

PRESS RELEASE



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Best Defense Foundation announces 2023 Program to bring WWII Veterans back to Normandy for the 79th Anniversary of D-Day in partnership with Delta Air Lines, and with the support of Michelin.

Best Defense Foundation thanks the French Embassy to the U.S. and the U.S. Mission to France for helping to share Veterans' stories, as well as the Normandy Region for helping us to honor the Veterans in France.



View photo gallery from the 2022 Battlefield Return to Normandy: [click here](#).

View video from the 2022 Battlefield Return to Normandy: [click here](#).

Photos and videos from the 2023 event will be available on request.

The Best Defense Foundation will once again bring WWII veterans to Normandy, France this year to commemorate the 79th anniversary of D-Day in partnership with Delta Air Lines and with the support of Michelin North America, Inc.

The French Embassy to the U.S. and the U.S. Mission to France are committed to honoring WWII veterans and sharing their stories to make sure that we never forget that the French-American friendship is bound in blood and that our two countries owe each other their very existence as free nations.

Return to Normandy

Up to 50 WWII veterans from across the U.S. will depart from Atlanta, Georgia on May 31, 2023, and land in Deauville, Normandy, France on June 1st on a special Delta charter flight, to participate in a week-long program that will include the official D-Day Commemoration on June 6.

The WWII veterans will be recognized and celebrated during many other commemorations and events in the cities of Deauville, Hérouville-Saint-Clair, Carentan, Sainte-Mère-Eglise, Bayeux, Ver-sur-Mer and Caen. During their stay, the group will visit local museums, interact with French students in a local school, and connect with WWII British veterans.

Meet a few of the veterans that we are honored to welcome this year

Among the WWII American veterans joining this program will be six D-Day veterans who participated in the invasion and subsequent battle of Normandy in June, 1944. As every veteran has their own story worthy of highlighting, this program will honor soldiers, sailors, and airmen, as well as nurses and women who fulfilled varied support missions during WWII. We are proud to announce the support of the U.S. Embassy in France and the French Embassy in the U.S.A. in sharing and amplifying their incredible stories of leadership, teamwork, and sacrifice.



Andrew Negra from Avella, Pennsylvania joined the Army in the summer of 1943. One year later, in July 1944, he landed at Utah Beach in Normandy as part of the Army's 6th Armored Division. During the Normandy Campaign, Negra engaged in combat in the Cotentin Peninsula, and afterwards fought across western France, before turning east and arriving at the German border. North of Metz, the 6th Armored Division participated in the Battle of Bulge, crossed the Siegfried Line and helped free Allied prisoners of war and the concentration camp at Buchenwald, then took Leipzig.

On June 27, 2019, Andrew Negra was decorated Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor for his service in France during WWII. The medal was bestowed by former Consul General of France in Atlanta, Louis de Corail.



George Sarros from Chicago, Illinois was drafted at age 18. The government granted his request to join the Navy, and he was assigned to LST 515 and traveled from New Orleans along the Eastern seaboard to pick up ammunition before making the transatlantic crossing with a convoy in January 1944. Once arrived in Southampton in England, George and his shipmates participated in 'Exercise Tiger - 'the last training exercise involving all combined forces before D-Day. As it took place, the German Navy picked up radio transmissions and torpedoed three of the ships. The Captain of LST 515 disobeyed a direct order

and turned around to pick up survivors. On June 6, 1944, George landed on Utah Beach at 1 pm. His ship delivered ammo, men, and vehicles before picking up wounded paratroopers to be brought back to England for medical attention. During his time overseas, George and the men of LST 515 made 65 cross-channel trips without one sailor killed or wounded. He was honorably discharged in June 1946.

George Sarros was awarded the French Legion of Honor in December 2022 by Anne-Laure Desjonquères, Consul general of France in Atlanta.



Carl Felton was born on February 6, 1926 in Somerville, Massachusetts. Four months after graduating from high school, he joined the US Navy in October, 1943 at age 17 and attended bootcamp in Sampson, NY. After receiving training in Morse Code, he became a Signaller and was assigned to the HMS Ceres. The ship was in charge of directing traffic in and out of Omaha Beach. In the early morning hours of June 6, 1944, the ship left for Normandy and took heavy fire off the coast. Carl was stationed on the bridge sending and receiving messages. Many ships around him were sunk. He was stationed at Omaha Beach throughout the summer of 1944 before moving on to Cherbourg to help rebuild the port. Carl was transferred in 1945 to the USS Baker whose main job was to search for mines. Carl returned to New York City on the Queen Elizabeth in 1945 and was transferred to the USS Scott which escorted a captured German submarine to Washington DC. He was then sent to Florida to assist in the decommission of several ships and was honorably discharged in April, 1946.

Carl Felton was decorated Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor for his service in France during WWII. The medal was bestowed by President Macron in Washington DC in December 2022.



Betty Huffman-Rosevear from Big Valley, Canada moved to Oregon as a child, along with her parents and her ten siblings. She trained as a nurse in a Catholic School in Baker, Oregon.

Betty enlisted in the Army Nurse Corps in 1944 and was sent to train at Fort Lewis for 6 weeks. She was commissioned as a 2Lt. and was assigned to an Army hospital in Auburn, California where she worked in a psychiatric ward—specifically with soldiers with brain injuries.

On February 20, 1944, Betty's husband, 2nd Lt. Billy Huffman, was shot down over. He was buried at the Ardennes cemetery and brought home in 1948. After his death Betty continued with nursing in the Philippines, working in a tent hospital in Leyte and Luzon and then in a hospital in Manila, where she tended to wounded soldiers of the Pacific Theater until the end of the war. Betty was discharged in 1946.

Quotes from the main stakeholders

Donnie Edwards, Founder, Best Defense Foundation: *“As we approach the 79th anniversary of D-Day, we are drawing near to a time when these commemorations will no longer have a WWII veteran present. It is with great pride that the Best Defense Foundation and our dedicated partners can provide this opportunity to up to 50 WWII veterans and provide them an once-in-a-lifetime experience to remember those they served with and preserve their story for all generations to come.”*

Ed Bastian, CEO of Delta Air Lines: *“Delta’s mission of connecting the world is on full display with our support of this important endeavor. Our team is honored to partner with the Best Defense Foundation to support our veterans through their travels – a small token of gratitude to these heroes who’ve so bravely served us.”*

Alexis Garcin, President and CEO of Michelin North America, Inc.: *“June 6, 1944 is a date that will always be remembered, not only for the people of France, but for the entire world as it signaled the beginning of the end of World War II in Europe. On that very day, Allied soldiers made history. Michelin is humbled to be able to participate once again in this opportunity to say thank you to the veterans who made it possible for us to celebrate freedom across Europe and the world. This day will always represent the very best of humanity and their willingness to sacrifice everything for the freedom of others. It is our honor to celebrate these heroes.”*

Denise Campbell Bauer, U.S. Ambassador to the French Republic: *“The U.S. Mission to France is deeply honored to welcome our American World War II veterans to Normandy and France and to pay tribute to their service and sacrifice. Their courageous efforts on June 6, 1944 were in defense of the values of democracy and freedom that are still under threat today, especially in Ukraine. We will be forever grateful to all our veterans and honor them in our work as diplomats and Americans.”*

Laurent Bili, Ambassador of France to the U.S.: *“Every year on June 6th, France commemorates D-Day and expresses its deep gratitude to the brave American soldiers who fought to liberate our country from tyranny. The French government awards the Legion of Honor, France’s highest distinction, to D-Day veterans as a way of honoring and thanking those who risked their lives for our freedom. On the occasion of the 79th anniversary of D-Day, we will share the stories of WWII veterans returning to Normandy with emotion and deference.”*

Hervé Morin, President of Normandy: *“79 years after the D-Day Landings, Normandy shows its gratitude and eternal recognition to the heroes who liberated its territory, France and Europe at the risk of their lives. It will be a great honor for me to welcome the D-Day Veterans to the Ardenne Abbey next to Caen to celebrate this great moment in the history of humanity, the return of democracy and peace and the return to a certain social ideal.”*

Jake Larson, US Army D-Day Veteran: *"The reception of the people of Normandy is something I am amazed by each year. I am once again excited to return with my fellow veterans to honor those who gave the ultimate sacrifice. It is up to us to remember."*

About the Best Defense Foundation

Founded by Edwards as a 501c3 non-profit foundation, the Best Defense Foundation's mission is to help veterans and their families. Its efforts are funded exclusively through sponsorships, private donations, fundraising events and Edwards' own philanthropy and generosity. A cornerstone of the Foundation is a commitment to bring WWII veterans back to their battlefields to help them find closure and camaraderie with their brothers-in-arms and celebrate their acts of heroism and sacrifice all those years ago. Since 2018, the Foundation has provided 'Battlefield Return' programs to Iwo Jima, Belgium, the Eagle's Nest, Guam, Tinian and Saipan, Normandy, and Germany.

Press contact

Media queries can be directed to Amanda Thompson, Executive Director, Best Defense Foundation, via email at amanda@bdf.org.