



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EDUCATION ACTIVITY

Wiesbaden High School JROTC Cadets Commemorate 80th Anniversary of D-Day in Normandy

The Wiesbaden High School JROTC Warrior Battalion embarked on a significant journey to Normandy, accompanied by 20 cadets. Their purpose was twofold: to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of D-Day, which occurred on June 6, 1944, and to visit the historic sites where pivotal events unfolded. The cadets, along with their instructors and chaperones, traveled to a location near Quineville, France, situated on the western edge of Utah Beach. It was a memorable and educational experience that connected the cadets to the past and honored the sacrifices made by many during that critical time in history.

The cadets were divided into groups and assigned tour segments to provide a briefing. The briefings included the forces engaged, the significance of the military action, and leadership examples that were essential to the mission's success. Cadets researched the battles within D-Day, and a mosaic of stories revealed how all phases of the operations, with the small, isolated battles, came together to ensure the success of the invasion.



Cadets, instructors and chaperones from Wiesbaden High School JROTC Warrior Battalion conducted physical readiness training on Utah Beach.

The entire group, including cadets, instructors, and chaperones, conducted physical readiness training on Utah Beach on the first two days running along the sea wall on Utah Beach in the morning. This displayed the distance involved for those hitting the beach on D-Day, as at 0700, it was low tide. The low tide created the exposed approach of nearly one mile to reach the seawall for the troops of the first wave. The cadets visited the La Fièvre causeway and the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) Memorial, commemorating where forces from the 507 PIR fought to seize an 82nd Airborne Division objective and then conducted a four-day battle. This battle represented the airborne missions connected to landings as this secured the critical routes off of the beach. The positions fought off mounted German counterattacks seeking to destroy the landing forces on the beaches.

Cadets later moved to Sainte-Mere-Eglise to visit and experience the town market square and Church where Sgt. John Steel famously remained in his parachute, snagged and dangling from the church bell tower on June 6. The cadets visited Amferville to see the 1/507 PIR memorial and the D-Day planned "Drop Zone T," where F Company successfully landed. The cadets were able to observe the Liberty Jump Team conducting a reenactment of the D-Day drop on the evening of June 4 with Lt. Col (Ret.) Jon Ring, Wiesbaden HS JROTC Senior Army Instructor and member of Liberty Jump Team, was participating.

Cadets from Wiesbaden High School JROTC Warrior Battalion listen to a history brief.



Cadets visited the Pointe-Du-Huc Memorial to have a briefing and to see the critical terrain of D-Day, which had the US Army 2d Ranger Battalion assigned to conduct an assault climb from an amphibious landing with grappling hooks. Today, the battle-scarred terrain has grass and low bushes. However, it still hosts the tremendous craters and cracked or scattered concrete bunkers from the naval bombardment. The German guns in this position could easily range Allied landing beaches and ships of Operation Neptune, the world's largest seaborne invasion in history. Moving from Pointe Du Huc, the cadets visited the Normandy American cemetery in Colleville-Sur-Mer. The manicured grounds with white marble tombstones were impressive from the start as you enter the Normandy American Cemetery. The main walkway was being transformed for the June 6 80th Anniversary event with United States President Joseph Biden and French President Francois Marcon in attendance. The cadets met David Marshall of the 84th Infantry Division and Charles Braun of the U.S. Army

Air Corps hosted by the Liberte Jump Team. The cadets engaged in a lively conversation and escorted two World War II Veterans maneuvering through the crowded pathways of the cemetery. They also assisted in moving the two veterans to see several grave markers of their comrades.

During the Airborne Operations of D-Day, paratroopers dispersed far and wide from the 101st Airborne due to enemy fire. In one of the lesser-known incidents of D-Day, one chalk of paratroopers from Headquarters Company, 507 PIR, was dropped in a small town of Hémevez on the northern edge many miles away from “Drop zone T” and landed on the Headquarters building of Field Marshall Erwin Rommel while he was away in Paris. The SS troops guarding the HQ fired on the paratroopers while landing, killing several. They captured and then killed seven paratroopers and ordered the villagers to bury the bodies. The villagers complied with the orders but secured the personal effects of the soldiers and marked the burial site. The villagers maintained the site, reported the incident, and led American officers to the grave site of the paratroopers as the German forces retreated. The town of Hémevez maintains the memorial to these seven paratroopers in the local church cemetery, and a ceremony is held to honor these paratroopers each year on June 6.

Cadets visited both Omaha and Utah beaches and were able to appreciate the depth of the task for the amphibious landing forces. The lay of the beach, the terrain behind the landing beaches, and German fortifications made all the difference to the troops hitting the beach. Utah Beach had an estimated 300 casualties, and Omaha Beach had 2,400 casualties. The cadets experienced the scope of the task the troops faced on that fateful dawn June 6 at low tide and in the cold water, experienced the distance the troops had to run under murderous fire while loaded with weapons, ammunition, and equipment. Today's lack of cover and concealment on the beaches is the same as it was for D-Day troops 80 years ago.



Cadets from Wiesbaden High School JROTC Warrior Battalion help escort World War II veteran at Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-Sur-Mer.

The Warrior Battalion Cadets conducted a brief ceremony on June 6, 2024, in Quenneville, France, western Utah Beach, to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of D-Day. The ceremony recognized the invasion's tremendous efforts and personnel costs to take the landing beaches, and Airborne forces took critical objectives behind the beaches and blunted enemy counterattacks. The 11:00 ceremony was symbolic as this represented an approximate time of the first link-up of US amphibious landing forces with U.S. Airborne forces in the Utah Beach area. This link-up connected the two forces, seized the critical causeways across the marshes to allow a

continued build-up of the beachhead, and protected the exposed beaches from German counterattacks.

One of the most telling observations of the tour was the sheer number of people visiting the Normandy area. Thousands of Soldiers from the U.S. Army, and U.S. Air Force conducted ceremonies and events at historic sites and World War II reenactors using re-stored World War II U.S. military vehicles traveled throughout the area or in demonstration camps across several towns. The Airborne Museum in Sainte-Mère-Église, located across the market square from the church, was a key point of learning that revealed what the paratroopers had for equipment, mission briefings, and contained within was a C-47 and WACO glider on display.

As the trip ended, the cadets were assigned the task of writing to themselves in the future about their reflections and what they learned from visiting during the 80th Anniversary of D-Day. Additionally, cadets will be presenting their experience to JROTC classes in August with a summary of the D-Day visit, points of significance, and actions taken by American Leaders during that historic event.

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