

9/19/18

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

WWII FOUNDATION

DOCUMENTARY

entitled

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.

THIS PACKAGE CONTAINS:

- A pre-lesson statement regarding the legacy of WWII upon United States history.
- The educational rationale for presenting *Eagles of Mercy* to your students.
- A brief narrative of events at Angoville-au-Plain from 6-8 June, 1944.
- Suggested learning expectations for presenting this material to your students.
- A list of short answer questions (with answers) that might be used before or after your students view the documentary.
- A list of discussion questions (with answers) that might be used for classroom discussion or individual student written exercises.
- Suggested group research questions that will familiarize students with the beach landings on D-Day which the airborne operations were supporting.
- 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.
- Research options for events at Angoville-au-Plain from 6-8 June, 1944.

The Legacy of WWII in the Early 21st Century

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

WWII's Effects on the United States

- Fascist Germany and Italy was defeated in 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, during which the U.S. was instrumental in the formation of the United Nations, sponsored the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe, and the rebuilding of the Japanese economy.
- 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.
- 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, Hispanic and Asian Americans in contributing to the war effort is cited as being a primary catalyst in their no longer accepting the prewar status quo and accelerated 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 of The Greatest Generation.

The Educational Rationale for Presenting The WWII Foundation Documentary Entitled "Eagles of Mercy"

To Your Students

The actions and experiences of 101st 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 to students who are about to enter the same stage of life as Wright and Moore when they became the “*Eagles of Mercy*”.

***CLASSROOM LEARNING EXPECTATIONS
FOR USE WITH THE
WWII FOUNDATION DOCUMENTARY
entitled
Eagles of Mercy***

“A Haven of Peace in a Time of War”

Upon completion of these exercises your students will be able to:

- (A) Discuss the circumstances and events that occurred in the village of Angoville-au-Plain, Normandy, France, during 6-8 June 1944*
- (B) List the major events involving the the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment in WWII.*
- (C) Describe the manner in which Airborne units deploy into operational situations.*
- (D) State the purpose and history of the Geneva Conventions.*
- (E) Demonstrate a general understanding of the major beach landings on D-Day which were supported by the airborne forces.*
- (F) Report to their classmates what role their family may have played in WWII related events.*

The Story of the “Eagles of Mercy” at Angoville-au-Plain 6-8 June, 1944

In the early hours of darkness on June 6, 1944, the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) of the 101st Airborne Division parachuted into the fields, hedgerows and marshes of the Norman countryside as part of the Allied D-Day assault into German occupied France. 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 U.S. paratroopers fought their German paratrooper (Fallschirmjäger) counterparts for control of the area surrounding the village.

The church of St. Cosmas and St. Damian at Angoville-au-Plain, dating from the 12th century, is located at a strategic crossroads and had been pre-designated as an assembly area for the 501st PIR. As the combat raged, many U.S. paratrooper casualties were brought to the church where two 21 year old U.S. 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 wounded. The two medics worked around the clock for two days treating both U.S. and German wounded, placing their patients on the church's pews, floor and even on the altar. The town square, including the church, changed hands several times between the American and German forces during the 48 hours following the U.S. airborne assault. During that period the two American medics continued to treat their wounded patients despite the overwhelming exhaustion and stress that both men were experiencing. At one point a German patrol burst into the church. The German officer leading the group

made threats about killing Wright and Moore as well as the American wounded. Wright and a wounded German soldier convinced him to change his mind, and more German wounded were brought into the church. Wright also insisted that all German soldiers – as was his rule with U.S. forces – must leave their weapons outside the church. Again, the Germans complied.

The church was under constant danger from small arms and artillery fire, regardless of which side was holding the town. At one point a mortar round burst through the roof of the church. The shell imbedded itself in the floor but miraculously did not explode. The repaired hole in the roof and the cracked floor are still visible today, as are the bloodstained pews where the wounded were treated.

Early on the morning of June 7 two German soldiers appeared from behind a doorway inside the church. They had been hiding in the bell tower of the church, 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 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 Damian and Saint Cosmas – 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 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 windows have now been replaced, with several depicting the two American medics in their role as the Eagles of Mercy.

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.

WWII Foundation Documentary

“Eagles of Mercy”

STUDENT QUESTIONS/ANSWERS

1) **How do U.S. Army units with the title “Airborne” enter into combat?**

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

2) **What was/is the nickname for the 101st Airborne Division?**

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

3) **What was the regiment within the 101st Airborne Division to which the U.S. soldiers at Angoville-au-Plain were assigned?**

The regiment that was involved in the Angoville-au-Plain events was the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR). (The other three regiments in the 101st Airborne Division during WWII were the 502rd and 506th Parachute Infantry Regiments and the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment.)

4) **What are the background facts surrounding the title “Eagles of Mercy” for the U.S. medical personnel at Angoville-au-Plain?**

The description of Bob Wright and Ken Moore as the “Eagles of Mercy” was derived from the nickname for the 101st Airborne Division as the Screaming Eagles and the mercy demonstrated to all the wounded soldiers, both American and German, by the two medics.

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 U.S. 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 Fallschirmjäger soldiers in Normandy have in common with the soldiers of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment?

Fallschirmjäger soldiers were German army paratroopers.

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 award for heroism did Moore and Wright receive?

Moore and Wright were awarded the Silver Star, which is the U.S. 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.

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 civilians, 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 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.

STUDENT RESEARCH EXERCISES

For use with the WWII Foundation Documentary
entitled
Eagles of Mercy

- 1) 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 utilize hard-copy and internet resources in preparing 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 landing on that beach. The students might also be broken into smaller groups – with each group assigned to report on events that took place on each landing beach.
- 2) 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. The students might also be broken into smaller groups, with each sub-group assigned to report on events involving U.S. 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions and the British 6th Airborne.

Recommended Research Sources

Internet: A significant amount of material can be found on the internet regarding the events depicted in the documentary *Eagles of Mercy*. Search **Angoville-au-**

Plain and **Kenneth Moore** or **Robert Wright** followed by “**wwii**” to find sites that will provide related material.

Regarding research of overall D-Day operations: BBC-History-World Wars: Animated Map: The D-Day Landings.

Google: d-day+maps+invasion for an excellent set of maps depicting D-Day events.

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

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

An intimate and personal description of the 101st Airborne Division in Normandy can be found in *D-Day with the Screaming Eagles*. This excellent narrative was penned by George Koskomaki, General Maxwell Taylor’s radio operator. Koskomaki provides detailed descriptions of the events in Angoville-au-Plain.

Regarding the American landing beaches: Joseph Balkowski’s books, *Utah Beach* and *Omaha Beach* provide excellent detail on both the airborne and beach landings, as well as strategic connections between the two forces.

Excellent books covering overall events on D-Day include:

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

Your Family in World War II

- 1) Does your family history include any members who served in the military in WWII?
 - What unit did they serve with?
 - Where was that 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?
 - 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 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.