



Newsday / Julia Gaines

Return of the Liberators

Members of 802nd Tank Destroyer Battalion at JFK airport on their way to revisit French towns they liberated in 1944

A Return to Land They Helped Free

By Alan Clendenning
and Patrick Brasley

Twenty-six years after he fought his way across Europe as an anti-tank lieutenant in World War II, Rupert Macpherson was back in France in a town he had helped liberate.

It was 1970. He walked into a small grocery store in Trigavou and, in French, told the woman behind the counter that he had been an American soldier in 1944. He asked for Jeanette, a young girl he remembered from the war years.

The 39-year-old woman behind the counter stared, then blurted, "Macpherson?" "I nodded

yes," Macpherson recalled, "and she shouted, 'Mama, Pappa, the liberator has returned.'"

That reunion with Jeanette Goger lingered in Macpherson's memory and helped spark a sentimental journey with 17 other graying warriors. They are going back to the Brittany towns they helped wrest back from the Third Reich in 1944. The group of veterans — all with ties to Long Island, Queens and Brooklyn — left Kennedy Airport last night to spend 15 days as guests of French families in the towns of Trigavou, Pleurtuit, Dinard and St. Malo.

All 18 were members of the 802nd Tank De-

stroyer Battalion, a unit formed from Hempstead Town-based National Guard units and later bolstered by draftees. The 802nd landed on Utah Beach in Normandy 10 days after D-Day, relieving battered troopers of the 101st Airborne Division who had been fighting since they dropped into France the eve of the invasion. With the 83rd Infantry Division, the 802nd fought against stubborn German resistance in the hedgerow country of Normandy and rolled into Brittany in late July.

Fred Dissinger, once of Ridgewood, Queens, now of West Palm Beach, Fla., recalled how warmly the French greeted the victors. "When we entered the towns they gave us wine and threw flowers," he said. "The hospitality of the people we liberated was so great that I'm really looking forward to going back."

Revisiting Brittany in 1970 with his wife and daughter, Macpherson, originally from Uniondale and now of Decatur, Ill., remembered Jeanette. "She was about 12 years old in 1944. She used to wash socks for me when we had our three-day rest in Trigavou. When we left, I gave her beads I had bought for my wife. Later, when we hit Luxembourg, I got a note from her thanking me. . . . We had a big party that day in 1970. Right before dinner, she went upstairs to dress and came down, wearing the beads I gave her in 1944."

The 802nd went on to fight in the Ardennes, Germany and ended the war in Czechoslovakia.

There was little to distinguish the old soldiers from other tourists as they awaited departure at Kennedy, except for the enamel lapel replicas of their old unit shoulder patch: a panther with a crunched enemy tank in its jaws and the legend: "Seek, Strike, Destroy."

Carl Arnott of Holbrook, a former tank mechanic, said he was excited to return to St. Malo. "I'm anxious to see what it looks like. At the time we were there before, St. Malo looked like it could have been a beautiful town, but it was pretty well destroyed when I was there."

The returning soldiers expect the town to be beautiful this time around. "I just think it's going to be a wonderful time," said Ed Herman of Mattituck.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

A New York Battalion Arrives at Mississippi Camp



Men of the 102d anti-tank battalion on their arrival at Camp Shelby, near Hattiesburg, Miss.



Macpherson

MY PHAT L.T.