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***SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES  
FOR USE WITH THE***

***WWII FOUNDATION  
DOCUMENTARY***

***EAGLES OF MERCY***

*We understand that every classroom situation is unique to the students and teachers in that individual environment. The following material is provided to offer suggestions to the classroom leader on how they might best use the documentary to relate the events that occurred in the tiny hamlet of Angoville-au-Plain, Normandy, France, on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and immediately afterward, in portraying the history of WWII, and the significance of D-Day, to their students. The final exercise in the package is designed to create student interest in how their family members may have participated in WWII events.*

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## ***The Legacy of The Second World War in the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century***

### ***Shaping our World Today***

WWII was the watershed event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It brought profound and lasting change (both for good and ill) to the people of many nations.

### ***Effects on the United States***

- Fascist tyranny in Germany and Italy was defeated along with their pursuit of regional and global dominance.
- Japan's quest to build an Asian empire was ended.
- The decline of European colonial empires was accelerated.
- The outbreak of the decades long Cold War was a direct result of the positioning of the Allied powers at the end of the war.
- In 1945, the economic competitors to the United States in Europe and Asia were destroyed or heavily damaged. By contrast, the U.S. economy (particularly the manufacturing sector) flourished during the war. These factors led to a post war international economic environment where the U.S. enjoyed several decades of prosperity.
- The 1944 Service Man's Readjustment Act (G.I. Bill) led to a large increase in the percentage of Americans with an education beyond high school and in home ownership. Both contributed to the American post-war economic boom.
- Between 1946 and 1964 seventy-eight million births were recorded in the United States. The "Baby Boom" generation would foster significant social, cultural and economic change as it aged through life's phases.
- The experiences of women and African-Americans in contributing to the war effort is cited as being a primary catalyst in their no longer being accepting of the prewar status quo and therefore a driver of both the Civil Rights and Women's movements of the post-war era.
- The more than sixteen million American men and women who directly served in the Armed Forces as well as the millions more who contributed on the home front established a legacy of service to country that has earned them the title as, "The Greatest Generation".

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## ***Educational Rationale for “Eagles of Mercy”***

Military conflicts are as complex as the human beings who participate in them. War produces a full spectrum of emotional and practical reactions. The experience of direct combat against an aggressive and well trained enemy requires an extra measure of courage and self-discipline.

The actions and experiences of 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division medics Robert Wright and Kenneth Moore in the initial stage of the D-Day landings serve as an example of the best that young soldiers can bring to the battlefield. Their calm courage, mission focus and sense of humanity offer enduring lessons.

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***CLASSROOM LEARNING EXPECTATIONS  
FOR USE WITH THE  
WWII FOUNDATION  
DOCUMENTARY***

***Eagles of Mercy***

***“A Haven of Peace in a Time of War”***

*Upon completion of these exercises the student will be able to:*

- (A) State the names of the paratrooper medics renowned as the “Eagles of Mercy” at the church of St. Come and St. Damien in Angoville-au-Plain, Normandy from 6-8 June 1944, and the Division and Regiment in which they served.*
- (B) Discuss the general circumstances and highlights of events that occurred in the village of Angoville-au-Plain, Normandy, France, during 6-8 June 1944*
- (C) List and describe major events in the history of the 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment in WWII as researched on the Internet.*
- (D) Describe the manner in which Airborne units deploy into operational situations.*
- (E) Have a general understanding of the purpose and history of the Geneva Conventions.*
- (F) Have a general understanding of the major beach landings on D-Day which were supported by the airborne forces.*
- (G) Report to their classmates what role their family may have played in WWII related events.*

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## **THIS PACKAGE CONTAINS**

- A pre-lesson statement regarding the legacy of WWII upon United States history.
- Suggested learning expectations for presenting this material to your students.
- A brief narrative of events at Angoville-au-Plain from 6-8 June, 1944.
- A list of eight student questions that could be used before or after your students view the documentary.
- Three questions that might be used for classroom discussion or individual student written exercises.
- Direct answers for the short questions and narrative descriptions that can be applied to discussion/essay questions.
- Internet references to events at Angoville-au-Plain from 6-8 June, 1944.
- Suggested group research questions that will familiarize students with the beach landings on D-Day which the airborne operations were supporting. (With Internet references.)
- Optional questions that can be used by students in order to determine what WWII activities their family might have participated in during the war years of 1939-1945.
- A recommended reading list.

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## ***The Story of Angoville-au-Plain***

In the early hours of June 6, 1944, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division parachuted into the fields, hedgerows and marshes of the Norman countryside. The military objective of the paratroopers was to seize the bridges and canal locks south of the village of Angoville-au-Plain in order to prevent German reinforcements from reaching the beach landings of Allied forces, which would commence soon after sunrise. The fighting surrounding the village continued unabated for over 48 hours with the village changing hands a number of times as the US paratroopers fought their German paratrooper (Fallschirmjager) counterparts for control of the area surrounding the village.

The church of St. Come and St. Damien at Angoville-du-Plain dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, is located at a strategic crossroads and had been pre-designated as an assembly area for the 501<sup>st</sup> PIR. As the combat raged, many US paratrooper casualties were brought to the church where two 21 year old US Army medics from the 501st, Private Robert E. Wright from Ohio, and Private Kenneth J. Moore from California, had set up an aid station to treat the wounded. They worked around the clock for two days treating both US and German wounded using the church floor, the pews and the altar on which to place the casualties. At least three US paratroopers died in the church and many more in the square and the fields around the town. The town square and the church changed hands between the GIs and the Germans several times over the course of the two days, yet the two US medics continued to continuously treat the wounded despite the overwhelming exhaustion that both men were experiencing. At one point a German patrol burst into the church. At first the German officer leading the group made threats about killing Moore and Wright as well as the American wounded. Moore convinced the officer that killing the Americans would result in the loss of the German wounded as well. The officer relented and had more German soldiers brought into the church for medical attention. Further, Moore insisted that all the German soldiers – as was his rule with American forces - must leave their weapons outside of church if he and Wright were to treat the wounded Germans, a demand to which the Germans complied.

The town was under constant shelling and at one point a mortar round burst through the roof of the church and hit the floor. Miraculously, the shell imbedded itself in the floor but did not explode. The repaired hole in the roof and the cracked floor are still visible today as are the blood stained pews where the wounded lay.

At one point on June 6 two German soldiers appeared from behind a doorway in the church. They had been hiding in the bell tower the whole time observing through cracks in the ceiling the treatment the medics were giving to the wounded on both sides. They volunteered to help the medics and were immediately set to work using a two-wheeled farm cart to scour the

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fields and hedgerows for wounded and bring them back to the church. At one point 75 wounded American and German soldiers filled the tiny church.

The patron Saints of the church are Saint Damien and Saint Come – both of whom were medical doctors. Legend has it that the two saints watched over the medics and the wounded and that the two medics were themselves angels.

During the fighting on June 6-8 all of the medieval stained glass windows in the church were blown out. In 2004 the citizens of Angoville-au-Plain formed an association to secure donations that would be used to replace the church's stained glass windows and to honor Bob Wright, Ken Moore, and all the allied soldiers who fought and died in the area around the town in 1944. The effort was successful and all of the stained glass windows have now been replaced.

Both Bob Wright and Ken Moore survived the war and returned to Angoville-au-Plain many times. Bob passed away on December 21, 2013 and Ken on December 7, 2014.

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## *Eagles of Mercy Student Questions*

The story of the “Eagles of Mercy” describes events in the town of Angoville-au-Plain in Normandy, France, from the opening moments of the D-Day invasion – with the arrival of American paratroopers from the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division at approximately 1:30 AM on June 6<sup>th</sup> - until the end of the day on June 8<sup>th</sup>. The center of the story is the town’s church, St. Come and St. Damian, where two American medical personnel, Robert Wright and Kenneth Moore, set up an aid station where they treated both American and German casualties during the extended fighting surrounding the town.

Working with classmates, and utilizing the Internet if necessary, answer the following questions:

- 1) What is unique about how US Army units with the title “Airborne” enter into combat?
- 2) What was the nickname for the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division?
- 3) What was the number of the regiment within the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to which the American paratroopers who fought at Angoville-au-Plain were assigned?
- 4) What are the two background facts surrounding the title “Eagles of Mercy” for the American medics (medical personnel) at Angoville-au-Plain?
- 5) What distinguished the equipment carried by the medical personnel from the rest of the American paratroopers with which they served on D-Day?
- 6) What did the German Fallschirmjager soldiers who fought against the American in Angoville-au-Plain have in common with the soldiers of the 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment?
- 7) What was the rule that the Robert Wright and Kenneth Moore set for anyone entering the church/aid station?
- 8) What US Military combat award for heroism did Moore and Wright receive?

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## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1) What are the Geneva Conventions, and how did they affect events in Angoville-au-Plain during the D-Day combat in the town?
- 2) American medical personnel serving in combat units today are issued weapons for their personal defense. What do you believe has changed since 1944 that calls for this change from the European Theater of Operations WWII when medics were forbidden to carry firearms?
- 3) At the close of WWII it was documented that the German government had committed major atrocities against civilians and military personnel, to include wholesale execution of prisoners of war and the Holocaust. How do you reconcile the humanity shown by the German army personnel in Angoville-au-Plain during the D-Day events in Normandy?

## **RESEARCH EXERCISES**

The majority of the allied soldiers who fought on D-Day landed from ships on the beaches of Normandy. Appoint a group of students to prepare a map of the landing beaches in Normandy, indicating the code names of each designated landing area and which country – the United States, Great Britain or Canada – was the home country for the soldiers on that beach. The students could also be broken into smaller groups – with each group assigned to report on events that took place on each landing beach.

Appoint a group of students to research, and report to the class, on the mission that the airborne forces were assigned in order to assure the success of the D-Day beach landings. The group should report to the class with a map showing the locations of the landings beaches and the airborne landings. Sub-groups of this group might report separately on the US 101<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Divisions and the British 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne.

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## **STUDENT QUESTIONS/ANSWERS**

*(A significant amount of material can be found on the Internet regarding the events depicted in Eagles of Mercy. Students can search Angoville-au-Plain or for the names Kenneth Moore or Robert Wright followed by “wwii” to find appropriate sites that will provide related material.)*

- 1) What is unique about how US Army units with the title “Airborne” enter into combat?

***The term “airborne” in a US military unit designation indicates that the unit in question is trained to arrive at operational locations via aircraft and enter into combat either by using parachutes (or, during WWII gliders), hence, AIRBORNE.***

- 2) What was/is the nickname for the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division?

***The nickname for the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division during WWII, and today, is: “The Screaming Eagles”.***

- 3) What was the number of the regiment within the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to which the American soldiers at Angoville-au-Plain were assigned?

***The regiment that was involved in the Angoville-au-Plain events was the 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR). (The other three regiments in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division were the 503<sup>rd</sup> and 506<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiments and the 327<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry Regiment.)***

- 4) What are the two background facts surrounding the title “Eagles of Mercy” for the American medical personnel at Angoville-au-Plain?

***The title of “Eagles of Mercy” was derived from the nickname for the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division as Screaming Eagles and the mercy demonstrated to all the wounded soldiers, US and German, by medics Bob Wright and Ken Moore.***

- 5) What distinguished the equipment carried by the medical personnel from the rest of the American paratroopers with which they served on D-Day?

***During WWII US military medical personnel were forbidden to carry firearms. All of the operational equipment carried by medical personnel was dedicated to their mission of tending to wounded soldiers.***

- 6) What did the German Fallschirmjager soldiers in Normandy have in common with the soldiers of the 501<sup>st</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment?

***Fallschirmajager were German army paratroopers.***

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7) What was the rule that the Bob Wright and Ken Moore set for anyone entering the church/aid station?

*No weapons were allowed inside the church.*

8) What US Military combat award for heroism did Moore and Wright receive?

*Moore and Wright were awarded the Silver Star, which is the US military's third highest award for combat heroism.*

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ANSWERS**

A) What are the Geneva Conventions, and how did they affect events in Angoville-au-Plain during the D-Day combat in the town?

*The Geneva Conventions are international agreements for the treatment of prisoners during time of war. The first convention was signed in 1864. All of the Allied participants in WWII, with the exception of Russia, were signers of the Conventions. Germany and Italy had also signed the Geneva Conventions agreements. Japan had not signed, but in 1942 agreed to abide by the conditions of the Conventions. As became obvious as the war progressed, Japan and Russia gave little thought to abiding by the Conventions. As the overall strategic situation of the German military began to collapse in 1944-45 adherence to the Conventions by the German military became situational rather than a policy for German military forces.*

*During the combat at Angoville-au-Plain both the US and German soldiers were, for the most part, adhering to the Conventions. The firm commitment of Wright and Moore to care for ALL wounded personnel, regardless of which army the wounded men served, was a humane incident of war that has rightly become honored for the lives that were saved. The humanitarian determination of the two medics, and the decisions made by the local German and American unit commanders to allow the medics to continue to save the lives of wounded soldiers from both armies, has become a unique story of D-Day lore.*

American medical personnel serving in combat units today are issued weapons for their personal defense. What do you believe has changed since 1944 that calls for this change from WWII when medics were forbidden to carry firearms?

*Events in Angoville-du-Plain from June 5-8 1944, involved elite units from two well trained, equipped and prepared armies belonging to major international powers.*

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*Regardless of those conditions not all situations in Normandy during that period exhibited such decency and humanity towards the opposing forces.*

*Today almost all combat scenarios faced by US forces involve opponents who are not formally trained soldiers serving in a formal and designated military unit under the flag of a recognized country, e.g., ISIS, or a country that has chosen not to abide by the Geneva Conventions. These extra-territorial organizations, or countries which do not abide by the Geneva Conventions, have shown that they have little or no respect for human life, particularly for the lives of those organizations, such as the US, with whom they are fighting. US military medical personnel continue with their primary mission of tending to their wounded comrades and civilians who become involved in combat situations. However, they now carry firearms for personal protection from opposition forces or civilians who do not respect the concept that medical personnel should be treated as non-combatants.*

- B) At the close of WWII it was documented that the German government had committed major atrocities against civilians and military personnel, to include wholesale execution of prisoners of war and the Holocaust. How do you reconcile the humanity shown by the German army personnel in Angoville-au-Plain during the D-Day events in Normandy? *As has been stated above – the two military forces engaged in combat at Angoville-au-Plain during June 6-8, 1944, were elite parachute infantry units. Strict discipline, adhering to orders from their commanders, and respect for their comrades were integral parts of the culture of both the American and German paratroopers. The culture created within these elite units by their leaders, and the fact that, as parachutists, they shared that unique separation between themselves and the common infantry soldiers in their armies, may have influenced a unique – if brief - connection between the combatants.*

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## **RESEARCH EXERCISES**

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Appoint a group of students to research, and report to the class, on the mission that the airborne forces were assigned in order to assure the success of the D-Day beach landings. The group should report to the class with a map showing the locations of the landing beaches and the airborne landings. Sub-groups of this group might report separately on the US 101<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Divisions and the British 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne.

The Internet has an abundant amount of sites that maps with D-Day beach and airborne landing zones. One site can be found at: [BBC-History-World Wars: Animated Map: The D-Day Landings](#). Also, google: [d-day+maps+invasion](#) for an excellent set of maps depicting D-Day events. Joseph Balkowski's books on Utah and Omaha beaches are especially accurate in describing the airborne/beach mission connections.

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## **Recommended reading:**

Several excellent “big picture” books covering D-Day include:

- Stephen F. Ambrose *D-Day*
- Cornelius Ryan *The Longest Day* - made into a movie of the same name.

The penultimate study of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division in WWII is Rapport and Northwood’s *Rendezvous With Destiny*.

An intimate and personal description of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division in Normandy can be found in *D-Day with the Screaming Eagles*. This excellent personal narrative was penned by George Koskomaki, General Maxwell Taylor’s radio operator. Koskomaki provides detailed descriptions of the events in Angoville-au-Plain in two sections of this narrative developed from personal interviews the author held with fellow D-Day 101<sup>st</sup> veterans.

Detailed descriptions of the American beach landings, with good descriptions of the supporting airborne operation, can be found in *Utah Beach* and *Omaha Beach* by Joseph Balkoski.

Without question, the finest written history of the events depicted in our documentary *Eagles of Mercy* was authored by Paul Woodage, a very well know D-Day historian and Normandy tour guide, it is similarly titled *Angels of Mercy*.

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## *Your Family in World War II*

- 1) Does your family history include any members who served in the military in WWII?
  - Do you know the unit that they served in?
  - Do you know where the unit was assigned?
  
- 2) Does your family history include any members who were part of the factory workforce that built the machines needed to win WWII?
  - Do you know the name and location of the company?
  - What product(s) did the company produce?
  
- 3) Does your family history include any members who were part of the support industries that provided the country with the ability to keep fighting during WWII?
  - Farming
    - o what type of crops and/or animals were part of the their farm life?
  - Transportation
    - o railroads
    - o merchant marine.
  
- 4) Does your family history include any members who contributed to the war effort in WWII in a manner different from the jobs mentioned above?
  - Please describe the unique job(s) held by your family member(s).
    - o This group includes mothers who stayed at home to care for the families of men who were serving in the military or as merchant marine sailors.
  
- 5) Does your family include any members who lived in countries other than the United States that were involved in World War II?
  - How were these family members affected by WWII events?
  - Have you visited the countries in which your relatives lived during the war years?
    - o What can you tell us about your visit?
    - o Did you visit any locations or hear any stories relating to WWII from your relatives?