



**UNVEILING OF THE AIRBORNE MONUMENT IN SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO THE
ALLIED AIRBORNE TROOPS OF JUNE 1944**

OPERATION OVERLORD

JUNE 8TH 2014 - CHURCH SQUARE OF SAINTE MERE EGLISE

INAUGURAL SPEECH BY MAURICE RENAUD

A V A PRESIDENT

Authorities participating in the unveiling:

GENERAL JOHN NICHOLSON – Commanding the 82nd AIRBORNE DIVISION
GENERAL JAMES MCCONVILLE - Commanding the 101st AIRBORNE DIVISION
GENERAL RICHARD CLARKE - Representing WEST POINT
GENERAL GILES HILL - Representing Great Britain
GENERAL WINDECK - Commanding Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan
Mr. DANIEL DELLINGER – Commander National of the American Legion
Mme. NANCY BROWN PARK - Auxiliary president of the American Legion
Mr. PHILIPPE GOSSELIN – French national congressman
Mr. JEAN QUETIER – Mayor of Sainte Mère Eglise
Mr. MAURICE RENAUD – President of the A V A association

In the presence of cadets delegations from United States military academy West Point, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan





Ladies and gentlemen,

Here, 70 years and 2 days ago, paratrooper **Alfred van Holsbek** landed and exploded in the flames of the house, burning across this square. The paratrooper **John Steele** was trapped on the steeple of this church.

In the village and in the surrounding villages of (*Chef du Pont - la Fiere - Amfreville - Carentan - Saint Côme du Mont – Sainte Marie du Mont*) ferocious combats were engaging paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st airborne divisions.

At the same time, in the eastern part of Normandy, in the *Merville and Franceville sector*, the British 6th airborne division and the 1st Canadian para battalion were jumping and taking Pegasus bridge (Pont de Bénouville) with **Lord Lovat** (Special Service Brigade) leading the way.

The S.A.S brigade commandos were attacking their targets and the free French paratroopers landed in Brittany. Operation **OVERLORD** was on its way.

In the first hours of the morning we discovered the bodies of six American paratroopers hanging from their parachutes from the limbs of the great old trees in the center of this square. Many others were lying dead on this very square. The casualties of all the airborne units were very high during the Normandy campaign: **3.152 killed in action - 8.006 wounded in action**

We chose to engrave the number of casualties on this monument because it illustrates the amount of courage and sacrifice of these elite soldiers.

This monument is more than a slab of granite etched with military insignias and the number of killed and wounded soldiers. It is the reaffirmation of a promise! The promise is simple: never ever forget, never is a big word it is infinite. In so being, it is also eternal, like the airborne spirit

These paratroopers, many of whom were less than 20 years old, were all volunteers. Without family ties of their own, they came to liberate a country they did not know. They did not know the language nor the customs, but gave of themselves to defend fellow human beings who were oppressed, defending the ideals of freedom and democracy.

Seventy years have passed since this historic night that delivered our freedom from the skies. To those of us on the ground it was nothing less than a miracle from heaven.

In reality the airborne assault on German occupied Normandy was something even greater. It was an act of human sacrifice for the salvation of others, a suicide mission for paratroopers and glider crews who were shot out of the sky, drowned in swamps or killed while fighting on the ground.

A day will soon come when no one who fought in the battle of Normandy will be among us. At some point after that no one who has even a personal connection to the liberation will be here to speak as firsthand witness.

Today we immortalize the bravest of the brave: the paratroopers who paid for our freedom, our future with their lives seventy years ago. As the monument says:

“They gave all of their tomorrows so that we could have our today”



The idea for this monument came from **Colonel Keith Nightingale**. He envisioned an everlasting symbol located on the square of our village which has become an icon for returning airborne troops who come back each year, just as my father, **Alexandre Renaud**, predicted in his book which he wrote in 1945.

Our association, the **AVA** which stands for "Friends of the **American Veterans** " decided to erect this monument and we are deeply grateful to the many donors from Normandy, from all over France and from the United States of America.

We are also very grateful to our veterans, their families and friends, for attending this ceremony.

This monument is dedicated to them and to their comrades killed in action in june/july 1944.

**To the paratroopers we extend our undying admiration and respect.
God bless the paratroopers!**

Airborne all the way

Maurice Renaud

A V A (Amis des Vétérans Américains)

