



■ CUERS ■ COLLOBRIÈRES ■ PIERREFEU DU VAR ■ LA LONDE LES MAURES ■ BORMES LES MIMOSAS ■ LE LAVANDOU

THE LANDING OF PROVENCE

IN MÉDITERRANÉE PORTE DES MAURES

Nestled between the Massif des Maures and the Mediterranean Sea, the territory of “Mediterranean Porte des Maures” draws its charm and character from this position. The different municipalities of MPM are home to a substantial and amazing built heritage, testimony to a rich history and multiple identities.

This around the heritage circuit allows to discover a part of this territory. You will find a description of the must-see places and the itinerary to browse these historic sites in complete autonomy.

For their contribution to the texts, thank you to: Marc BENINTENDI, Yves BOYER, Colette CATENI, Raphaël DUPOUY, Baptiste FRICAU, Philippe MOLIOTO and Serge PORRE. Crédit photos : MPM tourisme, office de tourisme de Bormes les Mimosas, office de tourisme du Lavandou, Mairie de Collobrières, Mairie de Cuers - Stéphane DELOR, Mairie du Lavandou, Philippe MOLIOTO, Nicolas CAVASSA, Colette CATENI, and Pierre VELSCH.

Design and production: mpm tourisme, printing: Riccobono, print
Copy, Tourist Office-N°IM0310033, Guarantor : APST – 15 avenue Carnot
– 75 017 Paris- Phone: 01 44 09 25 35, Insurance : ALLIANZ – Le Santa Cruz – avenue des Ilaires – 83 980 le Lavandou – Phone : 04 94 64 91 29



The Landing of Provence

After the Armistice of **June 1940**, defeated, France collaborates with the Third Reich. Following the Allied landing in North Africa and the scuttling of the French fleet in the port of Toulon, in **November 1942**, **General de GAULLE** in **1943** tasked **General GIRAUD**, to reorganize in North Africa, a French army with American material support. The Allies imagine to fight the occupation troops by the North (Operation OVERLORD in Normandy) and the South (Operation DRAGOON in Provence). The Maures' coast appears then as the only place likely to escape the coastal batteries of the Toulon area. Two months after the landing of Normandy on the **6th of June of 1944**, the Allies get the green light.

On the night of **August 14 to 15 in 1944**, the African commandos, the first French soldiers on the soil of Provence, stormed Cape Negro, the naval assault group, the Esquirol point, the Canadians and American rangers the Golden Islands. American parachutists are dropped in the plain of Mui.

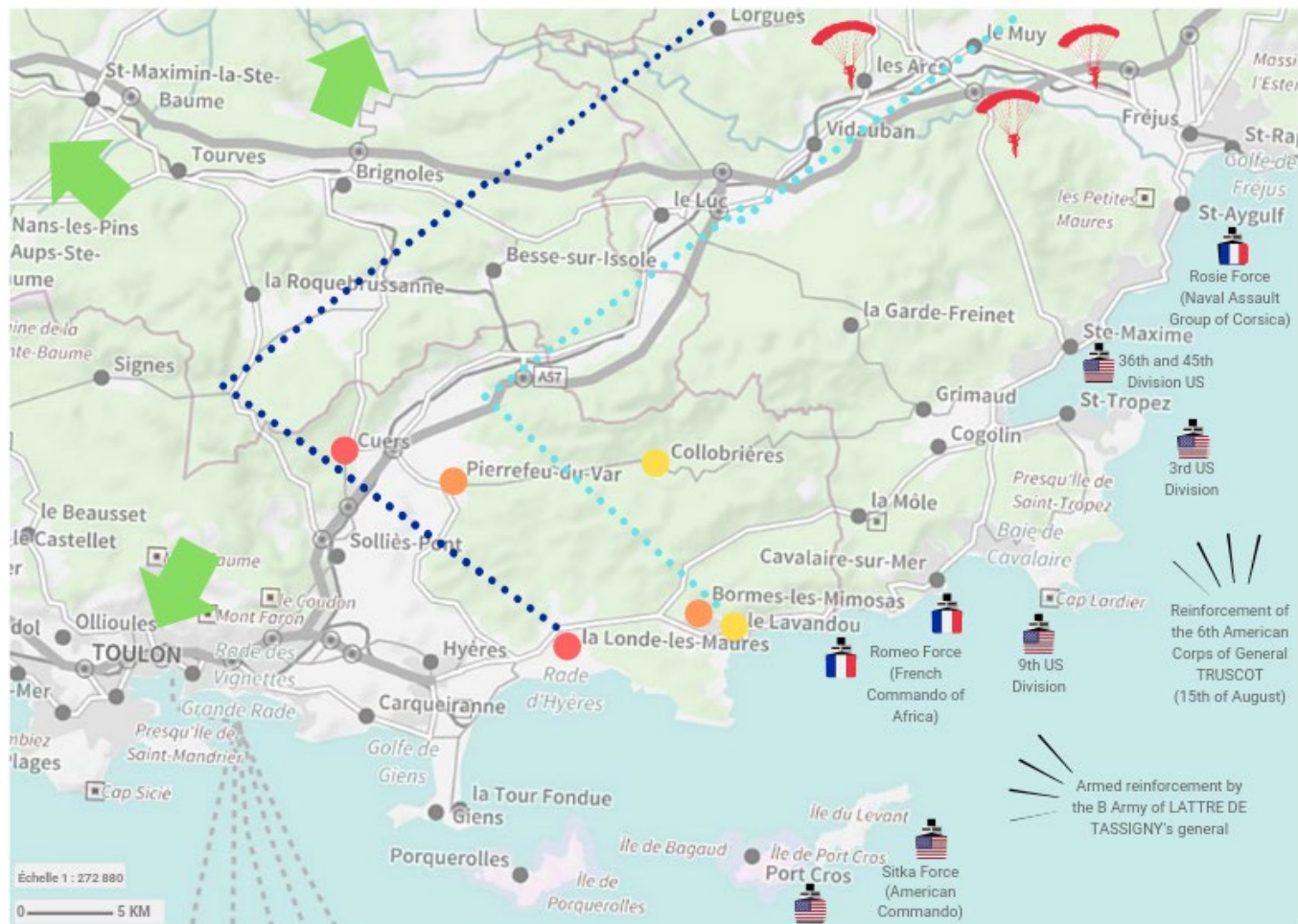
On the morning of **August 15th**, American divisions land at Cavalaire; for eight days, those of the Army of Africa land in a continuous flow on the beaches of Cavalaire, Dramont, Nartelle to liberate the occupied towns and villages in Var.

Go back in time and discover the town's liberation's highlights of Le Lavandou and Collobrières on **August 15, 1944**, Pierrefeu du Var and Bormes les Mimosas on the **16th**, La Londe les Maures and Cuers on the **17th**.












The parade of African commandos in Le Lavandou - 1945

THE LANDING OF PROvence



THE LANDING OF PROvence

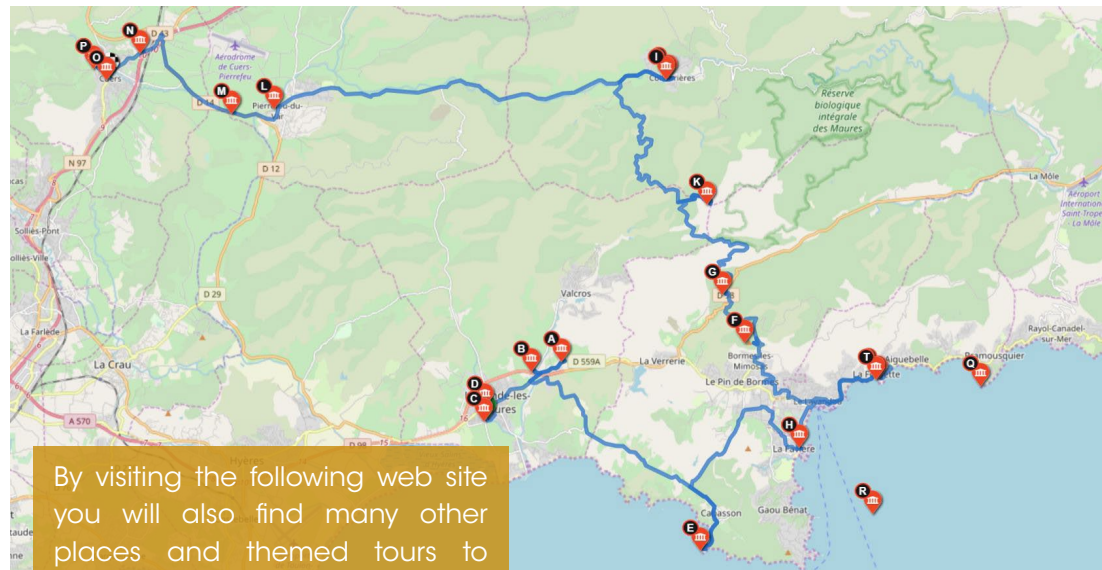
LEGENDE

-  Liberated on the 15th of August
-  Liberated on the 16th of August
-  Liberated on the 17th of August
-  Rugby Force (US paratroopers)
-  Frontline the 16th of August
-  Frontline the 18th of August
-  The troop's advance towards Draguignan, Brignoles, and Toulon
-  Reinforcements in men at the various landing sites between August 15th and 17th
-  Nationalities of the armed forces who contributed to the landing. (We must add the Canadians pilots of the French boats.)

YOU ARE THE GUIDE

This QR code will guide you through the iconic sites of the landing of Provence thanks to a map and an itinerary. Discover the cities of "Méditerranée Porte des Maures" differently and let yourself be surprised and touched by their tribute to the war hero.

In one sitting, or step by step, you will easily compose your historical event



By visiting the following web site you will also find many other places and themed tours to explore the territory in another way

www.cirkwi.com

Full tour : 3h30 (By car) / 90km

LE LAVANDOU

Location of the first commandos of Africa's landing during the night of August 14 to 15, 1944. Le Lavandou can be proud to have also been the scene of several episodes of the Second World War. Whether sailors, soldiers or resistance fighters, the Lavandourans actively participated in this conflict fighting against the enemy on the seas, on the fronts and in the maquis. Thanks to the information provided by the Resistance and to the bravery of Lieutenant Colonel BOUVET's men, the African commandos were to initiate the success of Dragoon Operation.

The commando plaque Cliffs of Cape Negro ▶

Visible during the sea trips organized by the company "Les Vedettes Îles d'Or"

At the precise spot where the first African commandos landed, at the head of the "Romeo Force", climbing the cliffs of Cape Negro at night, a lava stone commemorative plaque (representing the insignia of the commandos) has been affixed in memory of this glorious episode and in tribute to the first liberators of Le Lavandou. Only visible from the sea, this stele was fixed on the rocks where 35 men took foot shortly after midnight and from where they climbed the steep walls silently to reach the location of the enemy guns which was hundred meters higher. This detachment was led by **Captain DUCOURNAU** and, first of all, a mountain guide, **Sergeant DABOUSSY**. Their mission was to establish a bridgehead that will neutralize the coastal batteries and allow the Allied armada, seven hours later, to land in force on the beaches of Provence.



◀ The necropolis of La Fossette Avenue du Levant

At the head of the second commando shock composed of Moroccans, **Captain THOREL** is killed in action at the Fossette August 17, 1944 while participating in the liberation of Le Lavandou. His Moroccan prescription **Ben BARK** is also fatally injured. The necropolis of La Fossette pays homage to theme, not far from where they both fell.

◀ The stèle of Général GIRAUD

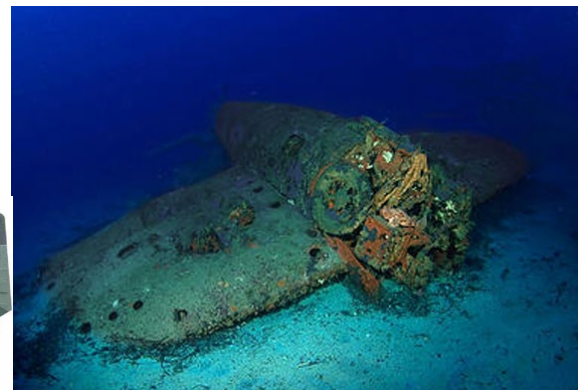
La Fossette's Beach

The night of **November 6, 1942**, the small beach of La Fossette is the scene of a secret operation that will play a role in the history of the Second World War two years before the landing of Provence. Escaped a few months earlier from the German fortress of Königstein, **General GIRAUD** embarks on a point with the help of the patron saint Lavandourain **Jules CREST** and local resistance fighters. Less than 1 mile from Pointe de la Fossette, a British submarine "Seraph" is waiting to take him to Gibraltar from where he will join the French army in North Africa to participate in Torch Operation, which will be a turning moment of the conflict on the Western Front.



The underwater wreck of a «Wildcat V» ▶

For diving and war planes enthusiasts, this wreck located 200 m north-west of the Fourmigue islet is to be discovered by 53 m of depth. 882 Royal Navy Squadron was equipped with WILDCAT V in service on the "HMS Searcher" (escort carrier) present during the Landing of Provence. Thanks to the American archives, we know that this aircraft which was on reconnaissance mission crashed on **August 15, 1944** and that its pilot had been recovered.



BORMES LES MIMOSAS

Until 1942, Provence is preserved from the occupation. Then she suddenly sees the events rushing with the invasion of the southern zone, by the Italian troops. At the armistice of Italy in September 1943, it is the German troops who take over, until liberation in August 44.

The roadblock of Gratteloup ▶

Col de Gratteloup

The crossroads of "Gratteloup" was the scene of a fight between the German troops of the 917th grenadier regiment of **Colonel LANGE**, and the 1st and 2nd battalion of the 7th infantry regiment, 3rd Division Us. The small blockhouse of the crossroads supported a machine gun who controlled the current D98, coming from Cogolin by La Mole. The American troops, landed on **August 15** on Red Beach in Cavalaire, separate to follow one, the coastal road and the other, the forest of Dom. The 1st and 2nd battalions overtake the Mole at the dusk of **August 16th**. Then on the heights of the pass where the Germans are ambushed in a network of trenches, they are shot. The tanks of the 756th Battalion fought back and the "B" company, assisted by the local Resistance, took the enemy position by the North. The commandos of Africa on the ridges and in the South, the Americans on their heels, the enemy retired at the end of the night. The company "F", sent to Bormes, discovered in the morning of **August 17** a desert village and Lavandourains hostages left by their guardians.



◀ The Notre Dame de Constance's fortified point

Constance DFCI track

From this position which dominates the village of Bormes and the plain, one can watch for kilometers any terrestrial or maritime movement. The defenses are organized around the Chapel of ND of Constance. **In 1943**, this point was occupied by four Italian howitzers of the 48th Division "Fanteria" "Taro" of General **Gino PEDRAZZOLI**, then by artillerymen attached to the 917th grenadier regiment. Troops and ranks occupy the subway which one of the guts gives access to a window of fire. The place was abandoned without a fight, certainly in the night of **August 16 to 17, 1944**.

The Pinède du Gouron's Blockhouse network

The Gouron's path ►

These blockhouses are part of a strong network of fortifications, built in 43 by Italian troops, then taken over and densified by the German occupiers. They closed the bay of Bormes, with the eastern end, Villa Bourguet, at the end of the port of Le Lavandou. Between the two, and in the center of the beach, have been built a huge blockhouse with cannon, an anti-tank trench excavated in the dunes, minefields, barbed wire and concrete pyramids as underwater obstacles, some of which are trapped by Tellermine of contact. After being shot by destroyers positioned offshore, the defenders will surrender without a fight to the passage of the 3rd commando of Africa.



◄ Fort de Brégançon Visible from coastal path and the sea

Possible access on guided tour by reservation

On August 17, 44, 2 days after the Landing of Provence, the 3rd commando of Africa finds Fort de Brégançon on its route. 80 German soldiers are still present behind the walls of the fortress. The **Captain de LEUSSE**, at the head of the commando of Africa, tries a blow of bluff. He passes the message of his superiority in man and material, giving them only a few minutes to decide before the assault of the commandos who will not make any prisoner. The subterfuge works. The enemy surrendered without a fight, after eliminating the non-commissioned officers who did not want to surrender and "fight until the last cartridge", according to the received order.

COLLOBRIÈRES

From November 11, 1942, the «free zone» is invaded by Germans and Italians. Everyday life, already difficult, is now punctuated by the curfew and the Ovra (Italian Militia of the fascist party) even stops the mayor Charles Imbert and locks him up in the Modane prison in 1943. The Resistance is organized in the scrub of the Moors but scarcity reigns and the only food productions are chestnut and grapes. It was not until August 15, 1944 that the Allied troops arrived by the road No. 14 Grimaud Collobrières to breathe again.

Place de la Libération **Downtown** ▶

It plays a central role in Collobrières. It is circled by the Town Hall built in **1861** and Boulevard Lazare Carnot, real Provencal course bordered by the beautiful homes of industrial cork. On the day of the Liberation, **August 15, 1944**, all the villagers gathered there to express their joy.

On **August 20**, the **General de LATTRE DE TASSIGNY** addresses the population of (from) the balcony of the Mairie after his troops have released Collobrières. To celebrate the release and impoundment of the village, a big party is organized every year on the Sunday closest to **August 15th**. A giant aioli is served and the rosé wine flows into the fountain for the occasion.



▼ **PRoger ROSSIs Bridge** known as **Pont Neuf** ▼



Built in the 19th century, this bridge quickly became the main crossing point of the Real Collobrier as evidenced by the request for classification by the Municipal Council of **February 25, 1877** "as a continuation of the road No. 14".

During the Liberation, a truck broke the rail and it is only in **1955** that it will be repaired and expanded. It is now called **Roger ROSSI**, hero of the resistance died on **August 18, 1944** in the Vercors. A commemorative plaque pays tribute to him there.

Sommet du Laquina Plateau Lambert ►

This is where the Germans built Station 37 Telemach Y Geräte Jägermess Stellung, occupied by the 20th Luftwaffe Ln-Rgt52 company.

This station of control and guidance of the friendly hunt consisted of :

- The concentration of the 3 Freya radars, 150 to 200m apart from each other to the west,
- Devices constituting the 3 Y lines in the eastern part,
- 3 casemates which contained the operators and the apparatus necessary for the operation of the «Heinrich Towers» (direction-finders),
- 3 casemates implementing the «Hans pylons», transmitters implementing the IFF system embedded in the devices of the friendly hunt,
- A Heinrich tower and a Hans pylon which constitute a Y-Linien (Y-lines).



This system made it possible to follow and guide several «friendly» hunting formations (several Y Lines) towards their objectives.

On **August 16, 1944**, the **lieutenant VALLIER** and his men, accompanied by the villagers, attack the radar but the enemy was already gone. This resort seems to have never been in service.



PIERREFEU DU VAR

AUGUST 16, 1944
24 hours. This is the time that will have elapsed between the landing of Allied forces on the beaches of eastern Var and the liberation of Pierrefeu du Var.
Arrived by RD 14 in the direction East / West, a column of goumiers, skirmishers, resistant and soldiers of the 3rd US Division enters Pierrefeu du Var to free him from the German yoke.
The battle is tough GI Erwin LEMKE will be ambushed by the enemy at the level of the current "Château Montaud".
Once Pierrefeu du Var is released it is at the "Chestnut Farm" that General DE LINARES will set up camp before leaving to free Toulon.

Stèle des Turcos Ferme des Marronniers ▼



This stele reminds us that at this place, the "TURCOS" regiments of Algerian Sharpshooters, have made a halt, having landed in Provence on the beaches of Dramont as they were led by **Colonel de LINARES** himself under the **General de LATTRE DE TASSIGNY** orders.

Then, they went through Montrieux, the plateau de Signes and Revest in order to deliver Toulon.

The first army, which was commanded by **General de LATTRE DE TASSIGNY**, landed in Provence to liberate the territories that were occupied by the Germans right before going back to Berlin to sign the German surrender.

In this first army, which was called "The French Expeditionary Force", there were regiments composed mainly of fighters of North African origin (between 230,000 and 250,000 men).

Some regiments were composed of Moroccans, who were called "Tabors" or "Goums".

Some others, who were called "TURCOS", had Algerian origins and were part of the 3rd AID (Algerian infantry division).

The Algerian and Tunisian sharpshooters' regiments were with the Zouaves among the most decorated of the French army.



But why were they called "TURCOS"?

This nickname was given to Algerian riflemen by Russian troops during the Crimean War (1853-1856). Indeed, they fought so heroically that the Russians fled before them shouting «Turcos» because the Turks had the reputation of being formidable warriors

Monuments to the memory of the French and American

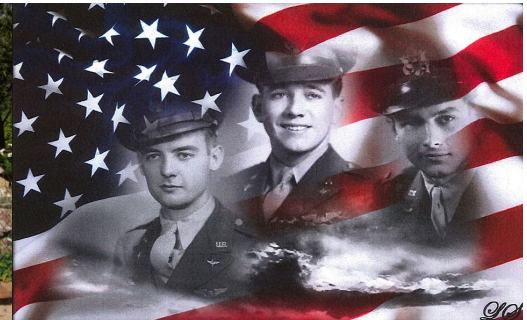
Place Urbain Sénés ▼

A plaque also commemorates the 3rd US Division which liberated Pierrefeu on August 16, 1944.



Square du Plessis de Grenadan ▼

On August 16, 2018, a new stele was inaugurated, in memory of 3 American pilots who fell during an aerial combat on January 27, 1944 on the heights of Pierrefeu du Var, whose remains were discovered by a Pierrefeu inhabitant. After a long and tedious research work, the families of the 3 pilots were found.



CUERS

In June 1940, on the CUERS-PIERREFEU BAN, the naval aviation fighter squadron was in charge of intercepting the enemy planes and two airmen died in June 1940 and June 1944.

On August 17, 1944, General Pierre MAGNAN, liberator of the commune, true hero, finally put an end to the relentless resistance of the German soldiers.

Since August 17, 1982, as a tribute, a place bears the name of the brave military and, subsequently, other streets and places were named after the heroes who «DIED for FRANCE».



Commanding Officer Chief Warrant Officer HOURCADE

◀ Avenue Joseph Balestrazzi (N97), close to access to the A57

This stele has been inaugurated on **September 14, 1941** by **General LAURE**, General Secretary of the Head of State, passing through CUERS, to preside at various patriotic ceremonies, with handing of a pennant to the Legion section. It is located district bridge of Pignans, place where was felled the plane of the chief warrant **Officer André HOURCADE June 15, 1940.**

It is a marble stele on which is fixed a metal palm. At the top of the stele, wings, symbolizing aviation, are carved and form a body with the cross.

Commemorative plaque of the liberation ▼

Esplanade of the Town Hall, side South facade.

In **1964**, the association RHIN & DANUBE, at the national level and in agreement with the government, suggested to affix a marble plate in all the cities and cities crossed by the armies of the Liberation, which would thus remind the future generations, the date of the Liberation of each. The plate of Cuers inaugurated on **August 17, 1964** carries the following engraving :



"THE FIRST FRENCH ARMY COMMANDED BY THE GENERAL OF LATTER OF TASSIGNY, FORGED IN AFRICA AND ITALY, DEBARQUEE IN PROVENCE, GROSSIE OF THE FRENCH FORCES OF THE INTERIOR, TO LEAVE CUERS, ON AUGUST 17, 1944, IN HIS VICTORIOUS MARKET IN RHINE AND DANUBE "

▼ Monument to the Deads of the Cemetery Central Alley of the Cemetery, Rue du Souvenir

From Monday to Friday, from 8 am to midday and from 1:30 pm to 5:00 pm except Friday afternoon from 1:30 to 4:30 pm.



It is a large composition of 5 m high, with various symbols referring to the prosperity and folklore of the region. Two horns of plenty overflowing with fleshy fruits and blooming flowers, frame the communal coat of arms. The central relief is a Victory crowned with olive tree, offering the crown and the palm. The coronation is a trophy, taking up the armor and the crest helmet of the Roman soldiers. These representations are not without evoking the Roman origin of the village. Three shells and two Howitzers surround the majestic building.

The Cannes architect **Charles SEASAL** realized this monument inaugurated on **November 1st, 1916**. It will be enriched in **1919**. Then, plates will be added in order to pay homage to the "Dead for the Fatherland" of the two world wars and that making the places of the combats where the valiant Cuersoises perished.

LA LONDE LES MAURES

On June 25, 1940, when the Armistice was announced, La Londe is relieved. Marshal Petain was first supported, before suffering the weight of the occupation, first Italian and then German from August 1943. While the Nazis settled at the Pascalette or Castle Bormettes and deteriorate, in some parts, the resistance becomes impatient and stronger as the alerts sound. At the same time as the bombing intensified, the rumor of a landing was heard until August 17, 1944.

Général Paul DUCOURNAU's Bridge

Avenue Henri Matisse ▶

After Le Lavandou and Bormes have been liberated, the 1st commando of Africa led by **Captain DUCOURNAU** reached La Londe on the evening of **August 17th**.

On **August 18, 1944**, they crossed the Pansard, reached the stop at the station of La Pascalette where American tanks were wiped the first shots of the batteries of the 152 KRIEGSMARINE installed in Mauvanne.

Captain DUCOURNAU and his commandos seize the blockhouses heroically, but 30 out of 60 are killed or wounded.

On the evening of August 19, they join Cuers in order to seize Fort Coudon they take the 21 and open the road to French troops for the Liberation of Toulon.

In a week **Captain DUCOURNAU** will have achieved three brilliant actions.



Sergeant Stanley BENDER's Bridge Route de Valcros ▼ 3è Division d'Infanterie Américaine (DI.US)

On **August 17**, he performed an act of bravery on the town:

"Under a rain of fire, he advanced to a first machine gun he puts out of harm's way. Then, he fought a path through the [...] combat zone towards a second machine gun. Led his group to the destruction of 8 enemy strongholds [...], submerged the enemy, destroyed a roadblock, captured a city, seized the bridge over the Maravenne River and regained command of the area."



With his section, he will wait for the arrival of the US tanks and on **August 18** in the morning, he will cross the liberated city.

In **1984**, he was awarded with the highest honor of the United States of America "The Medal of Honor".

▼ Stele of the Martyrs of the Resistance Avenue Albert Roux



Eugene OSWALD fled to escape from the Obligatory Labor Service and joined the maquis of Ain. On **July 13, 1944**, during an ambush extended to the occupation army in the commune of Songieu (01), the guerrillas were spotted by the Nazis. **Eugene OSWALD** and two comrades from Haute-Savoie are shot dead.

Pierre RIVAUT, worker at the Bormettes factory, left the village to escape the S.T.O and joined the maquis. On **July 20**, he's taken prisoner by the Nazis with nine others "Francs-Tireurs" and "Partisans Français" (F.T.PF), tortured, he is shot with his comrades at the edge of the Asse de Blieux, in the town of Senez (04).

Louis BUSSONE (F.T.P.T) defuses the Maravenne bridge on **August 17, 1944**, when the arrival of American and French soldiers is announced. He tries to sabotage the firing device that the German soldiers had installed to destroy the Pansard Bridge during their withdrawal. Surprised, he is shot on the spot.



Stele of the Liberation Route de Saint Honoré ►

It was erected in 1970 by the French Souvenir on the site of the first divisional cemetery created after the Liberation. The **Marquis de LORDAT**, owner of the land, accedes to the request of **General Diégo BROSSET** who commands the 1st Free French Division so that the corps of 117 officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers on the 298 of this unit who perished between La Londe and Le Pradet, to be buried there.

General de LATTRE DE TASSIGNY, commander of the 1st French Army, comes to pay homage to them.

General O'DANIEL commanding the 3rd DI.US stops there before visiting the field hospital of Valrose (East of La Londe).

General de GAULLE comes to pray there after the end of the war. He is greeted by the mayor Sir. **François de LEUSSE**, former officer of the commandos of Africa.

Most of the 1st DFL soldiers' corps are returned to their families after the opening of the national necropolis BOULOURIS (St-Raphaël), inaugurated on **August 15, 1964** by **General de GAULLE**.



TO GO FURTHER

**In La Londe les Maures,
walk through "The 1942
to 1944 memory road"**

The French Remembrance society initiated a marked itinerary that places La Londe les Maures back in the Second World War situation. Thanks to 9 markers which are in situ the association and the city pay tribute to the soldiers and the londais who had fought and sometimes died for France.

(Leaflet available at the Tourist Office and online itinerary on www.cirkwi.com)



ACSPMG's travelling exhibition Pierrefeu du Var

As part of the duty of remembrance, the ACSPMG (Association of Collectors for the Safeguarding of the Patrimony from the Maréchaussée to the Gendarmerie) presents a traveling exhibition about the Var's Gendarmerie role in the resistance and during the landing of Provence. This exhibition has many patriotic and remembrance associations as partner. This topic is presented in numerous exhibitions, or shared to municipalities or associations.



Information :
06 74 62 85 24
acspmg.contact@gmail.com

The French Remembrance society

This association is involved in honoring the memory of all those who died for France by combating in the name of freedom and law. It also defends those whether French or foreigners, who served the country.

There are members of this association in Cuers, Pierrefeu du Var, La Londe les Maures, Bormes les Mimosas and Le Lavandou.

Contact of the delegation of the Var : 04 94 58 52 92



The Publications

« Commandos d'Afrique, de l'île d'Elbe au Danube »

Patrick de Gmeline, Presse de la Cité

« La Londe Les Maures, les tourmentes du XXème siècle » .

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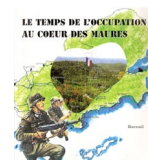


« Ouvriers de la première heure »

Colonel Georges Régis Bouvet, Editions Berger-Levrault, Archives Us Nara

« Le Temps de l'occupation au cœur des Maures »

2è recueil, 2008, Claude Gritti



« L'épopée des commandos d'Afrique, libérateurs du Lavandou, 1943-1945 »

Jean-Patrick et Olivier André, Editions Ville du Lavandou (téléchargeable sur www.le-lavandou.fr)

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