

The McClintock Letter

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Two Hundred Thirty-Two Years Ago Today – June 14, 1777



Our National Flag Day Legend . . .

- ⌘ During the Revolutionary War, several patriots made flags for our new nation. Among them were Cornelia Bridges, Elizabeth (Betsy) Ross, and Rebecca Young, all of whom were from Pennsylvania, and John Shaw of Annapolis, Maryland.
- ⌘ As the legend goes, it was George Washington, George Ross, and Robert Morris, all members of the Continental Congress, who asked Betsy Ross to sew the first American flag in the spring of 1776. The young widow was in her 20's when she completed our first flag. (See below *The Birth of Old Glory*, by Edward Percy Moran, depicting the presentation by Ross of the flag to General Washington.) What may be interesting to learn is where Morgan



believed this event to have happened? The 'room' you see in his painting is certainly not at 239 Arch Street in Philadelphia. There is no place in the Betsy Ross House that comes near comparison.

- ⌘ The first "official" Flag Day was celebrated on June 14, 1877 - the flag's centennial. Rutherford B. Hayes was President.
- ⌘ On June 14, 1898, a campaign was launched to have at least two million Americans donate dimes to the Betsy Ross Memorial Association to help convert the house from a time-worn building into a national shrine. If you made such a donation you received a copy of Charles H. Weisgerber's painting *Birth of Our Nation's Flag*. Weisgerber's picture was also made into penny-postcards as seen here.



- ⌘ On May 30, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation that called for an annual nationwide observance of Flag Day on June 14.
- ⌘ No action was taken by Congress until it officially recognized Flag Day in 1949 when President Harry Truman signed the National Flag Day Bill. Sixty years ago, today!



The following tongue-in-cheek look at Flag Day should help you smile.

In the *American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940* you will find entertaining examples of incidences concerning all kinds of Americans in all kinds of American situations - Flag Day is no exception. Written in the American vernacular, the following is a transcript of a conversation that occurred between **Mr. George Richmond** and a **Mr. Davis** near Richmond, Virginia. The scene is in the showroom of a gas station along a busy highway, circa 1938 . . .

. . . as **George Richmond** enters the gas station in which he spends much of his time these days, he says, "Why ain't you got your flag out? You know today is Flag Day, don't you?"

"I guess the boss forgot to buy a flag, George," says **Mr. Davis**, the station attendant. "And even if we had one, we ain't got no place to put it."

Richmond: "That's a fine state of affairs, that is. Here they are tryin' to bring home to you people the fact that you're livin' in one of the few countries where you can draw a free breath and you don't even know it. You're supposed to have flags out all this week. Don't you know that? This is Flag Day and this is flag week. Where's your patriotism?"

Davis: "What the hell are you hollerin' about, George? You're always runnin' the country down. They can't do anything to suit you. You're worryin' about taxes and future generations and all like that. Where's your patriotism?"

Richmond: "Well, that's different. A man's got a right to criticize. That's free speech. Don't mean I ain't patriotic."



D-Day + 65 years = June 6, 2009

A Note from Ray: Over the years I have done a great deal of reading and research on Dday events and personalities. My father served in the European Theater of Operations and I've had the pleasure of knowing others who gave their youthful years to the defense of the USA. SJPC members Joe Engle and Steve Martorano included.

"Pop" is what I called my father; he liked it because that is what he called his father. My father arrived in Normandie on Dday + six = Monday, June 12th. Pop never talked much about the war, but one of his standard wise-cracks was, "Yeh, General Patton and me, we both arrived late to that battle." After being wounded in February 1944, Pop was assigned as a driver for Colonel David Flaherty, and he had a favorite story about the night that Colonel Flaherty and he literally knocked General Mark Clark to the ground (my dad always said, "on his ass") while they were all running for an air-raid shelter. Another vivid memory I have is how often Pop said, "Monday, what a way to start a week; just like June 12th."



Needless to say, last Friday, I thought of Pop and how June 12th was an exceptional day in his life and I hope that those of you who read this will stop for a minute and think of all the Americans who had such days in their lives and thank them for making our days so much better.



It is reasonable to say that an American GI who read *Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain's 1869 description of his own travels to Europe and the Holy Land, would certainly know that the line, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness," did not apply to them.

The American GIs who traveled to Europe on Tuesday, June 6, 1944, were not tourists. The armies of Nazi Germany had over-run most of Europe and parts of North Africa. It was time to say, enough is enough.

With General Dwight D. Eisenhower in command, over 175,000 Allied soldiers landed on the Normandie beaches to deliver the message that the Americans and our Allies had had all we could take of Adolph Hitler and his gang of thugs. Period.

One of the Allies in the mix that day was Private John M. Steele, a young American paratrooper from Fayetteville, North Carolina, who died of cancer in 1969 just a few days before the 25th anniversary of D-day. Many know his story from the movie, *The Longest Day*, in which he was portrayed by Red Buttons. Steele had jumped with others from the 82nd Airborne Division and before he reached the ground his silk parachute caught up on a steeple of the church in Sainte-Mère-Église, the first village in Normandie to be liberated by the Americans.

Today as you drive the single-lane roads in that tranquil part of France it is easy to recognize the great natural beauty of the region. There are clean and beautifully kept villages, all of which are decorated with summer flowers in window boxes and gardens in the town centers, as well as along rural streets and back roads. Everyone recognizes how well tended the land is. It is evident the villagers truly love their homesteads. Litter is non-existent and it is evident that great care is taken by the locals to enhance their quality of life.



It's easy to be maudlin about history, especially events in which friends or relatives were involved. We who study history can only imagine the horrors of Nazi death camps, the dreadful conditions of our own Civil War prisons or the bone-chilling cold felt by General Washington's troops at Valley Forge. America's history is full of stories like these; remember them well and perhaps learn a new one. There is no sin in looking back, but to let the events of the past devour the future is truly odious. Don't just remember; teach some one your life experiences with love, understanding and tolerance.

During our visit to Sainte-Mère-Église, Marie and I sat in a tiny café of just three tables, across the village green from the church, with an ice-cream cone in one hand and a sandwich of sweet French cheese in the other. We didn't say much to each other but I'm sure we were both thinking how lucky we were, on a warm summer day, that our part of the world was at peace.

Inside the church are stained glass windows, one of which depicts Saint Michael, the patron saint of paratroopers, and another, the Virgin Mary, surrounded by paratroopers.