field kitchen, machine guns, jeeps, and a large guard tower.

“I started collecting little things when I was 25 and then they just got bigger and bigger,” he said.

Many of the reenactors are using items they have found. When the U.S. Army moved out

of a town here, its units often had to move quickly, and ended up leaving a lot of things behind. Many of the larger objects such as jeeps and trucks were abandoned or given to the

French army.

“The French army only had American military vehicles. That is why the French people have a great appreciation for them,” said Lancelot.

After the war, French firefighters took American military vehicles that had been left behind and painted them red to use them as fire trucks. Local farmers used jeeps to move crops and animals.

A lot of Soldiers from Task Force Normandy 65, the joint service team of hundreds of servicemembers who are in Sainte Mere Eglise to support the D-Day commemoration ceremonies, have visited the festival, said Lancelot.



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Members of a reenactment group park a restored World War II-era truck at the Airborne Festival in Sainte Mere Eglise, France, June 3. The festival, which coincides with events in the area commemorating the 65th anniversary of D-Day, features historic vehicles, weapons and other equipment in recreated World War II settings.

“I think it’s awesome. It gives us a chance to look back at the past and see what the paratroopers have done for us and (how they have) led the way for us,” said Spc. Dale Lepore, a parachute rigger with the Brigade Support Battalion, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team. “Hopefully we can continue on and carry on what they have done for us.”

Lancelot shared that sentiment.

“We really like when the Americans come here,” he said. “Without the Americans, France would have never been liberated.”

The group has opened its camp to the public for a 2 euro admission fee, which is waived for veterans and American military members.



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