

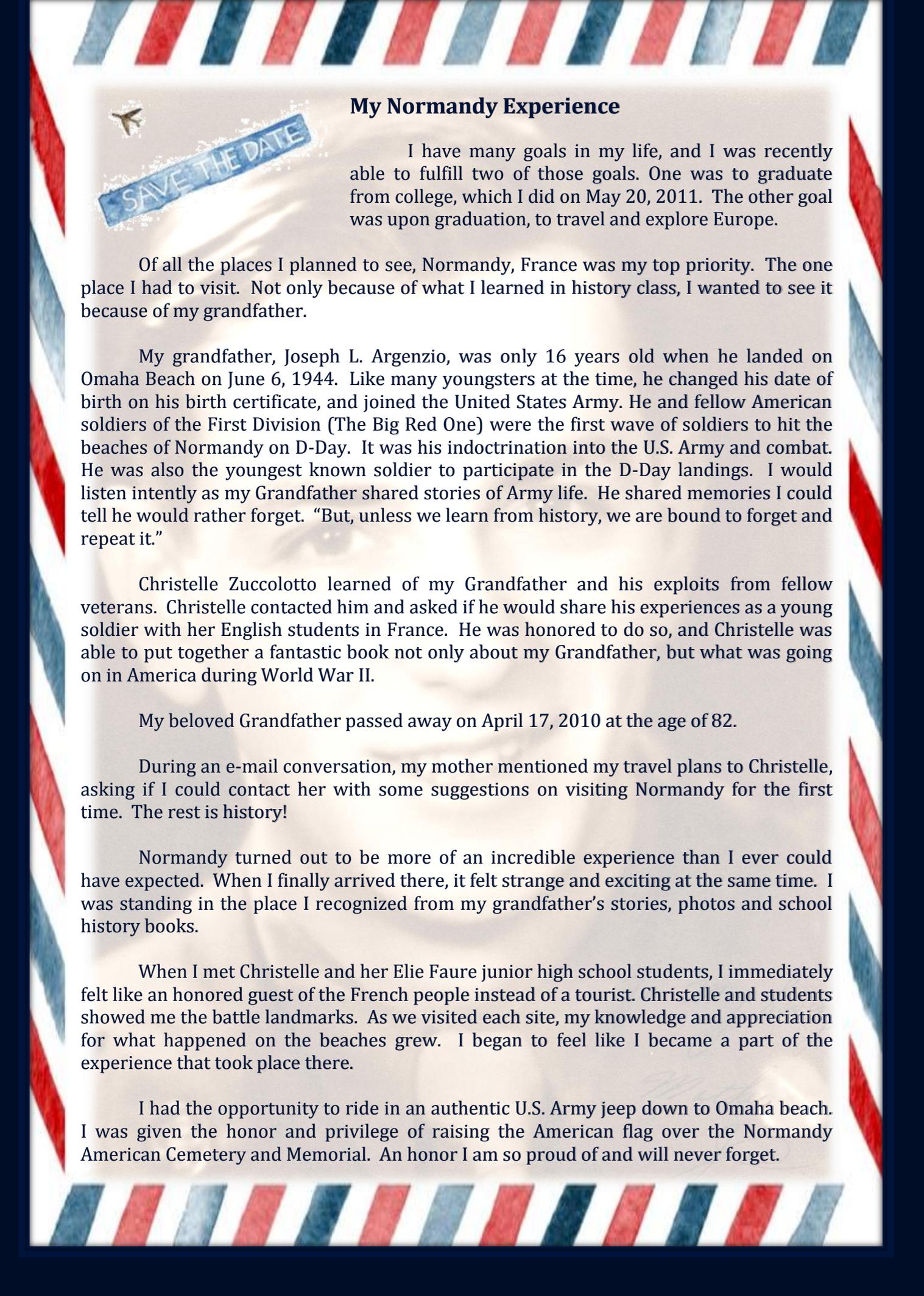
RYAN - GRANDSON OF OMAHA BEACH

VETERAN JOSEPH ARGENZIO -

WRITES ABOUT OUR MEETING

IN NORMANDY





My Normandy Experience

I have many goals in my life, and I was recently able to fulfill two of those goals. One was to graduate from college, which I did on May 20, 2011. The other goal was upon graduation, to travel and explore Europe.

Of all the places I planned to see, Normandy, France was my top priority. The one place I had to visit. Not only because of what I learned in history class, I wanted to see it because of my grandfather.

My grandfather, Joseph L. Argenzio, was only 16 years old when he landed on Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. Like many youngsters at the time, he changed his date of birth on his birth certificate, and joined the United States Army. He and fellow American soldiers of the First Division (The Big Red One) were the first wave of soldiers to hit the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. It was his indoctrination into the U.S. Army and combat. He was also the youngest known soldier to participate in the D-Day landings. I would listen intently as my Grandfather shared stories of Army life. He shared memories I could tell he would rather forget. "But, unless we learn from history, we are bound to forget and repeat it."

Christelle Zuccolotto learned of my Grandfather and his exploits from fellow veterans. Christelle contacted him and asked if he would share his experiences as a young soldier with her English students in France. He was honored to do so, and Christelle was able to put together a fantastic book not only about my Grandfather, but what was going on in America during World War II.

My beloved Grandfather passed away on April 17, 2010 at the age of 82.

During an e-mail conversation, my mother mentioned my travel plans to Christelle, asking if I could contact her with some suggestions on visiting Normandy for the first time. The rest is history!

Normandy turned out to be more of an incredible experience than I ever could have expected. When I finally arrived there, it felt strange and exciting at the same time. I was standing in the place I recognized from my grandfather's stories, photos and school history books.

When I met Christelle and her Elie Faure junior high school students, I immediately felt like an honored guest of the French people instead of a tourist. Christelle and students showed me the battle landmarks. As we visited each site, my knowledge and appreciation for what happened on the beaches grew. I began to feel like I became a part of the experience that took place there.

I had the opportunity to ride in an authentic U.S. Army jeep down to Omaha beach. I was given the honor and privilege of raising the American flag over the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial. An honor I am so proud of and will never forget.

My visit also included several ceremonies, which I was invited to participate in. During one of the ceremonies, I was given the honor of narrating a poem thanking all veterans for their sacrifice. One of the students and I placed a wreath at the site memorializing our veterans.

I was especially touched when Christelle and her students surprised and included me in a special ceremony dedicated to the memory of my grandfather. As we were gathered together on Omaha Beach, the students surprised me with a very touching, beautiful song. Two of the students sang "I Remember" while one of them strummed the guitar. The words and music to "I Remember" were written by the students, making it that much more special. Thanking all veterans for their sacrifices and grand efforts in making their county free. It was a very emotional experience for me.

Then Christelle and I placed a bouquet of flowers in the Channel water off Fox Green. The same water in which my then teen-aged Grandfather almost drowned, dodging German bullets as he tried to reach the beach. The water which gave him nightmares until the day he died. The water in which so many soldiers died before they could reach the land. It was a little overwhelming.

I am so grateful to Christelle and her students. They made sure I would never forget the experience I had on the beaches of Normandy. The French people impressed me with their hospitality and generosity. I met some great people in Normandy, old and young. While many expressed their thanks to me on behalf of my Grandfather, I am just as thankful to them for remembering and honoring the memory of the veterans, especially those who sacrificed all. In the back of my mind I could still hear the words "But, unless we learn from history, we are bound to forget and repeat it."

Christelle's students were in Normandy to experience what they learned in school about the invasion on D-Day. They said their visit was dedicated to the veterans, the heroes like my grandfather. I wanted to see Normandy first hand to gain a better understanding of what my Grandfather experienced on D-Day. He always insisted he was not a hero. "The real heroes are buried under the crosses in the cemetery." The cemetery in which I had the honor to raise the American flag. I hope I did him proud.

My visit to Normandy is dedicated him, my hero, my Grandfather, Joseph L. Argenzio.

Ryan



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*A few years earlier, during WWI,
Joseph Argenzio's father
had fought in France*

*Quelques années auparavant, durant
la première Guerre Mondiale,
le père de Joseph Argenzio avait
lui aussi combattu en France*



*Joseph Argenzio ; At 16 years old,
he was part of the first assault wave
that landed on Omaha Beach*



*Joseph Argenzio ; alors qu'il n'avait que 16 ans,
a fait partie des tout premiers hommes
à débarquer sur Omaha*

January 2008, French Ambassador's Residence in Washington D.C. : French Minister of Defense awards the Légion d'Honneur to Joseph Argenzio



Janvier 2008, Résidence de l'Ambassadeur de France à Washington : La France remet la Légion d'Honneur à Mr Joseph Argenzio





A family proud of the gratitude of France



Une famille fière de la gratitude de la France

