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V CORPS AIR DEFENDER FINDS MORE THAN JUST HISTORY AT SITE OF D-DAY INVASION

By Hugh C. McBride

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Spc. Stebel Buissereth of V Corps' 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade places flags near the headstones at the Normandy American Cemetery in preparation for the 60th anniversary celebration of the D-Day invasion.

NORMANDY, France – Spc. Stebel Buissereth joined the U.S. Army to help pay his college bills. Standing among the graves of Normandy American Cemetery, though, Buissereth said his service has resulted in more than just financial aid.

“You feel the values of the Army here,” Buissereth said. “You can understand how hard it was for the Soldiers who fought here – and how important it is for us to work hard to honor them.”

A native of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Buissereth spent part of his youth in France as a student in an international school near Paris. Thus, in addition to acting as an unofficial translator for his colleagues in V Corps' 5th Battalion, 7th Air Defense Artillery, 69th ADA Brigade, he brings an international perspective to the first D-Day commemoration ceremony he has attended while in uniform.

“As a civilian, you admire what’s going on, but you understand more when you’re here as a Soldier,” he said while walking through the cemetery with an armful of small French flags.

Buissereth spent the morning of May 29 placing flags beside the ivory crosses and Stars of David in the cemetery, which is located on a hilltop overlooking Omaha Beach. As they are every year in preparation for Memorial Day and the anniversary of the D-Day invasion, the graves of each of the 9,387 service members buried in Normandy American Cemetery were marked with both U.S. and French flags.

In addition to participating in this tradition of honor, Buissereth and fellow members of his unit were scheduled to participate in the Memorial Day and D-Day ceremonies. Though he had attended similar events in Normandy before joining the service, Buissereth said being

there in uniform had many differences -- the most striking being the reaction that he has received from veterans of the invasion.

"They see us and they stop us," he said, recalling a recent meeting with veterans of the 10th Mountain Division. Though these men have been acclaimed as members of the "Greatest Generation" and credited with saving the world from the horrors of facism, Buissereth said they don't stop the young troops to regale them with stories from the history books.

"The vets, when they talk to you, they want to know about you," he said, adding that the veterans only shared stories of their exploits after considerable prodding from the active-duty Soldiers. "They are very humble," he noted.

Turning toward the rows of graves that awaited his flags, Buissereth reflected on the meaning that his time in Normandy has added to his military service. "When you are here, that's when you know how important your job is," he said.

