



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

## THE PROVENCE LANDING

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 its position. The different municipalities of MPM are home to a substantial and amazing built heritage, testimony to a rich history and multiple identities.

Discover a part of this territory by following this heritage circuit. You will find a description of the must-see places and the itinerary to freely visit them.

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## The Provence Landing

After the Armistice of **June 1940**, France, defeated, collaborated with the Third Reich. After 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 a French army with American material support in North Africa, in **1943**. The Allies planned to fight the occupying troops from the North (Operation OVERLORD in Normandy) and the South (Operation DRAGOON in Provence). The Maures' coast seemed to be the only place likely to escape the coastal batteries of the Toulon area.

Two months after the Normandy landing, 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 were dropped in the plain of Muy.

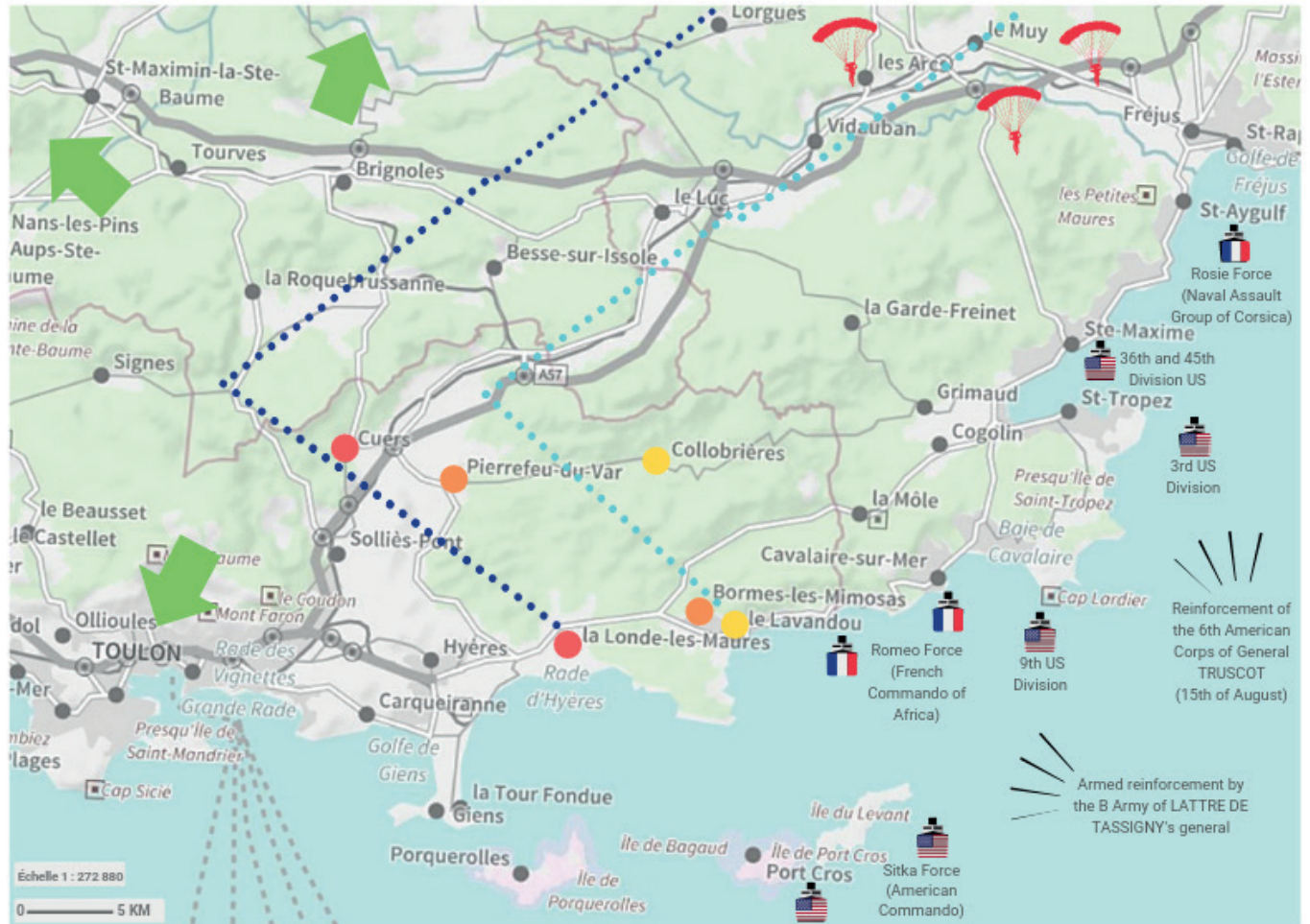
On the morning of **August 15th**, American divisions land at Cavalaire; for eight days, the soldiers from the Army of Africa continue to land on the beaches of Cavalaire, Dramont, Nartelle to liberate the occupied towns and villages in the Var.

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



*Reinforcements at the various landing sites between August 15th and August 17th - 1945*





## THE PROVENCE LANDING



THE PROVENCE LANDING



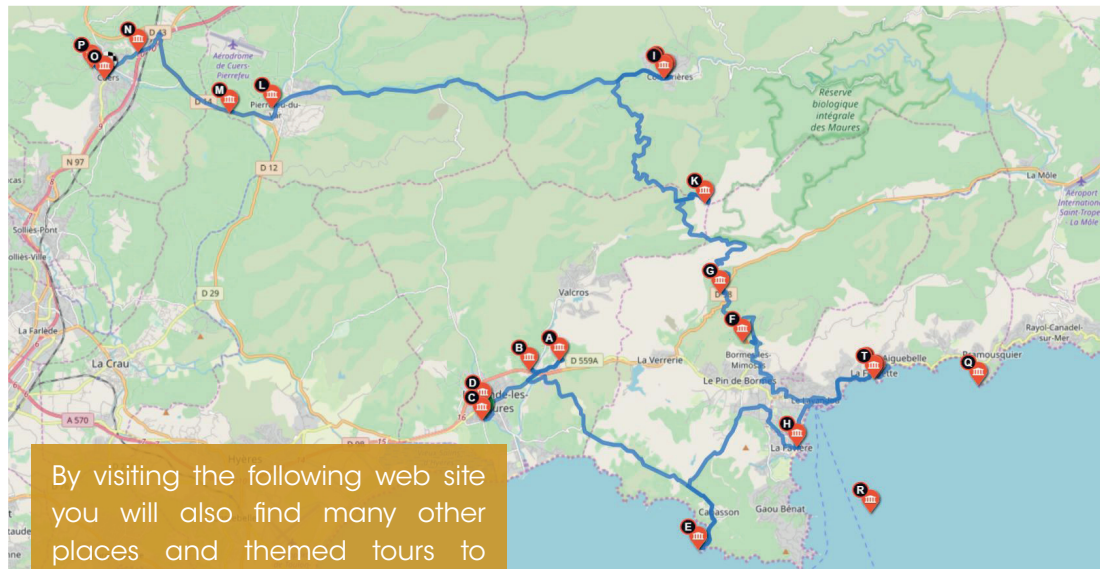
## LEGENDE

- 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 area differently

[www.cirkwi.com](http://www.cirkwi.com)

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

## LE LAVANDOU

The location of the first commandos of Africa's landing during the night of August 14 to 15, 1944. Le Lavandou can also be proud to have been the scene of several episodes of the Second World War. Whether they were sailors, soldiers or resistance fighters, the Lavandourans actively participated in 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 able to initiate the success of Dragoon Operation.

### The commando plaque **Cliffs of Cape Negro** ▶

*It is visible during the boat trips organized by the company "Les Vedettes Îles d'Or".*

Its 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 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. Only visible from the sea, this stele was fixed on the rocks where 35 men set off shortly after midnight and from where they climbed the steep walls silently to reach the location of the enemy guns a hundred meters further up. This detachment was led by **Captain DUCOURNAU** a mountain guide, and **Sergeant DABOUSSY**. Their mission was to establish a bridgehead that would neutralize the coastal batteries and allow the Allied armada, to land in force on the beaches of Provence, seven hours later.



### ◀ The necropolis of La Fossette **Avenue du Levant**

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





## ◀ The stèle of Général GIRAUD

### La Fossette's Beach

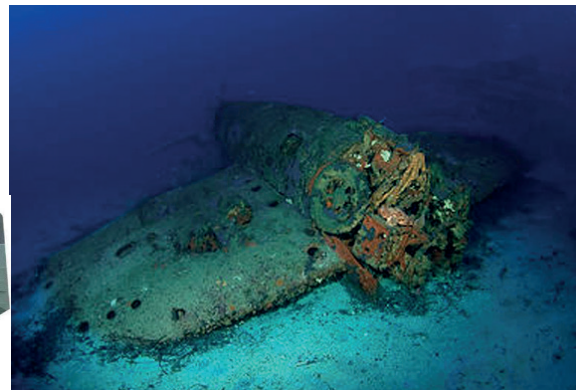
Two years before the landing of Provence, on the night of **November 6, 1942**, the small beach of La Fossette was the scene of a secret operation that would play a role in the history of the Second World War. **General GIRAUD** who had escaped a few months earlier from the German fortress of Königstein,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



## The underwater wreck of a «Wildcat V» ▶

For diving and war plane enthusiasts, this wreck is located 200 m northwest of the Fourmigue islet and rests 53m under the sea. The 882 Royal Navy Squadron was equipped with WILDCAT V in service on the "HMS Searcher" (escort carrier) and was 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 was recovered.



## BORMES LES MIMOSAS

Up until 1942, Provence was spared from the occupation. Then events took a turn for the worse with the invasion of the southern zone, by the Italian troops. During the armistice of Italy in September 1943, it was the German troops who took over, until the 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 which controlled the current D98, from Cogolin to La Mole. The American troops, landed on **August 15** on the Red Beach in Cavalaire, split up to follow both the coastal road and the road of the forest of Dom. The 1st and 2nd battalions overtook La Mole at dusk on **August 16th**. On the heights of the pass the Germans are ambushed in a network of trenches, where they are shot.

The tanks of the 756th Battalion fought back and the "B" company, helped by the local Resistance, took the enemy position from the North. The enemy retired at the end of the night with the commandos of Africa on the ridges and in the South and the Americans on their heels. On the morning of **August 17**, the company "F", sent to Bormes, discovered a desert village and Lavandourain hostages left by their guards.



### ◀ The Notre Dame de Constance's fortified point Constance DFCI track

From here, overlooking the village of Bormes and the plain, one can keep watch for kilometers for any terrestrial or maritime movement. The defenses were organized around the Chapel of ND of Constance. In **1943**, it 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 underground from which they could access a shot window. It was abandoned without a fight, probably during the night of **August 16th 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 expanded by the German occupiers. They closed the bay of Bormes, at the eastern end : Villa Bourguet, at the end of the port of Le Lavandou. A huge blockhouse with a cannon, an anti-tank trench, minefields, barbed wire and concrete pyramids as underwater obstacles, some of which are trapped by Tellermine of contact are built between the two. After being shot by destroyers positioned offshore, the defenders surrendered without a fight to the passage of the 3rd commando of Africa.



MONUMENT  
HISTORIQUE

◄ **Fort de Brégançon** Visible from coastal path and the sea  
Possible access on guided tour by reservation

On **August 17 1944**, 2 days after the Provence Landing, the 3rd commando of Africa passed Fort de Brégançon on its route. 80 German soldiers were still present behind the walls of the fortress. The Captain de **LEUSSE**, at the head of the commando of Africa, tried to bluff them by pretending that he had more men and more equipment, giving the German soldiers only a few minutes to decide before the assault of the commandos and would not take any prisoners. The subterfuge worked. The enemy surrendered without a fight, after eliminating the noncommissioned officers who did not want to surrender and "fight until the last cartridge", according to the orders they had received.

# COLLOBRIÈRES

From November 11, 1942, the «free zone» was invaded by the Germans and the Italians. Everyday life, which was already difficult, became more so by the curfew. In 1943, the Ovra (Italian Militia of the fascist party) even arrested the mayor Charles Imbert and locked him up in the Modane prison. The Resistance is organized in the scrub of the Moors but scarcity reigns and the only food productions are chestnuts and grapes. It was not until August 15, 1944 that the Allied troops arrived by the road No. 14 Grimaud and allowed 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, a real Provencal course bordered by the beautiful homes of the cork industry. 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** addressed the population from the balcony of the Mairie after his troops had released Collobrières. To celebrate the freedom 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.



## ▼ **Pont Roger ROSSI's Bridge** known as **Pont Neuf** ▼



Built in the 19th century, this bridge quickly became the main way of crossing 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 was only in **1955** that it was repaired and expanded. It is now called Roger ROSSI, a hero of the resistance who died on **August 18, 1944** in the Vercors. There, a commemorative plaque pays tribute to him.



## Sommet du Laquina Plateau Lambert ▶

### *Pedestrian acces only*

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» (directionfinders),
  - 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 on the radar but the enemy was already gone. This resort seemed never to have been in service.



## PIERREFEU DU VAR

August 16, 1944.  
24 hours. This was the time it took between the landing of Allied forces on the beaches of the eastern Var and the liberation of Pierrefeu du Var. A column of goumiers, skirmishers, resistant and soldiers of the 3rd US Division arrived by RD 14 from the East and entered Pierrefeu du Var to free the village from the German yoke. The battle was tough. GI Erwin LEMKE was ambushed by the enemy at what is now "Château Montaud". Once Pierrefeu du Var was freed it was at the "Chestnut Farm" that General DE LINARES set up camp before leaving to free Toulon.

## Stèle des Turcos Ferme des Marronniers ▼



This stele reminds us that it was here that the "TURCOS" regiments of Algerian Sharpshooters, 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**'s orders. Then, they went through Montrieux, the plateau de Signes and Revest in order to free 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 from 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

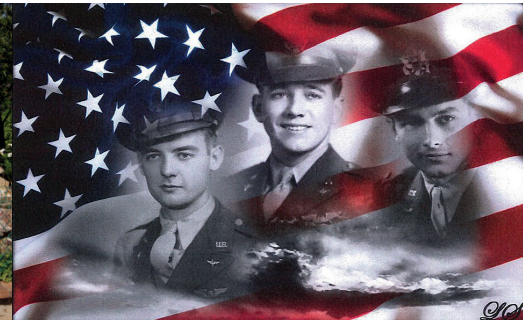
### Place Urbain Sénés ▼

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, their remains were discovered by a Pierrefeu inhabitant. After a long and tedious search, 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 was 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 in the district bridge of Pignans, the place where the chief warrant officer André HOURCADE's plane was felled in June 15, 1940.

It is a marble stele on which 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 affixing a marble plate in all the cities crossed by the liberating armies, which would thus remind the future generations, the date of the Liberation of each city. The plate of Cuers was inaugurated on August 17, 1964 and carries the following engraving :



“THE FIRST FRENCH ARMY COMMANDED BY THE GENERAL OF LATTER OF TASSIGNY, FORGED IN AFRICA AND ITALY, LANDED IN PROvence, REINFORCED BY THE FRENCH FORCES OF THE INTERIOR, TO LEAVE CUERS, ON AUGUST 17, 1944, IN HIS VICTORIOUS MARCH IN RHINE AND DANUBE ”

THE PROVENCE LANDING



## ▼ 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. It features two horns of plenty overflowing with fleshy fruits and blooming flowers, framing the communal coat of arms. The central relief is a Victory crowned with olive branches, 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.

**Charles SEASAL**, an architect from Cannes designed this monument which was inaugurated on **November 1st, 1916**. It was enriched in **1919**. Then, plates were added in order to pay homage to the "Dead for the Fatherland" of the two world wars and marking the places where the valiant Cuersoises perished.



## LA LONDE LES MAURES

On June 25, 1940, when the Armistice was announced, La Londe was relieved. Marshal Petain resisted for as long as possible, before suffering the weight of the occupation, first the Italians and then the Germans from August 1943. While the Nazis settled in and damaged some parts of the Pascalette or Bormettes Castle. The resistance became stronger and impatient as the alerts sounded. At the same time as the bombings 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 had 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 taking 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 men are killed or wounded. On the evening of **August 19**, they arrived in Cuers in order to seize Fort Coudon which they take on the 21st and open the road to the French troops for the Liberation of Toulon. In a week **Captain DUCOURNAU** achieved three brilliant actions.



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

On **August 17**, Sergent Stanley Bender performed an act of bravery in the town: *"Under a rain of fire, he made it to a machine gun that he put out of commission. Then, he fought himself a path through the [...] combat zone towards a second machine gun. He led his group to destroy 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 waited for the arrival of the US tanks and on the morning of **August 18th**, he crossed 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 the Ain. On **July 13, 1944**, during an ambush on the occupying army in the commune of Songieu (01), the guerrillas were spotted by the Nazis. **Eugene OSWALD** and two comrades from Haute-Savoie were shot dead.

**Pierre RIVAUT**, a worker at the Bormettes factory, left the village to escape the S.T.O and joined the maquis. On **July 20**, he was taken prisoner by the Nazis with nine other "Francs-Tireurs" and "Partisans Français" (F.T.PF), after being tortured, he was shot with his comrades at the edge of the Asse de Blieux, in the town of Senez (04).

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



## 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**, the owner of the land, accedes to the request of **General Diégo BROSSET** who commands the 1st Free French Division that the bodies of 117 officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers on the 298 of this unit who perished between La Londe and Le Pradet, be buried there.

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

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

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

Most of the 1st DFL soldiers' bodies 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 fought and sometimes died for France.  
(Leaflet available at the Tourist Office and online itinerary on [www.cirkwi.com](http://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](mailto: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





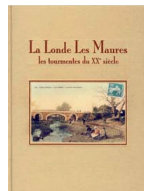
## The Publications

### « 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 » .

En vente à l'Office de Tourisme, en Mairie ou par l'intermédiaire de l'association ALPHA.

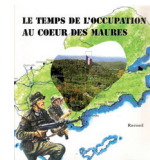


### « Ouvriers de la première heure »

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](http://www.le-lavandou.fr))

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# MÉDITERRANÉE PORTE DES MAURES TOURISME

La Londe les Maures, Cuers, Collobrières, Pierrefeu du Var, Bormes les Mimosas, Le Lavandou

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