

DeGlopper Remembered

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The hedge-lined farm road in Normandy, France, where Charlie took his last stance and was felled by German bullets. (Photo from the Larry Quinn collection)



WGRZ-TV Channel 2's Pete Gallivan at the site of the Charles N. DeGlopper statue and story board in Normandy, France. (Photo from the Larry Quinn collection)

Army Base in New York, a U.S. Army transport ship was renamed the Pvt. Charles N. DeGlopper, and at Fort Bragg in North Carolina both a street and their Air Assault School are named after him. His portrait hangs in the hall of heroes on base.

Across the seas, a monument stands not far from where Charlie fell. A plaque hangs in a chapel at Couqegny that overlooks a churchyard still scarred from war. And he has his own exhibit in the airborne museum at St. Mere Eglise.

And in Western New York, in 1958, the U.S. Army Reserve Training Center in Tonawanda was renamed the Charles DeGlopper Center. Four years later, American Legion Post 1346 dedicated Charles DeGlopper Park on Grand Island Boulevard, and in 1965, Grand Island's

DeGlopper

2x8.5VFW Post 9249 changed its name to Charles N. DeGlopper Memorial.

Still, despite this worldwide recognition, the story of Charlie's sacrifice was not well-known here. But Joe Synakowski wouldn't let us forget.

A trustee at VFW Post 9249 and a member of the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment in 1947, Joe helped organize the rededication of the memorial on Grand Island in Charlie's honor. On June 9, 2002, the 58th anniversary of Charlie's heroics, the Town Council proclaimed the day as "Charles DeGlopper Remembrance Day."

"It was a good thing to expose the history of somebody who did something from Grand Island," he said. "Most of the people didn't

know anything about it."

As for Charlie's family, his nephew Ray DeGlopper says he's met three men from his uncle's company who said if it wasn't for Charlie, they wouldn't be here today.

"Charlie's a hero to the 82nd," he said.

Clinton Riddle agrees. "Frankly, I think he's a miracle."

In 1962, the war film "The Longest Day" hit Hollywood. A black and white docudrama, the film followed the landings at Normandy nearly 20 years earlier. Alongside stars like John Wayne and Henry Fonda, some of the actors had actually seen action as servicemen during the war. Actors like Richard Todd who was among the first British officers to land in Normandy in Operation Overlord.

It was this film that moved Frenchman Daniel Briard to take up his own mission decades after the war, a mission to remember the sacrifices of American liberators during the D-Day invasion.

Briard is the president of the Association U.S. Normandy, a French group that raises money for monuments to preserve the memory of some very special soldiers.

Soldiers like Grand Island resident Charles N. DeGlopper.

"He went out on the causeway and opened fire on the Germans," Briard said, recalling the moment when the 22-year-old gave his own life to save members of his platoon in the early morning hours of June 9, 1944.

Briard and the Association U.S. Normandy helped build a memory board for Charlie near La Fiere, not far from where he fell.

In 1946, Joseph Synakowski was stationed at Fort Bragg in North Caro-

lina.

A member of the 82nd Airborne Division, Joe served in the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment. As he walked the streets of Fort Bragg, one sign stuck out on base.

"I remember seeing DeGlopper Street, and I said, 'Why would they name that DeGlopper?'" Joe said.

That sign sent Joe on a road to remembering a soldier and war hero from his hometown.

Across the seas, Charlie's story of sacrifice is very well-known in Normandy. Today, a monument stands not far from La Fiere, France, where Charlie once stood 70 years ago, drawing Nazi attention and gunfire on himself in order to save his platoon.

"When the DeGlopper (family) first went over in 2010, my French friends ... literally wanted to shake their hands and touch them and say, 'Thank you,'" Kelly Carrigg, a retired lieutenant colonel in the 82nd Airborne, said. "To see the legacy of the family continue."

Also in La Fiere is Vivian Roger, a member of the Association U.S. Normandy dedicated to commemorating the American men in the Invasion. Originally from North Carolina, Vivian married a Frenchman and moved to France, where she worked on her first major project for the Association – the monument of PFC Charles N. DeGlopper.

"I never knew any of this when I was going to school," Vivian said. "We covered World War II in a few days and then moved on."

In many cases, U.S. soldiers came home and never looked back. Until now.

"I learned more about the battle my uncle fought from Joe Synakowski than I did anywhere else," explained Ray DeGlopper, the commander of the American Legion Post 1346 on Grand Island.

On the Island, Joe made it his mission to remember a local war hero. His efforts led to the rededication of the Charles DeGlopper Memorial at Baseline Road and Grand Island Boulevard.

"It was a good thing to expose the history for somebody who did something from Grand Island," Joe said.

"We need to be thankful, and we need to pass it along to other generations," Vivian said. "These stories must live on even past our years."

Charles N. DeGlopper Memorial Statue and Killed in Action Plaques Unveiling Saturday, June 5, 2021, 9:45 a.m.

Grand Island Boulevard at the corner of Baseline Road

CHARLES N. DEGLOPPER

November 22, 1922 - June 9, 1944



Charles Neilans DeGlopper was born November 22, 1922 on Grand Island, NY. He attended a one room schoolhouse and graduated from Tonawanda High School. After working for a couple of years, he was drafted into the Army in the fall of 1942.

Being assigned to the 325th Glider Infantry, Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division, he travelled to North Africa, Ireland and England. Departing England, they rode in gliders into the area behind enemy lines at the Normandy landing site.

He was instrumental in securing the LaFiere Bridge crossing. It was at that site he lost his life by saving other members of his platoon from enemy fire whereby they could regroup and successfully secure the bridge crossing.

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DeGlopper Memorial Expansion Committee issues instructions for dedication ceremony

The Charles N. DeGlopper Memorial Expansion Committee announced the dedication ceremony for the expanded site, at 2333 Grand Island Blvd., will begin promptly at 9:45 a.m. Saturday, June 5. There will be road closures except for local traffic at 9:30 a.m. until approximately 11:45 a.m. as follows:

- Grand Island Boulevard and Baseline Road intersection
- Baseline @ post office service entrance
- Grand Island Boulevard @ Tim Hortons

Parking and seating will be limited. There will be a handicap drop-off access at the entrance to the site from Baseline Road only.

The committee stated, "To respect the event's dignity, we kindly request that everyone is seated before the ceremony begins. Please bring your chairs. The event will take place rain or shine, and there will be no shelter for inclement weather. All

NYS COVID-19 protocols/restrictions that are in effect on June 5, 2021, will be in place, including mask wearing and social distancing. There will be no seating on the south side of the veterans' granite memorial walls.

"The site's dedication will include special tributes to our Grand Island service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice, including the unveiling of a statue commissioned in honor of Charles N. DeGlopper, a presentation to our Civil War veterans, and the Unknown Soldier. We invite you to visit the website at www.degloppermemorial.org for opportunities to continue to help support our mission. The committee is currently taking orders for pavers and granite stones with newly revised forms and price increases. The revised request forms, effective May 25, are available via the website."