



"Iron Mike," the French memorial dedicated to those airborne troopers killed in the liberation of France, overlooks paratroopers participating in an airborne drop on June 7 as part of week-long events commemorating the 65th Anniversary of D-Day. More than 300 paratroopers from the U.S., France and Germany participated in the drop outside of Sainte Mere Eglise, France.

SOCEUR paratroopers participates in historic event honoring D-Day veterans

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Paratroopers representing all services of the U.S. Special Operations Command Europe (SOCEUR) jumped in the same fields of Normandy, France on June 7 just as paratroopers did 65 years ago as part of the D-Day invasion by Allied Expeditionary forces.

The massive air drop of more than 300 airborne paratroopers culminated a week of memorial events held at Sainte Mere Eglise, France honoring the 65th Anniversary of D-Day.

Airborne units from the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions liberated many French towns in some of the most epic battles of World War II. Some of the last surviving veterans from those units who took part in the invasion came across the Atlantic to once again walk the beaches and fields of Normandy.

Throughout the week-long commemoration, SOCEUR servicemembers personally engaged the veterans from D-Day, gave away military souvenirs to children and took

photos with the thousands of World War II re-enactors who ‘stormed’ on the small French town.

“The entire event was a phenomenal experience where I could take in the history and pay tribute to those who paid the ultimate price for our freedoms,” said Air Force Master Sgt. John Cauffman, SOCEUR Operations Executive Officer. “Meeting a veteran with four combat jumps and a Ranger who fought at Pointe du Hoc were the highlights of the trip.”

The story of D-Day has been chronicled in the mini-series “Band of Brothers,” which highlighted the experiences of E Company (Easy Company” of the 2nd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division.

As an avid fan of the documentary and of the 101st Airborne Division, Army Staff Sgt. Odwin Matthews felt the experience of meeting the World War II veterans gave him a surge of pride as a Soldier like never before.

“The D-Day invasion has to be one of the most significant events to have occurred in our military history, and to walk the grounds of some of the most fierce battles and meet some of the veterans from that time was a very proud and humbling experience for me personally and as an American Soldier,” said Matthews, SOCEUR logistics support noncommissioned officer in charge. “Our nation and the world is in a better place because of the display of extraordinary heroism and sacrifices by the United States and our Allies on June 6, 1944.”

For 65 years there have been stories told throughout towns in Normandy, France of the brave American fighting men who fought for freedom and suffered the horrors of war. Their appreciation of the paratroopers who liberated them has been passed on from generation to generation and their unwavering affection for those paratroopers was expressed symbolically during the commemoration events.

“All Americans should visit Normandy at least once in their lives to take in the experience and show gratitude for the sacrifices [veterans] made for their freedoms,” Cauffman said.