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First French town liberated on D-Day shows its appreciation to Normandy veterans

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SAINTE MERE EGLISE, France -- After a well-deserved tribute at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial at Omaha Beach June 6, attended by four heads of state, the veterans of D-Day were honored again today. This tribute, however, was organized by and held in the town of Sainte Mere Eglise, the first town liberated by allied forces on D-Day.

Along with the families of the veterans, Maj. Gen. Yves Fontaine, commanding general of U.S. Army Europe's 21st Theater Sustainment Command and Brig. Gen. Jon Miller, 21st TSC deputy commanding general, were among those who attended the ceremony.

Even though the crowd was nowhere near the size of the one at Omaha Beach, the appreciation and respect shown for the veterans was as strong today in front of the Sainte Mere Eglise town hall as it was yesterday at the June 6 event.



SPC ADRIENNE KILLINGSWORTH
Pierre L. Porter, liaison officer for the American Legion in Paris, France, presents the colors during a ceremony in honor of D-Day veterans in Sainte Mere Eglise, France, June 7. Saint Mere Eglise was the first town liberated by American forces on D-Day.

The crowd that gathered outside to welcome the veterans could hardly contain its excitement. While technical difficulties prevented speech-making, in the end the gratitude of this town did not need words.

The appreciation of the people of Sainte Mere Eglise could be seen in the faces of the children who lined up to take their picture with the veterans. It was felt in the pressing

crowds, eager to get closer to their heroes.

As the ceremonies in remembrance of D-Day come to an end here in Normandy, the veterans and the people who gather here to honor them have not waned in their enthusiasm for one another.

William Tritt, 86, is a native of Carlisle, Penn. Tritt was a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division's 508th Infantry Regiment when he landed four miles northwest of Sainte Mere Eglise on D-Day.

This year was Tritt's first trip back to Normandy since the war and he said he has enjoyed the reception he has received here. Even after sharing a handshake with the president of the United States, Tritt still thinks the best part of his week has been the affection he has gotten from the ladies.

“The best part is the kissing,” Tritt said of his warm reception from the people in town. It is a reception that has not been an uncommon sight here.

The festivities continued after the outdoor reception and the presentation of gifts to the veterans from the French administrative department Manche, when the veterans shared lunch with their families and one another.

As the ceremonies and the celebrations for D-Day roll to an end and the town of Sainte Mere Eglise returns to its normal pace, one gets the feeling that even when the last troop pulls out of town, the spirit of that day will never leave.



SPC ADRIENNE KILLINGSWORTH
William Tritt, 86, a native of Carlisle, Penn., wears his original uniform from World War II at a ceremony in honor of D-Day veterans outside the town hall of Sainte Mere Eglise, France, June 7.



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