



Le journal de l'association Air Memorial

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CARNET DE VOL

AIR MEMORIAL IN NORMANDY FROM JUNE 5 TO 9, 2024.

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Spécial Normandy 2024

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Logo of the 80th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT:

It seemed essential for us to go to Normandy for the 80th anniversary of the D-Day. Indeed, the Landing ceremonies allow us not to forget the men who fell to bring us freedom and to become aware of the value of democracy. On behalf of our association, we contacted the American Battle Monument commission and the Liberation Commission of the Prefecture of Calvados to request invitations to the Franco-American ceremony at the American cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer as well as to the International ceremony on Omaha Beach.

These commemorations take on a special character this year with, probably for the last time, the presence of veterans and a year 2024 marked by the return of war in Europe. In many respects, the relationship between France, Europe and the United States is more than ever at the heart of current events. Air Mémorial immersed itself in Normandy for a few days, discovering or rediscovering sites and historical facts that marked the summer of 1944...

This is what we are going to present to you in this special issue of Carnet de Vol !

June 5, 2024 - Visit to Pegasus Bridge.



Frank Bernard in front of the first liberated house in France, le café Gondrée.

Unavoidable, the Café Gondrée, located a stone's throw from Pegasus Bridge, is now a café-museum !

Our journey through Normandy begins with this symbolic site, listed as a historical monument. The establishment was created in 1935 by Georges and Thérèse Gondrée, the parents of Arlette Gondrée, who claims that it has remained as it was on the night of 5 to 6 June 1944, when the Bénouville Bridge was taken by the British 6th Airborne.

The tapestry in the café room is the same as in 1944. The café is full of souvenirs, photos, berets and personal effects of British veterans.

On the night of June 5, 1944, a group of 181 men from the 6th Airborne Division, commanded by Major John Howard, boarded 6 Horsa gliders at RAF Tarrant Rushton in southern England. The gliders were towed by Halifax bombers.

Their objective was to seize the Bénouville bridge on the Caen-to-Sea Canal and the Ranville bridge on the Orne a few hundred meters to the east. An important detail: they had to take them intact. At midnight and 16 minutes, 5 of the 6 gliders landed in the immediate vicinity of the bridge, the 6th landed 16 km away. In less than 15 minutes, the British soldiers took advantage of the element of surprise and seized the bridge.



The Gondrée café and the new bridge which replaced in 1994 the one in place in 1944.

The Bénouville bridge was quickly renamed "Pegasus Bridge", in fact the Pegasus is the insignia of the 6th Airborne Division. Aging and poorly adapted to modern ships, it was dismantled in 1994 and replaced by a modern and almost exact copy.

The original bridge is now visible outside the nearby Pegasus Memorial Museum.



« Pegasus » insignia of the 6th Airborne Division.



June 6, 2024 - Franco-American Ceremony at the American Cemetery



The American cemetery site is poignant with its 9,389 steles aligned near the beach, but today an additional level is crossed with the arrival of about 200 veterans !

Today the Franco-American ceremony commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Normandy landings takes place in the presence of Presidents Emmanuel Macron and Joseph R. Biden Jr.

The two presidents speak successively and then Emmanuel Macron presents the Legion of Honor to 11 of the American veterans present.

Among these men, let us mention the oldest, Edward L. Berthold, who is now 104 years old. As a co-pilot in the 445th Bomb Group, 702nd Bomb Squadron, he flew a mission on board a B-24 bomber of the 8th Air Force over the bridges of Saint-Lô on June 6, 1944. He had a total of 35 war missions to his credit.



Three veterans arrive at the ceremony.

President Emmanuel Macron's speech pays tribute to all American veterans. He directly addresses some of those present, citing their feats of arms during the summer of 1944.



One of the 200 veterans

The President of the Republic then salutes the courage of the fighters
(Extract from his speech):

"... This place and this ceremony express our debt to those who fell as well as to those who survived", underlines the French Head of State, then addressing the veterans present: "In the summer of 1944, you were barely 20 years old, sometimes less, you had a family, you had dreams, plans and you left everything and took all the risks for our independence, for our freedom. We do not forget it, thank you ..."

The President of the United States Joe Biden, 46th President of the United States, then speaks (Extract):

"... the Allies who fought together 80 years ago showed the way. We won the war together. And today, 32 NATO countries form the largest alliance in history... Ukraine is fighting against a tyrannical nation and has already suffered many losses in this illegal aggression by Russia. More than 50 countries stand with Ukraine and we will not turn our backs on it. Otherwise, the whole of Europe will suffer the consequences. We cannot let this happen, it would mean forgetting what happened on the beaches of Normandy. And what will people say about our time in 80 years? ... »



The public present at the American cemetery

June 6, 2024, Omaha beach, international ceremony, Saint Laurent sur Mer (14).



The scene in front of Omaha beach, here animated by dancers and singers from the Franco-German Youth Office



Achille MULLER, a French veteran of the SAS who landed in a glider in Brittany in August 1944 at Locol-Mendon (56)

Various military bands from the French Army, including the Bagad de Lann-Bihoué, followed one another with a troupe of dancers/singers from a Franco-German youth association, and readings of texts, to evoke the drama of the Second World War, the liberation, the reconstruction and the reconciliation through the creation of Europe. A set of moving and explicit presentations that concluded with an air parade with the Patrouille de France.

Our association was invited to this ceremony in the presence of the President of the French Republic and 24 other heads of state of the allied nations. The platform and the stage faced Omaha Beach in the resplendent sunshine. Our delayed arrival brought us together for a moment with the Prime Minister. Here too the arrival of the veterans was very moving. The ovation for the Ukrainian president, a country at war, was worthy of the event.



The Patrouille de France and The British Arrows patrol open the flypast

June 7, 2024 - Visit to the Hillman site in Colleville-Montgomery (14)



Colleville-Montgomery is a town in Calvados near Ouistreham, formerly called Colleville-sur-Orne. It changed its name in 1946 to pay tribute to the British troops and their commander General Bernard L. Montgomery who landed on June 6, 1944 on Sword Beach located partly in the town.

Buried command post of Colonel Ludwig Krug.

The Hillman site is the English code name for the site designated Widerstandsnest 17 by the German army located in Colleville-Montgomery. It is a set of 18 buried bunkers connected by trenches, one of which served as a command post for Colonel Ludwig Krug commanding the 736th German Grenadier Regiment.

Some of these bunkers were equipped with 20 to 30 cm thick armoured domes used for observation and tobruks (individual shelters) equipped with machine guns. Located 45 m above sea level, this fortification offered a clear view of a large part of the landing beaches as well as the mouth of the Orne. The guided tour is provided by Daniel Delangle, who is one of the artisans of the restoration of the site in the 80s. The association created for the occasion took 3 years to clear the earth accumulated in the various bunkers and trenches to restore the site to its original appearance.

A long research work was then necessary to find furniture or military accessories from the period. Thus, Colonel Krug's command post has been reconstructed almost identically. The strategic role of the site consisted of ensuring transmissions between the different elements of the regiment in liaison with General Wilhelm Richter, based in Caen commanding the 716th Infantry Division and whose role was to defend the region.

This structure was occupied by an officer, two non-commissioned officers, and three soldiers who ensured an observation and radiotelephone transmission mission



Reconstruction of Colonel Krug's office - On the wall a period black and white photo shows Krug sitting at his desk.

On the evening of June 6, the site fell into the hands of the British Suffolk Regiment. Despite a fierce defense, Colonel Krug and several dozen soldiers had to take refuge inside.

Krug called Richter, "The enemy is on my bunker, I have no means of resisting him and I have no communication with my men. What should I do?"

The General replied to the besieged that he would leave him to make his own decision. On June 7 at 6:45 a.m., Colonel Krug and his men surrendered to the British.



Hans Sauber's bed, his photo taken in 2014 is visible on the top bunk.

Hans Sauer, the only known German veteran of the Ouistreham sector who was on the site on June 6, 1944, returned for the 70th anniversary of the landing in 2014. During the visit to the bunker, he recognized the bed he was resting on at the time !

On June 6, 1944, he had tried, with his comrades in arms, to repel the Allies.

On June 6, 2014, he confided to Ouest-France:

"On the sea, I saw all the ships, the planes in the sky and the shells falling. Our comrades posted down below no longer answered our calls. On the evening of June 6, the colonel had all the armored doors closed. There were seventy of us soldiers in a bunker designed for ten men, buried alive. We were in the dark, listening to the tanks passing over our heads. Waiting for our last hour. I said to myself: tomorrow, you're dead Hans."

In July 2015, Hans Sauer died at the age of 91. The visit ends, this journey through time was fascinating thanks to Daniel Delangle, a passionate man who has the art of captivating his audience.

So if one day you pass by Colleville Montgomery, make the detour !

June 7, in Arromanches.

In beautiful weather, the association was able to attend several events in Arromanches. A ceremony to pay tribute to Czech soldiers, a British singer singing period songs with talent, a rehearsal for the airshow the next day and finally a presentation of 300 military vehicles from the Second World War, including rare British vehicles. It was also an opportunity to meet David Wall a Jeepster who owned a training biplane from the Second World War, a Tiger Moth.



300 vintage military vehicles on Arromanches beach

**Back in Brittany, we asked him to write a few words for Carnet de Vol:
"Thank you for asking me to write for your newsletter.**

I run a car restoration company working mostly on pre-war cars but including others from the 1950's and 1960's. Post war cars were mostly Minis, Morris Minor, M.G., Jaguar, Bentley, Rolls Royce and Aston Martin.

Pre-war cars are mostly Austin Seven, M.G., Riley also Bentley 3, 4 ½ and 6 ½ Lt, Bugatti T13, 37, 44, and 57. Rolls Royce Silver Ghost, Phantom 20 20/25 etc. I started the business in 1977: it continues under the name of Toad Hall Workshops and I now enjoy semi-retirement.

My love of pre-war Lagondas means we have had all models from 1927 to 1940 in the workshop, including the V12 that raced as Number 6 at LeMans in 1939. I have driven it to LeMans and around the course. Quite a car that one ! But the type 44 was jolly good.



David Wall and his jeep.

I have a number of cars of my own that I have collected over the past 60 years: Austin Sevens, M.G., Riley and a few more up market cars.

I bought the Willys Jeep two years ago as a well restored example. I joined the Norfolk Military Vehicle Group with the intention of going to Normandy for the 80th anniversary. I was accompanied by my son who owns a 1942 Ford Jeep ex British army that is known to have served in France and Germany.

We had breakfast at Pegasus Bridge the first morning and visited Omaha and Utah beaches, batteries and battlefields for the first days also cemeteries to which you obviously show great respect.

The last visit we made was to Arromanches-les-Bains.

Throughout our week in Normandy, we were impressed that villages, towns and many houses were displaying U.S. English and Canadian flags and without exception we were shown enthusiasm and courtesy.

The gathering and display at Arromanches was much more than we could have expected. There seemed that thousands had gathered on the seafront to see the Military vehicles and welcome us it was a truly overwhelming welcome, not only to us but to commemorate those that landed and ran up that beach on 6th June 1944. one of which, on the second wave was my wife's father Arthur Powley, gunner.

We drove off the beach feeling that it was the most memorable of all the days. Perhaps you will be able to pass on not only our thanks but those of all taking part in the display.

(As you know) I also own and operate a 1942 DeHavilland Tiger Moth that I acquired in 1993 after four years of restoration, having obtained my pilot's licence I first flew her on the last day of 1997. She has given me and many others who have flown with me great pleasure, the first few years often flying with WWII Lancaster, Mosquito, Hurricane and Spitfire pilots.



Tiger Moth and Lagonda 1934 41/2 Lt belonging to David Wall.

A lot can be learnt from those chaps. I am fortunate to have flown with them. You are doing a splendid job commemorating those that did not return. Keep up the good work".

**David Wall
www.davidwall-vroxham.co.uk**

June 8, 2024 - Petit Magny Manor Saint Vigor le Grand (14)

A ceremony is taking place this morning at the Manoir du Petit Magny in the town of Saint Vigor le Grand, close to Sommervieu.

The ceremony begins at 9:30 a.m. with a speech by Jean Jonlet, the former owner of the manor. He says that about twenty years ago, he noticed a man behaving unusually. Indeed, he was observing the manor carefully and lingering there, apparently looking for something... Wanting to find out for sure, Jean Jonlet went to meet the stranger. He had no idea what surprise awaited him! He quickly understood that this visitor had a very special connection with his property.

He was a former pilot of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) who, in 1944 shortly after the landing, had stayed at the manor for several weeks !



The visitor's name is Richard Rohmer, assigned at the time to the 39th Reconnaissance Wing.

In the days following the landing, the British built an "Advanced Landing Ground" (ALG) in a few days, an advanced airstrip. This is how ALG B8 was built from June 14 to 22, 1944 in the town of Sommervieu, near the Petit Magny manor. This type of land that spread across Normandy after the landing allowed the Allied air force to intervene as close as possible to the fighting. Richard Rohmer then recounts that at the time he was staying at the manor where he had his room. Then he adds that his dearest wish would be to be able to spend a night there again. Jean Jonlet, moved by this meeting, invited Richard Rohmer the next day to sleep at the manor in the room he occupied in 1944, emotion guaranteed !

But let's go back quickly to 1944.

On June 22, the 39th Reconnaissance Wing of the RCAF was installed on ALG B8 in Sommervieu. The 39th Wing was composed of the 400, 414 and 430 Squadrons. As a reconnaissance unit, its missions consisted of photographing the environment of the combat zones and informing the Allied armies on the ground. The unit was equipped with Supermarine Spitfires and North American P-51 Mustang Mk1s.

SAINT-VIGOR-LE-GRAND

HOMMAGE AUX NATIONS OUBLIÉES ET AUX AVIATEURS DE L'AÉRODROME B-8

La mémoire collective attache beaucoup d'importance au débarquement des troupes américaines, britanniques et canadiennes en Normandie, à juste titre. Néanmoins, de nombreuses autres nations ont permis à l'opération militaire de réussir.

Depuis le Manoir du Petit Magny, la commune de **Saint-Vigor-le-Grand** a choisi de mettre à l'honneur les aviateurs qui étaient positionnés sur l'aérodrome B-8, tout proche. Une commémoration aura lieu à partir de 9h30. D'anciens combattants transmettront un flambeau à des écoliers de la commune et du Congo-Brazzaville symbolisant le transfert de mémoire. Les enfants chanteront en cœur et liront des témoignages de leurs proches ayant vécu la guerre. Tout au long de la journée, un camp militaire sera reconstitué et des avions d'époque survoleront la zone pour un spectacle aérien.

8 JUIN

Manoir du Petit Magny | 9h à 18h

Extract from "Regards" the leisure magazine of Bayeux intercom - No. 26 - June 2024.

The day of July 17, 1944 remains one of the most vivid memories of Flying Officer Richard Rohmer, pilot of the 430 Sqn. He took off for a reconnaissance mission aboard his Mustang and saw a German car driving towards Livarot. Since his plane was not armed, he immediately reported the presence of this vehicle and its location on the radio.

Spitfires quickly arrived on the scene and machine-gunned the vehicle, which swerved and went across the road.



Moment of relaxation between two missions on the ALG B8.
Photo: Canadian Armed Forces.

On board, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was thrown from the vehicle and seriously injured.

He was put out of action until his suicide on October 14, 1944.



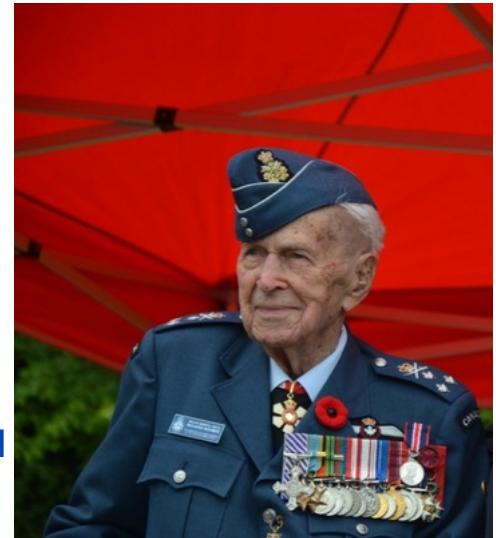
Flying Officer R.H. Rohmer during World War II.
Photo: Canadian Armed Forces.

It was only later that Richard Rohmer learned that it was the staff car of General Erwin Rommel, commander of the Atlantic Wall. Seriously injured, Rommel was put out of action until his suicide on October 14, 1944.

In November 1944.

Richard Rohmer ended his tour of operations with 135 war missions to his credit. After the war, he remained in the RCAF and became Major-General in 1978.

He is to this day the most decorated Canadian citizen; he left the armed forces in 1981.



Richard Rohmer, aged 100 at the Petit Magny manor on June 7, 2024

On the 75th anniversary of D-Day in 2019, Richard Rohmer said:

“The number of people who fought in D-Day and the Battle of Normandy is diminishing very rapidly, because we are all getting very old. This will be the last one...because we don't have many years left.

I am 95 years old and I am still flying and doing all sorts of things, but I know that it can't go on for much longer, that's life. So I am doing the best I can to keep going.”

Now in 2024 he is back in Normandy for the 80th anniversary, aged 100 !

Richard Rohmer at the podium. In the foreground on the left, Mrs. Irène Mboukou Kimbatsa, Minister of Cultural Affairs of Congo-Brazzaville. On the right, Mrs. Lydie Pongault, Minister of Cultural, Tourism, Artistic and Leisure Industry.



June 8, 2024, air show in Arromanches (14)

We attended the air show over the beach at Arromanches which attracted nearly 150,000 people to the town and the coast.



P-47 Thunderbolt, Spitfire and C-47 in the sky of Arromanches

A patrol of P-47 Thunderbolt and Spitfire aircraft opened the show with a breathtaking demonstration of a C-47 Dakota (or Skytrain) in acrobatics that were thought impossible.



F-16 and A400M Atlas from the Air Component of Belgian Defense



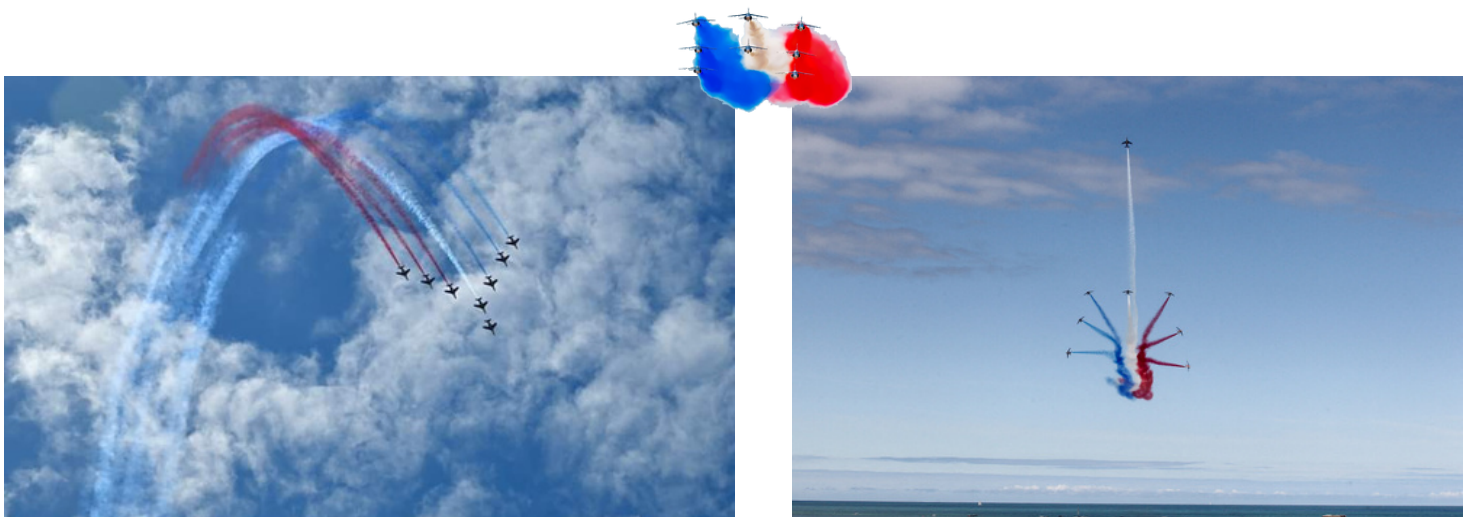
Affiche du meeting aérien

A H160 helicopter from the French Navy gave a sea rescue demonstration with a boat from the SNSM (National Sea Rescue Society). Cap 10 and Cap 231 aircraft gave an aerobatic display, then an A 400M aircraft and F16 aircraft made several passes.



Rafale Marine

Rafales Marine made high and low speed passes and finally the Alphajets from the Patrouille de France concluded this air show.



The Patrouille de France

June 9, 2024, Advanced Landing Ground B3 in Sainte Croix-sur-Mer (14)

Another site visited is also related to Canadian aviation and is located at the exit of Sainte-Croix-sur-Mer on the road to Ver-sur-Mer in Calvados.



Memorial on the ALG B3 site in 2024.
On the ground an SMT (Steel Mesh Track) grid
which was used on the ALG B3
to prepare the runways.

On June 7 at around 2 p.m., Major Mitchell of the Royal Air Servicing Commando identifies the ideal site for the future airfield that he is tasked with creating. To provide effective support to combat units, the Royal Air Force created the Air Servicing Commando, whose objective is to accompany the invasion forces, in particular to make operational the new landing strips built by the airfield construction units.

Thus, the first men and earthmoving equipment of the Royal Engineers 24th Airfield Construction Group arrive the same day and begin work while the surrounding area is not yet completely secure and is still under enemy fire.

On June 10, B3 became the main runway of the 144 Wing of the Royal Canadian Air Force, composed of 3 squadrons, the 441, 442 and 443 Squadrons equipped with Supermarine Spitfires.

The Wing was commanded by James E. "Johnny" Johnson, who would become the British ace of aces at the end of the war with 34 aerial victories and 7 in collaboration in 515 war missions.

The 146 Wing of the RAF, composed of 5 Squadrons equipped with Hawker Typhoons, also landed on B3 from July to September 1944.

It was commanded by
Group Captain Denys Gillam.

On Tuesday, June 13, twelve Supermarine Spitfire aircraft from the Ile-de-France (340th Squadron) and Alsace (341st Squadron) fighter groups belonging to the Free French Air Forces (FAFL), temporarily landed on B3.

For the first time since 1940, FAFL planes land on liberated French soil !

On Sunday, July 23, 1944, Prime Minister Winston Churchill also landed on a B-3 during a visit to Allied troops.



FAFL commemorative plaque at ALG B3
in Sainte-Croix-sur-Mer.

Canadian Cemetery of Beny sur Mer (14)

This cemetery houses 2,049 graves for eternity in the shade of pine and maple trees facing Juno Beach.

Very peaceful, the alignment of the graves is decorated with flowers, unlike other Commonwealth cemeteries. On a beautiful summer day, reading the age of these soldiers, we can imagine the life they deprived themselves of, sacrificing themselves for our freedom.



Canadian cemetery

British Memorial of Ver sur Mer (14)



The monument

We visited this fairly recent memorial which on its walls bears the names of the 22,443 soldiers under British command who lost their lives during the landing and during the Battle of Normandy.

In addition, a specific memorial pays tribute to the 20,000 French civilians who died during this battle.

For this year of the 80th anniversary of the landing, metal silhouettes were erected around the monument.

Numbering 1,475, they represent the British dead for the day of June 6, 1944 alone.



Metal silhouettes



D-Day Wings Museum in Caen / Carpiquet (14)

This museum is the only one dedicated to air combat during the Battle of Normandy. The Air Memorial association has established a special link with this museum since it is the only one to have hosted our entire exhibition "Le cuir des anges" for 4 months in 2023.



Partial general view of the D-Day Wings museum

Since our last visit, many new items have appeared, a C-47 cockpit (or Dakota or Skytrain), runway work machines, a wreck of a Kettenkrad tracked motorcycle, a Higgins landing craft, a Mirage 5, a Tiger Moth biplane and a few other original features. A museum to visit by all enthusiasts.

American military cemetery in Brittany in Saint James (50)



View of the chapel at St James Military Cemetery

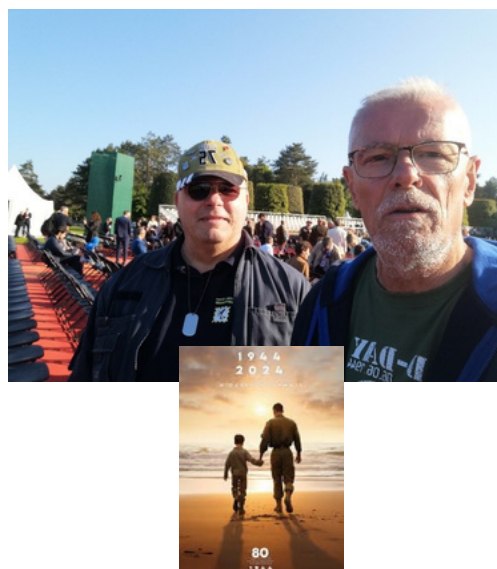
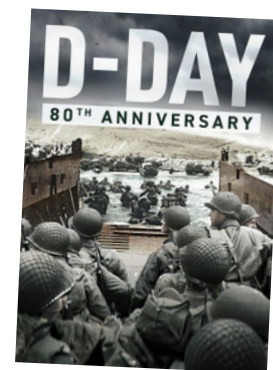
Our members sponsor several graves that are "entrusted" to them through the association "Les Fleurs de la Mémoire".

They thus commit to decorating them with flowers and honoring them at least once a year. In this cemetery, which is smaller than the one in Normandy and further from the tourist circuits, the atmosphere is more intimate, more peaceful and conducive to contemplation.

Every year, members of our association visit this cemetery, which contains 4,410 graves of soldiers who fell mainly during the fighting in Brittany. It is the second largest American military cemetery in France after Colleville sur Mer in Normandy.



Aerial view of St James Military Cemetery



End of this special Normandy Carnet de vol.
We are planning the next issue at the start of the school year
to present our many activities.
You can follow us on our
Facebook page : Association Air Memorial

If you do not wish to receive our Carnet de vol newsletter,
let us know by return email.



The End

