



TOUGH 'OMBRE TIMES

NEWSLETTER OF THE 90TH DIVISION ASSOCIATION

Message from the President Col [R] James Beesley

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Dear Members:

Happy New Year to members and friends of the 90th Division Association! We are excited about the year ahead, and looking forward to our reunion on August 28-29, 2026, in Fort Worth, Texas. You will find more information about the reunion elsewhere in the newsletter.

I would like to dedicate this issue of the Tough 'Ombre Times to Jeanette Levaufre. Jeanette was the wife of Henri Levaufre, our great French historian. Jeanette passed away on December 6, 2025. For decades, Henri and Jeanette served as gracious hosts, tour guides and friends for 90th Division veterans and their families who visited Normandy in the decades after the war. Jeanette's generosity and kindness will never be forgotten. We mourn with their children, especially Christian and his wife, Evelyne.

As we lose our WW II generation, and those who were eye witnesses to the events in Normandy during WW II, we are reminded of their special place in history.

Those of us who were lucky to know Jeanette will miss her and be forever grateful for her devotion to her community, her family, her friends and to the 90th Division Association.

Sincerely,

COL [Ret] James Beesley



2025 - 2026 Officers

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Message from the Executive Director Nancy Rasmusson



Greetings from the Executive Director:

2026 90th Division Association
Reunion

We are pleased to announce that the 2026 90th Division Association reunion will be held at the Sheraton Downtown Fort Worth, in Fort Worth, Texas on August 28-29. The reunion will begin with a banquet and program on Friday evening. A memorial program will be held on Saturday morning, and the event will conclude with a banquet and program

on Saturday evening. Please save the date! It will be a memorable weekend, as 90th Division members, friends and family members reunite in Fort Worth. You do not need to be a member of the Association to attend. In addition to reunion events, there are many fun and interesting things to do in Fort Worth. Plan to spend the entire weekend! Additional details, including room reservation information and registration information will be posted in the near future! If you have questions, you may contact Nancy Rasmusson, Executive Director at 970-227-2744 or by email nancy@90thdivisionassoc.org.

Nancy

Save the Date! 104th 90th Association Reunion

Sheraton Downtown Hotel

1701 Commerce Street

Fort Worth, Texas 76102

August 28 - 29, 2026

Reserve Rooms Now by Calling 817-335-7000



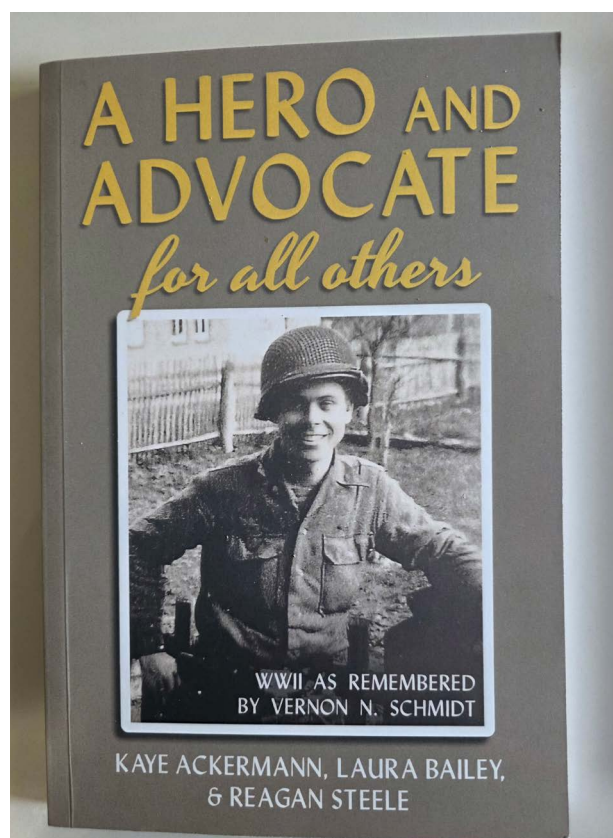
Happy 100th Birthday Vern Schmidt!

Vern Schmidt recently celebrated his 100th birthday! As members of the Association, we appreciate all that Vern has done over the course of his lifetime to honor and memorialize the 90th Division Tough Ombres! In addition to his service in WW II, Vern has since dedicated his time and effort to ensuring that the legacy of the 90th Division will live on for future generations. Vern has been a great ambassador, representing the 90th Tough Ombres in a variety of organizations and has also established international friendships and working relationships all over the world. Vern's advocacy for veterans and for international understanding has had a tremendous impact. Thank you Vern and happy birthday!

If you would like to learn more about Vern, you can purchase a copy of Vern's memoir *A Hero and an Advocate* written by Kaye Ackermann, Laura Bailey and Reagan Steele through Amazon.



Vern Schmidt - WWII Veteran



Memoir available on Amazon

Was it worth it?

by Linda Rasmusson



Harry Rasmusson
315 Combat Engineer Co B
Circa 1944

brations and remembrances in the area. Christian has spent his life searching the Normandy countryside for WWII artifacts with his father, writing about war experiences and helping veterans and families connect with their family members' experiences. For the French in Normandy the celebrations are similar to Memorial Day observances here. We were amazed that each small community held a commemorative service filled with ceremony and expressions of gratitude for the Americans who liberated their communities from German occupation.

By the time the Americans landed in Normandy the French countryside had been occupied by the Germans for several years. I have often wondered when an army "occupies" a country exactly how they do it. As it was explained, the Germans lived in every home in the community. Local families had no choice but to house them, feed them and work for them building bunkers and growing food for the German army. Some were driven from their homes and forced to hide or flee. They faced a dire situation. Life was very hard for the French people.

Our tour started with a celebration in a small town of Gourbeville. When we entered the village one of the first things we saw was a beautiful memorial with a picture of an American soldier, Virgil Tangborn. I was struck by the fact It stood in a special permanent place with flowers and a plaque reminding the residents every day of the bravery of this soldier from Minnesota. The ceremony included a military band, contingents

Next to my computer I have a photo of my dad, Harry Rasmusson, in his army fatigues with a rifle in his hand. It's taped to a framed TO patch. I greet Dad with a smile and "good morning" as I start my day reading emails. Sometimes I ask him, "Was it worth it? You gave up a few years of your life to leave behind your family, your home, your fiancé to fight a war in a foreign country. Was it worth it?"

This past summer I traveled with my husband, sisters and significant others to Normandy to see for myself. We were invited by Christian and Evelyne Levaufré to Normandy for the D-Day festivities. Our amazing hosts packed four busy days of sights and celebrations for us—all to commemorate and remember June 4, 1944, when the Americans landed at the Normandy Beaches.

We began our stay in city owned apartments in Periers, France. Our gracious hosts filled the refrigerator and cupboards with food, drinks, and snacks for our visit. They graciously provided us with our own personal guide, their delightful and knowledgeable son Guillaume.

Christian, as President of the Normandy '44 Association, and Evelyne are very involved in the local cele-

of soldiers (French, German, American) and WW II re-enactors. The 90th Division Color Guard presented the Colors, and townspeople came together to remember the American liberators and to express gratitude for their service. The Mayor and several others provided speeches and tributes and concluded with the laying of wreaths on the memorial. We were blessed to have Eugene Kleindl, our own 90th Division veteran and his granddaughter in attendance with us.

Christian made sure we saw other monuments as we traveled the short distance back to Periers. He Included a short hike through a private pasture where we saw actual foxholes and bomb craters from 81 years ago. I couldn't imagine hiding under fire in this place. The ghosts of soldiers were everywhere around us. I was quite amazed to see a memorial signifying the terrible battle at Hill 122. It was along a remote country road we could have easily passed by. Christian shared stories of the battle that took place there. The will to preserve these memories is still strong today.



Tough 'Ombres, Periers, France 2025

D-Day found us at Utah Beach with Christian, Evelyn and Guillaume and several other TO families from the 90th Association to observe and participate in the commemoration of the 90th Division Tough 'Ombres who began their part of the war on that spot. We received very special treatment thanks to Christian and sat in the same section as our own Secretary of Defense and Secretaries and Defense ministers from across Europe. It is hallowed ground, and gazing down at the beach below brought feelings of both sadness and pride.

The ceremony was followed by a lovely reception for the visitors and military personnel who attended. There



L to R: Christian Levaufre, Linda Saveraid, Nina Rasmusson, Nancy Rasmusson, Evelyne Levaufre. Periers, 2025

were approximately eight WWII veterans in attendance who were honored guests and visited with those of us about their memories of the war. They were very candid about their experiences and the guests were very grateful for their service. There is nothing like a war story from a soldier who was there! They can be quite colorful and definitely uncensored.

Our next tour stop was a sightseeing tour to visit Omaha Beach and the pristine American Cemetery. Guillaume was our guide for the day and provided lively conversation and much historical and cultural information for our group! The cemetery is a solemn, moving site to see. Again, the emotional experience can hardly be described without actually experiencing it. It is peaceful but very somber to think about.

In Le Plessis-Lastelle (Boucadray) we shared a special remembrance for Carver McGriff, a 90th veteran who was wounded in the fighting there. Carver passed away recently, and his widow, Mary Ann, brought some of his ashes to be buried near the spot where Carver was wounded. It was another experience of an American remembered in a special way.

Our last memorial service was hosted in Periers. The program began with a ceremony honoring French citizens who died during the bombings. We had another meaningful program with a band, soldiers, and speakers. We then marched through town to a site commemorating the townspeople who were occupied by the German Army and heard from a gentleman who experienced the occupation firsthand. It was a part of the

war I hadn't thought much about. Our final ceremony was at City Hall, in front of the Four Braves sculpture. It is a remarkable memorial, depicting four 90th Division soldiers who died in the Battle of Normandy, and who are buried in the American Cemetery at Colleville. The ceremony was a special experience. Speeches by Christian, government officials and dignitaries and a German officer were meaningful and moving. My sisters and I were honored to lay wreaths on the plaques in front of the beautiful statue of the four soldiers. I found myself so thankful Dad made it home when so many others didn't.

Following the ceremony we were hosted at the city hall with a potluck dinner including people from the village and the special guests from the festivities. Throughout our visit, my sisters and I wore lanyards with Dad's picture on them. I was moved to tears as a French gentleman took the lanyard with tears in his eyes, kissed it, and said, "Thank you, thank you, thank you." He didn't speak English nor I French but we were able to communicate our feelings with each other in a special way. I will never forget it.

Yes, Dad, it was worth it. You are remembered and recognized for your service and your bravery by the grateful people of France. The appreciation and gratitude we experienced from the French people were genuine and meaningful to us. Their celebrations 81 years later were heartfelt and took much planning, time and effort to accomplish.

I can't thank Christian and Evelyne enough for their devotion to keeping these traditions and memories alive. Our shared experiences being children of parents who experienced the war first hand has created a special bond. The 90th Association has facilitated our two families coming together to share memories and become lifelong friends. We will be back in Normandy again!

Thank you, thank you, thank you.



Periers, June 2025



Path of the Tough 'Ombres, 1944-1945

French Citizen Shares the Story of the Bombing of Periers



Claude Pasturel was a child living in Periers in 1944 when bombs from Allied forces descended on the city. On June 8, 2025 he shared his story at a Memorial Ceremony for French civilians who lost their lives in the attacks. His recollection of the events and their aftermath provided a eye witness account of the horrors of war and of the courage of the French people who suffered following the attacks.

It was in the morning of June 8, 1944. The light mist rising from the ground provided a glimpse of a beautiful day.

The population, anxious about the never-ending air raids, the news of the landings, and the rumors of bombing raids on Saint Lo and Coutances that had filtered through, couldn't bring themselves to leave the town and head for the surrounding countryside, as they had been invited to do by the Allied leaflets, of which - it's true - very few people were aware. Despite the traffic bans imposed by the occupying forces, life resumed its normal course, with shopkeepers opening their stores and children, who had no classes, having lunch. Each home had its own habits, its own intimacy, its own rhythm, its own life.

Very early on, a horse-drawn hearse, carrying a doctor who had fallen victim to his dedication, had crossed the central crossroads, hastening towards the cemetery.

Suddenly, a heavy roar took possession of the sky. Several waves of planes whirled around; and it was horror, apocalypse, gehenna. The violence of the bombs' destructive blast, the unbearable roar that stunned the frightened, haggard inhabitants! Doors and windows ripped open, roofs blown away, houses ripped apart, whole sections of buildings and whole streets collapsing, gaping craters, heaps of ruins. Terrifying moments when we sometimes saw people praying together: those who believed in heaven and those who didn't, and then: smoke, a pungent smell, the sudden wind, fire, dust that had obscured the sun, the darkness itself, and then suddenly : silence, a deathly silence, and after that, and only then, came the cries for help from the survivors buried under the ruins, the complaints of the wounded, the rudimentary first aid given in a hurry in the



absence of the doctors who had died, the lack of water, the lack of basic necessities, total disarray and then the search, the discovery, the burial of the corpses in a hastily opened mass grave, and the fear, incomprehension, revolt, anger and anguish of a population fleeing in all directions, giving rise, as in any human society in exceptional circumstances, to acts of courage, silent heroism but also cowardice.

After so many years, the elderly witness of these events who speaks to you today still has the images in his eyes, the deafening noise in his

ears and perhaps also the fear in his subconscious.

The majority of our 127 dead were victims of this bombing. Others fell during the fighting or on the exodus routes. Entire families disappeared. There were dead we know nothing about. We have had the nameless dead, the faceless dead, the crushed, burnt and mutilated dead, the unburied dead, the dead from all professions and all walks of life. Thirty-five percent of all these dead were under the age of seventeen, including some very young children.

Yes! in the rubble of the City Hall square, a small foot was found in a child's shoe;

Yes! a mother had her two children, aged 14 and 20, dead in her arms all day under the rubble of her house.

Yes! a young girl died in the light after forty-eight hours of digging herself out of the rubble of her home, and her old father had to bury her himself after transporting her body in a hand truck.

Yes! the doctor was crushed in his shelter with his wife and two small children, Francis and Marie.

Yes! couples had disappeared without a trace



And how many other cases could I mention of those who were swept away that day in the whirlwind of horror?

What remains of these dead? A name, a photograph, an image, a face lost in the fog of time, and so to sublimate and transcend these shattered lives, we planted 127 oak trees as a tribute to their memory, but also for ourselves, for our youth, so that all those who take this path will know that this place of life was born out of a terrible ordeal.

In so doing, the people of Périers have done a work of peace, a work of life, by giving continuity to the sacrifice of our victims and to all those children whose lives we do not know what might have been, or whether they were cut short before serving some great cause.

A Nobel Prize winner in medicine once wrote that man was halfway between the atom and the star, and Martin Gray, a man scarred by war, stressed in his book of life that each man, like the star, was a universe. When he dies, everything dies, and yet everything continues, because life is at the heart of every human being. This life is a perpetual march towards the future, changing like the sky, clear, stormy, generous, wild, cruel as a hurricane, devastating and fulfilling, but we must recognize its beauty, its lightening in the storm, its greatness.

It is life, and after the martyrdom of our city and all those lives cut short, we must still, after so many years, tell of its price to those who will come.





Scenes from Periers

Mystery is Solved

Readers of Tough Ombre Times might remember a story that was featured in a newsletter a few years ago. At that time, the Association was contacted by Marita King, on behalf of a friend in Germany, Hans Schaefer. Hans had undertaken a “covid project” in which he researched photographs taken in WW II, and returned to photograph those sites today. Hans had encountered a mystery and he turned to the Association, via Marita, for help. He had a picture of an unknown church, and in the picture, American soldiers were clearing rubble off the street. Hans had no way to find the church, as the location was not identified with the picture, and the author who had included the picture in a book was deceased. Hans, who is both a photographer, collector and amateur WW II historian, believed the soldiers in the picture might be part of the 90th Division. He was hoping that a reader of the newsletter might be able to help him find the location of the church.

We were not successful in helping Hans locate the church, however, we were recently notified that he was finally able to identify the unknown church. The church is the former Roman Catholic Parish Church of St. Albanus & Leonhardus of Manheim, which was part of Kerpen near Cologne. The church was no longer in service after 2019, and initially it was believed that the church had been demolished.

It turned out that it was not soldiers of the 90th Division that were shown in the 1945 photo, but members of the 104th. Happily, Hans went on to learn that the planned demolition of the church did not happen, and it is still standing today.

Attached are pictures, including the 1945 photo and the church today. Congratulations to Hans Schaefer on his persistence in searching for the church, and on solving the mystery!



New Book With TO Ties

Greetings members of the Association. Several months ago I was contacted by Rick Rosenthal who was working on a novel that featured the discovery of stolen Nazi loot which was buried deep in the abandoned salt mines of Merkers, Germany. He had some questions about the 90th Division's role in the discovery and aftermath. Rick has since written and published a suspenseful "what if?" novel about the discovery of the treasure. If you enjoy suspenseful, fast-moving and highly engaging fiction related to the events of WW II, you will like this book! The following is a brief synopsis:

Early Spring, 1945: World War Two is ending. Hitler's Wehrmacht is decimated, and the Third Reich is crumbling. President Roosevelt has led the Allies to the brink of unconditional victory, but he has one agonizing regret: He couldn't stop Hitler's evil murders of millions of Europe's Jews.

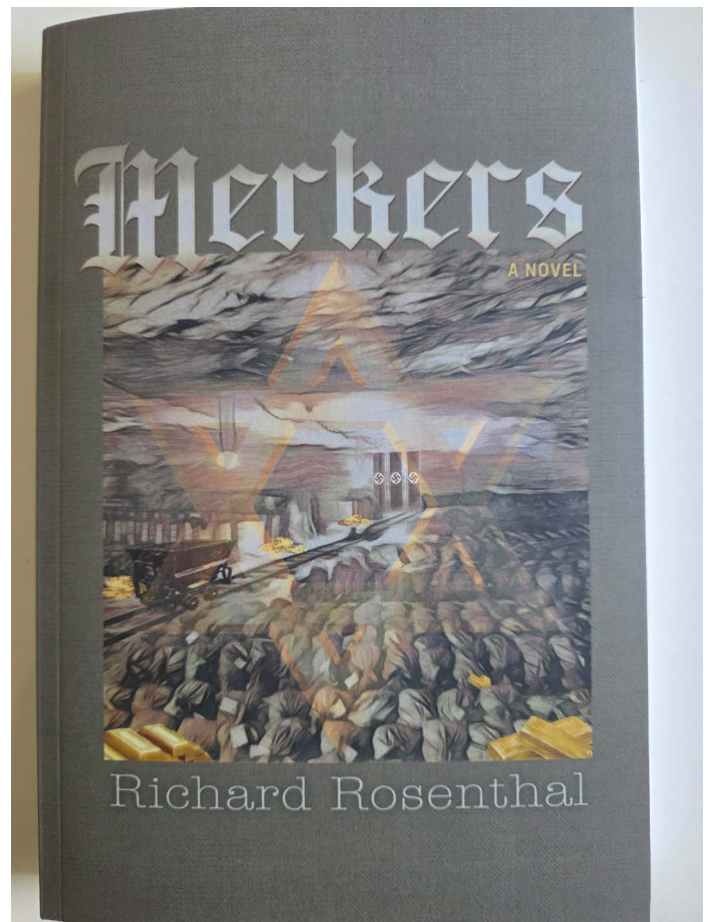
Filled with remorse, he summons his top Jewish adviser to the White House. Hoping even at this late hour to make amends, Roosevelt tells Rabbi Dr. Stephen Wise about a vast trove of treasure the Nazis have cached in a salt mine deep underground in the town of Merkers.

If an elite team of Jewish commandos could somehow steal even some of that wealth, it could literally mean the difference between life and death for the future haven-nation of Israel.

Standing in the way: the diehard German military, and General George Patton's U.S. Third Army, which is within days of capturing the mine. And those were the easy obstacles.

The book may be purchased via Amazon. The title is "Merkers" by Rick Rosenthal. I highly recommend it!

Nancy



2026 Reunion Registration Form

(Please Print)

Attendee 1 Attendee 2 Attendee 3 Attendee 4 Attendee 5 Attendee 6

First Name

Last Name

City

State

Dietary Needs

Registration Fee (per person)

Adult or Child (Under 13) \$50 or \$0 \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____

Fri (8/28) 7:00 Dinner & Program

Adult or Child (3-12, \$70 or \$20 \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____
Under 3 Free)

Sat (8/29) 9:00 Memorial Program

No Meal - Program Only \$0 \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____

Sat (8/29) 7:00 Dinner & Program

Adult or Child (3-12, \$75 or \$20 \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____
Under 3 Free)

Total for EACH Attendee: \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____ \$ _____

Grand Total for ALL Attendees: \$ _____ *(See Page 2 for additional needed information)*

Attendee 1 Additional Information:

Mailing Address: _____

Preferred Phone #: _____ **Email:** _____

90th Unit: _____ **Special Needs:** _____

Payment Information

_____ **Check enclosed** - Please make checks payable to: **90th Division Association**

_____ **Credit Card** (Visa, MC, Disc., AmEX): Name on Card: _____

Credit Card #: _____ Exp: _____ 3 Digit Code: _____

Mail Registration Form to : 90th Division Association, PO Box 125, Nevada, IA 50201-0125

For questions please contact Nancy Rasmussen : Nancy@90thdivisionassoc.org or Phone: 970-227-2744