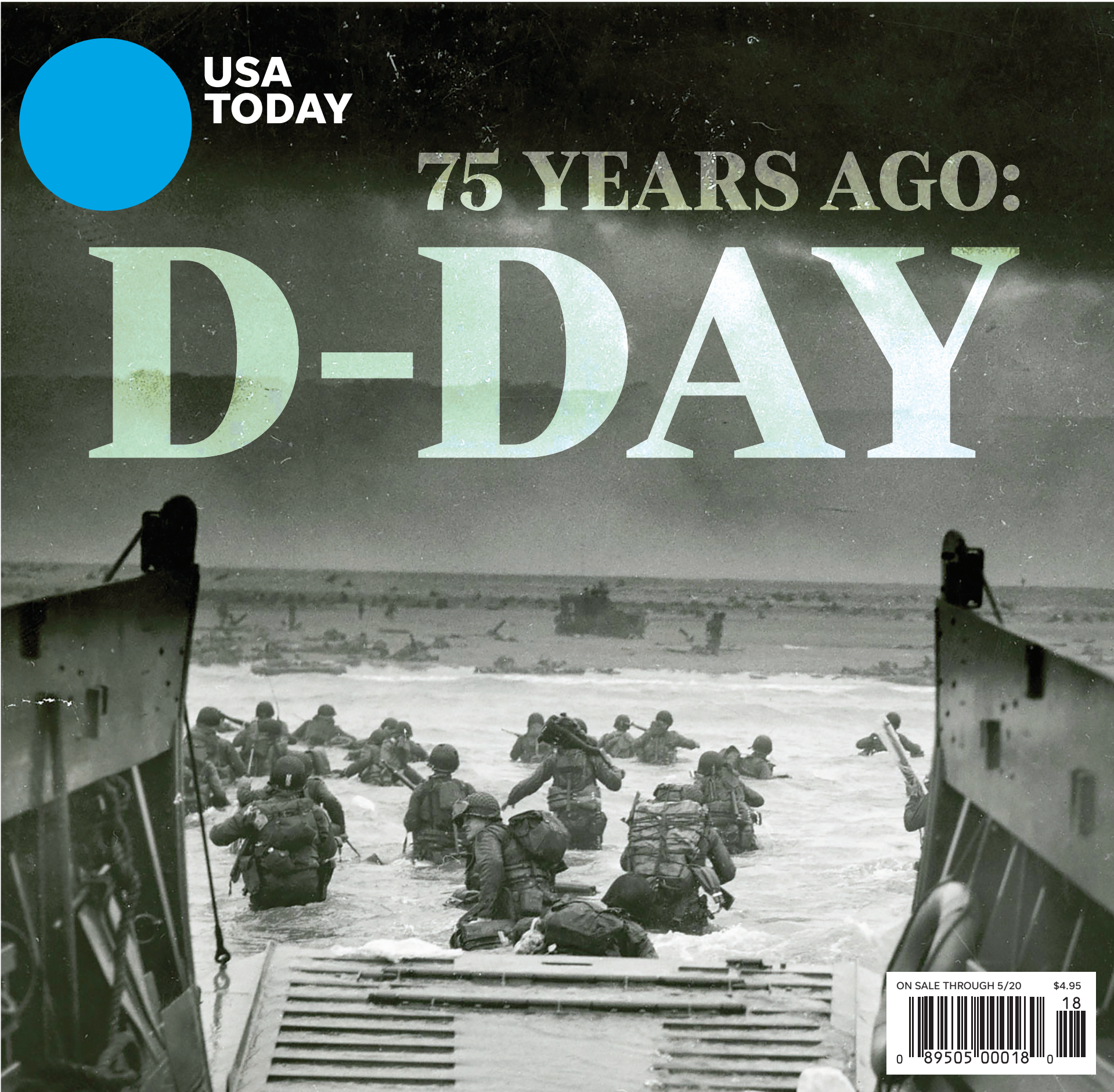



Remembering the heroes of the ‘Great Crusade’ in WWII



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REMEMBERING D-DAY

LEGACY



When a high school band from Herndon, Va., plays in Normandy in June, its members will wear these photos of sailors who were aboard the USS Herndon on D-Day.

Responsibility

As the WWII generation fades away, youngsters take up torch of history

Matt Alderton Special to USA TODAY

When they attend a high school band concert, most parents go home with a program and a mild headache. Margaret Jamborsky came away with a mission.

It was spring 2017, and Jamborsky's eighth-grade daughter was playing piccolo in an ensemble performance with the Herndon High School band in Herndon, Va. Suddenly, the lights dimmed and a screen dropped from the ceiling, peppering parents with World War II imagery. A booming voice announced that the Pride of Herndon marching band had been invited to represent the United States in the 75th anniversary D-Day Memorial Parade taking place June 6, 2019, in Normandy.

For Jamborsky — a professional event planner, a Francophile, a veteran's daughter and a history buff — it felt like kismet.



Members of the Pride of Herndon marching band, which will represent the U.S. in France. MARY BROWN

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NORMANDY INVASION



to remember



Crewmembers of the U.S. Navy destroyer USS Herndon in 1943-44. PICASA

Jamborsky attended a meeting for prospective parent volunteers. That's where she first heard about the USS Herndon, a Navy destroyer that was the lead ship in the Allied armada on D-Day. Because they share a namesake — William Lewis Herndon, a U.S. naval commander who went down with his ship in 1857 — the town of Herndon has been entrusted with artifacts from the D-Day destroyer, which it displays at the little-known Herndon Depot Museum.

"I had no clue there was a ship called the USS Herndon, or that right down the street from my house is a little museum dedicated to it," Jamborsky says. "So I made it my mission to learn everything I could about that ship."

And to share her findings with Herndon High students, whose generation will one day inherit the responsibility of commemorating World War II and remembering its lessons.

"More than 300 World War II veterans die every day. ... In just a few more years, all these guys are going to be gone," Jamborsky says. "That's why it's so important to share this history with our young people."

Educators across the country agree, and are using the 75th anniversary of D-Day as a vehicle through which to train a new generation of historians to carry the heavy torch of remembrance.

Marching with a purpose

The USS Herndon carried 301 Americans on June 6, 1944. When they boarded the ship a week earlier, sailors were told to write farewell letters home because they were going on what seemed like a suicide mission. The Herndon's job was to draw enemy fire as a way to determine the position of German coastal defenses.

"They were supposed to go into Utah Beach and be sitting ducks," Jamborsky says. "Then, on D-Day, they raised the first Stars and Stripes to ever fly on German-occupied territory, and they hit ev-

Continued on Page 20

REMEMBERING D-DAY

Continued from Page 19

ery single one of their targets — bam, bam, bam.”

Left and right, other ships were sunk. But somehow, the Herndon survived. “They called it the Lucky Herndon because everybody came home,” Jamborsky says.

She set out to find the families of all 301 men aboard the Herndon. At the time of this writing, she had found all but nine. When the Pride of Herndon marching band performs in Normandy, each of its student members will wear around his or her neck a photo of one of those sailors. Later, they’ll sprinkle sand from home on the graves of Virginians buried at the Normandy American Cemetery.

“I didn’t want these kids to think they were going on a vacation in France. I wanted it to mean something,” Jamborsky says.

After the trip, students will write letters to the families of the veterans whose pictures they carried, enclosed with sand from Utah Beach. “They’re going to tell them what it meant for them to honor their loved ones and how it changed their lives — because it will.”

Seemingly every generation of young people gets accused of apathy and self-absorption. But Generation Z — those born from 1995 to 2010 — are well suited to buck that stereotype. Research by marketing agency Sparks & Honey, for instance, shows that Gen Zers are more likely to have grown up in multi-generational households, have an affinity for volunteerism, are knowledge seekers and want to make a positive impact on the world. They’re up to the task of remembrance.

“The kids are really absorbing this and eating it up,” says Herndon High band director Kathleen Jacoby. “They really want to acknowledge our veterans; I can see how important it is to them and how seriously they’re taking it.”



Rod Andrew

Time Traveling

Although it’s a privilege only some can afford, travel is a necessary catalyst for remembrance, says Rod Andrew Jr., a retired Marine Corps Reserve colonel and a history professor at Clemson University. In 2017, he began taking students on an annual trip to Normandy to study D-Day where it happened.

“To me, the study of history should not neglect questions about what we as human beings are capable of when we’re at our worst, but also when we’re at our best. When you’re standing on Omaha Beach looking over the bluffs, it really hits you,” Andrew says. “The more we can get people there to see that hallowed ground, the more it will actually be remembered.”

Andrew’s 2019 trip takes place May 14-24 and will include 15 students, each of whom will give a grave-



“When you’re standing on Omaha Beach ... it really hits you”: Clemson University students in Normandy.

Continued on Page 22

REMEMBERING D-DAY

Continued from Page 20

side presentation about a Clemson alumnus who died in World War II and is buried in one of the overseas military cemeteries the students will visit. “Knowing that these were real people who went to their school helps them connect personally to that history and makes it something they won’t forget,” Andrew says.

The Albert H. Small Normandy Institute also hosts annual trips. Named for the real estate developer and philanthropist who founded it, the institute finances two-week trips each summer for 15 teams, each made up of one teacher and one high school junior or senior. Teams study World War II history, visit historic sites, research an individual from their hometown who died on D-Day and deliver a eulogy for their soldier at his grave.

The institute’s academic director, Tom Long, teaches an undergraduate class at George Washington University using the same curriculum. In his students he sees promising custodians of history.

“There was a psychology major in my class two years ago. ... Because of her experience in Normandy, she decided she wanted to spend her career working with soldiers who have been wounded,” Long says. “There are tons of stories just like that. It has a huge impact on people’s lives, and those people are going to keep this memory alive because they care about it enough to spread it.”

History on the home front

Historians and educators are also looking for ways to engage youth in remembrance within the USA.

That’s the forte of The National WWII Museum in New Orleans, which originally focused on D-Day but expanded to cover the whole war. It conducts educational travel programs as well as initiatives like the Electronic Field Trips program, in which virtual tours of historic sites are streamed live with lessons into classrooms nationwide. On May 2, for instance, the museum will host a 75th Anniversary of D-Day Electronic Field Trip, during which student reporters will lead peers on a 50-minute excursion into the events of D-Day. Because it’s broadcast live, students can ask a historian questions in real time.

“Students need to go into adulthood

fully informed, understanding the decisions that shaped the world today,” says Gemma Birnbaum, associate vice president of the museum’s Media and Education Center. “When I think about all the different ways we’re engaging students, I feel a little bit better about the future.”

Another site for domestic commemoration is the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Va., which hosts both on-site and virtual field trips. The former take place in an authentic military tent where students examine historic artifacts while learning D-Day history. The latter are broadcast live from the memorial’s distance-learning studio, and sometimes feature veterans whom students can interact with and interview.

With the last surviving WWII veterans now in their 90s, the memorial is more focused than ever on education, says April Cheek-Messier, president and CEO of the National D-Day Memorial Foundation. She says the memorial is planning a new Education Center to host interactive programs and exhibits.

“Our focus since we opened in 2001 has been paying tribute to our veterans who are still with us. Now we want to build an educational complex where we can give young people an emotional connection to those veterans that they will carry for the rest of their lives,” Cheek-Messier says. “If we can do that, we’ll ensure that interest in this history continues to grow, and that commitment to telling their stories doesn’t leave with our veterans.”

But remembrance isn’t just about stories. It’s about the morals therein, says John Baick, a history professor at Western New England University. Whether they’re in a marching band in Normandy or a student group in New Orleans, what he hopes young people understand most about World War II is the spirit with which the Allies won it.

“We are facing a profound divide in American life. Perhaps the Greatest Generation, even as they pass from life, can provide us one final service: They can provide us a model for how a nation can come together and do extraordinary things,” Baick says. “From V-E and V-J Day to victory gardens, from the front lines to farms, World War II was almost a novel in its sweep. It was not just the best of times and the worst of times. It was the times that showed the world what America was and could be.

“It should not be so hard to remember that, should it?”



Students participating in the Albert H. Small Normandy Institute visit sites such as the Longues-sur-Mer battery, a well-preserved German gun emplacement.



D-Day veteran Herbert “Bill” Sisk speaks to students from Saint-Lô, France, visiting the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford, Va. ANGELA HATCHER LYNCH



Narrative plaques at the National D-Day Memorial explain the roles that different elements of the armed forces played in the invasion of Normandy. ASHLEE GLEN