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DeGlopper: 'We need to be thankful, and we need to pass it along to other generations. These stories must live on even past our years.'



La Fiere Bridge at the Merderet River, which DeGlopper and his unit were on their way to take out in an overall attempt to separate German forces. (Photo from the Larry Quinn collection)

BY PETE GALLIVAN WGRZ-TV CHANNEL 2 "DAYBREAK" ANCHOR

Pete Gallivan is author of the "Unknown Stories of WNY." This is a story he published about Pfc. Charles N. DeGlopper after visiting Normandy, France, in 2015 with Larry Quinn, the former president of the Buffalo Sabres. It is reprinted here with permission.

"You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you."

With those words, Gen. Dwight David Eisenhower led over 73,000 Americans to the shores of Normandy in an offensive that would begin the push back against Nazi Germany.

Thousands of American men put their lives on the line halfway around the world to fight for freedom and liberate an occupied continent during World War II.

More than seven decades later, the sacrifices that led to victory in Europe, for many Americans, have faded into the history books. While the stories of individual heroism are often forgotten on this side of the Atlantic, those men and their supreme sacrifice are well-documented and honored even today by the people in the towns they liberated.

Hundreds of Western New Yorkers were part of that force and among them, a Med-

al of Honor recipient from Grand Island, Private First-Class Charles N. DeGlopper.

Across the ocean in Colleville-sur-Mer, France, thousands of white marble crosses mark one of the most visited spots in Normandy. An American cemetery became the final resting place for 9,387 soldiers who sacrificed themselves for freedom.

On the evening of June 6, 1944, the 82nd Airborne Division's troops began to touch down in France. Over the next 24 hours, hundreds of gliders landed near Normandy to complete several missions across the region. Mission Hackensack was the last to arrive. More than 1,000 men of the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment were on board. Their destination: Chef du Pont.

For two days, things seemed to go smoothly for the glider men whose mission was to keep the roads and bridges clear for troops landing at Utah Beach. But in the early morning of June 9, as the regiment approached La Fiere Bridge at the Merderet River, the men came under attack.

One of those men was young Clinton Riddle.

"I was pinned down in a wheat field and I kept crawling and crawling and crawling," he said. "I came out of the wheat field, but my pack was full of holes." He survived because of the sacrifice of DeGlopper.

That day, D-Day plus three, the regiment got slightly off track and strayed between the farm fields that were separated by high



The story board in Normandy, France, near where the Grand Island war hero paid the ultimate sacrifice. (Photo from the Larry Quinn collection)

mounds and thick hedges. As the men came around a corner, they were immediately caught in the crossfire of German snipers.

That's when Charlie DeGlopper took his stand.

At that moment, Charlie jumped into the middle of the road with his heavy Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) and started firing at the Nazis. He took all the attention and gunfire upon himself so his platoon could escape. While the Germans were distracted with Charlie's automatic fire, his company was able to break free to join the rest of the regiment.

Charlie was 22 years old.

In 1946, Charlie's grieving father received the Medal of Honor on his behalf. He was the only soldier from the 82nd Airborne Division and 325th Glider Infantry Regiment to receive the award for his actions in the Battle of Normandy. It cites Charlie's "sacrifice and unflinching heroism" for drawing the enemy away from his fellow soldiers.

It continues: "(Pfc. DeGlopper) walked from the ditch onto the road in full view of the Germans, and sprayed the hostile positions with assault fire. He was wounded, but he continued firing. Struck again, he started to fall; and yet his grim determination and valiant fighting spirit could not be broken. Kneeling in the roadway, weakened by his grievous wounds, he leveled his heavy weapon against the enemy and

fired burst after burst until killed outright."

In the more 70 years since that day in the farm fields of Normandy, Charlie has been honored as a hero both across the United States and in Normandy. At the Brooklyn

Unveiling set for Charles N. DeGlopper Memorial The moment has arrived.

At 9:45 a.m. Saturday, a dedication ceremony will be held for the Charles N. DeGlopper Memorial site on Grand Island Boulevard at the corner of Baseline Road.

Countless hours have been put in by dedicated volunteers to ensure the community would have a fitting tribute to honor all Grand Island residents – past, present and future – who have proudly served the U.S. as a member of the military.

Over past weeks, Niagara Frontier Publications has partnered up with Grand Island businesses to showcase the unveiling. Michael Billoni has put forth a series of feature articles chronicling the people who knew and served with DeGlopper, as well as friends, family and freedom fighters. Those stories can be found online at www.wnypapers.com.

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