



**VISITVAR**

# THE LANDING ROUTE *in Provence*



**1944-2024**

**« VAR, LAND OF FREEDOM »**



## THE LANDING IN PROVENCE

« Nancy has a stiff neck », « Gaby will lie down in the grass », « The hunter is hungry ». Cryptics, these messages nevertheless announced the landing in Provence. Code name : Operation Dragoon.

The kick-off of this naval and air operation was launched by American, British, Canadian and French troops.

The objective of the assault ? To catch the enemy in a pincer movement and force him to retreat. After Normandy, the Provence landing was the second jaw of the allied vice.

On August, 15th 1944, the allied forces, preceded by the French saboteurs of Colonel Bouvet's African commandos, helped by the action of the Resistance fighters from the Var region, were deployed on the territory.

The landing zones of the gliders and the airborne troops were concentrated at La Motte and Le Muy to surprise the enemy and prevent the deployment of German reinforcements from the east.

Almost 80 years later, the Var remembers and prepares the commemorations of the Provence Landing. Rediscover its history !



KEY FIGURES :



**450 000**  
men, including  
**250 000**  
French



**9000**  
parachutists



**2100**  
warships



**1900**  
planes and  
gliders

# LA RÉSISTANCE DU VAR LIBÉRÉ

PRIX :  
**1 Fr. 50**

MARDI  
22 Août 1944

Organe Quotidien des Mouvements Unis de Résistance

M. L. N. — Front National — Parti Socialiste — Parti Communiste — G. G. T.

RÉDACTION et ADMINISTRATION : 12, Boulevard Foch — TÉLÉPHONE 20

## Le représentant du Gouvernement provisoire de la République est arrivé dans le Var

M. Raymond Aubrac, Commissaire régional de la République et Délégué du Gouvernement provisoire de la République Française pour l'administration des territoires libérés du Midi de la France, est arrivé à Saint-Tropez et a immédiatement pris contact avec les autorités administratives du Département du Var.

Il a adressé à M. Vidal, Ingénieur en chef des Ponts et Chaussées, Préfet provisoire du Département, la lettre suivante :

« Je suis heureux de saluer, au nom du Gouvernement de la République Française, les hommes et les responsables de la Résistance de Draguignan qui ont pris la plus grande part à la libération de leur cité.

Je vous remercie d'avoir accepté les lourdes res-

ponsabilités de l'intérim des fonctions préfectorales, et j'espère que, dans quelques jours, après la libération de Toulon, nous pourrons mettre au point rapidement et à la satisfaction de tous les patriotes, l'Administration du Département.

Avant de pouvoir moi-même venir vous serrer la main, je suis retenu par la préparation des mesures à prendre pour assurer la vie des grandes cités dont nous attendons la libération.

Signé : AUBRAC. »

Tard dans la soirée, M. Aubrac est arrivé à Draguignan où il s'est entretenu avec M. le Préfet provisoire et différentes personnalités administratives et Résistantes avant de regagner Saint-Tropez.

## L'Enseignement et la Résistance

Parmi les grands corps de la Nation, l'Université française a particulièrement souffert de l'oppression et de l'arbitraire, depuis 1940 et l'installation rue de Grenelle du ministre Abel Bonnard. Le corps enseignant, sans haine mais désireux de justice, attend que celle-ci châtie les coupables et reconnaisse le dévouement et le courage des meilleurs de ses membres.

Malgré le danger des révocations, des sanctions, des déplacements, l'esprit du corps enseignant demeura toujours fidèle à l'idéal de liberté dont il était nourri. Malgré les calamités de 1940, un patriotisme fervent vivait au cœur de tous, patriotisme qui, durant quatre ans, et suivant les conditions où chacun se trouvait placé, se traduisit en actions héroïques ou en travail patient et secret.

Nous pensons à vous, Professeurs et Instituteurs du Var, membres des F.F.L. Chefs de Groupe, Officiers de réserve de l'Armée secrète. Nous n'oublierons pas le frémissement de vos âmes, vos révoltes contre l'oppresseur, votre désir d'action. Vos faits d'armes seront rendus publics et vos élèves pourront s'instruire aux pages du livre d'Or qu'aurait écrit leurs maîtres glorieux.

Nous saluons aussi les institutrices qui accomplissent de nombreuses et dangereuses missions, sans défaillance et avec leur ardent et secret courage.

Nous savons comment les Instituteurs désignés pour l'Allemagne eurent toute facilité pour échapper au départ et reçurent des services compétents une aide pécuniaire et administrative précieuse.

Un accord tacite, une communauté reconfortante de





## HISTORICAL REMINDER

Operation Dragoon kick off was **launched 70 days after the Normandy landing**. The operation involved a **naval and an air assault**. If the German troops expected the landing to be imminent, they were unaware of the date and were surprised on the night of August, 14th 1944.

That night, the French group of commandos, also known as the « **Romeo** » force, led by **Lieutenant-Colonel Bouvet**, arrived on both sides of Cap Nègre in Lavandou. The objective, after having climbed cliffs of more than a hundred metres high : **to destroy the German batteries** !

For their part, the American and Canadian commandos of **Colonel Walker's « Sitka » force** approached the island of Levant and the island of Port-Cros (off the coast of Hyères) with the help of rubber dinghies. Their mission was to **destroy forts and cannons** that threatened the landing.

On the island of Levant, the battery they were trying to destroy, installed near the Titan lighthouse, was ultimately a dummy.

Further east, the « **Rosie** » force, the French naval assault group led by **Captain Seriot**, landed on the beaches of Antheor and Trayas in Saint-Raphaël to the Pointe de l'Esquillon but an undetected minefield was set up by the enemy, killing a dozen soldiers. This was **one of the major failures of Operation Dragoon**.

Far from the coast, **the parachuting of the 7,300 men of the 1st Anglo-American Airborne Division** of General Frederick was concentrated between La Motte and Le Muy, thus preventing the influx of enemy reinforcements from the west.

At 8 a.m., the « **Kodak** » force surged onto the beaches between Cavalaire and Saint-Raphaël. This force was divided into three assault groups : the « **Camel** », « **Delta** » and « **Alpha** » forces.

## THE BALANCE SHEET

Provence was **liberated in less than two weeks** whereas the estimated duration of the operation was two months. In total, from the landing on the Provençal coast to the reassembly of the troops in the interior of the country, **Operation Anvil-Dragoon mobilised 900,000 men** and lasted over three months.



## THE LANDING BEACHES



Rayol-Canadel-sur-Mer



Sainte-Maxime

Today popular with bathers, yesterday a high place of landing...

### SAINTE-MAXIME

The Nartelle beach in Sainte-Maxime was the **landing point** of the 45th American infantry division (D.I.) : the Delta force.

The group of the 1st French division, commanded by General Sudre, landed the following night.

### CAVALAIRE-SUR-MER RAYOL-CANADEL-SUR-MER

The group of **African commandos** arrived on the Canadel beach on the night of August, 14th to 15th. Their mission ? **Destroy the batteries that threatened the beaches** on which the Allied troops were planning to land.

On the beach of Cavalaire, the troops of the 3rd American infantry division (D.I.) arrived. Hitler, in front of the allied breakthrough, will say : « *This is the darkest day of my life* ».



Saint-Raphaël

### SAINT-RAPHAËL

**20,000 Texas GIs** of the 36th division landed on the Dramont beach, near Saint-Raphaël.

The wreck of the allied ship, the remains of the artillery battery and the commemorative plaque testify to those decisive days that **marked the end of the conflict**.

### > RAMATUELLE

In the southern part of **Pampelonne** beach, the vines and reed hedges were destroyed to **build an airstrip** in order to install a link with Corsica and North Africa.

It had taken **many years to reconstitute** the vineyards, clear the beaches of mines and rehabilitate the roads.

### > SAINT-TROPEZ

The American 3rd infantry division set foot, on the morning of 15th August, on this vast beach which was to become a **major landing site**.

Nearby, the **airfield of Ramatuelle** was built with a bulldozer in a vineyard in only 48 hours. **It allowed the first allied planes to take off.**



### > LA CROIX-VALMER

In the early hours of August, 15th 1944, **the Allied troops arrived on the beach** of La Croix Valmer, today known as the « landing beach ».

**Strategically placed**, the beach has been used as a landing place for the troops who headed later for the cities of Toulon and Marseille.



## SITES AND MEMORY PLACES



Draguignan

### > THE AMERICAN CEMETERY OF DRAGUIGNAN

Managed by the American Battle Monuments Commission, the cemetery of Draguignan, also known as the « Rhône American Cemetery », is a reminder of the importance of airborne operations. It contains the graves of **861 American soldiers, 62 of whom are unknown**.



Toulon

### > THE MONT FARON MEMORIAL IN TOULON

On the Mont Faron, the memorial of the landing and the Liberation in Provence overlooks Toulon and its harbour. This **high place of national memory** is **accessible by aerial cable car** and offers an exceptional view.



Saint-Raphaël

### > THE MITAN PLATEAU AT LA MOTTE

The Mitran Memorial at La Motte commemorates the parachuting of American and British troops on August, 15th 1944 at 2.30 am, **making La Motte the first liberated village in Provence**. **350 combat gliders** carrying men and equipment were towed by C47 Dakota aircraft launched from bases in Italy.



La Motte

### > THE NATIONAL NECROPOLIS OF RAYOL-CANADEL-SUR-MER

Covering an area of 220 sqm, this cemetery is the **smallest of the French national cemeteries** and contains the graves of 13 French soldiers who died alongside their leader while climbing the cliffs of Cap Nègre.



Rayol-Canadel-sur-Mer



### > ALSO TO BE DISCOVERED ...

- National Navy Museum  
📍 Toulon
- Memory trail of the Provence Landing  
📍 La-Londe-les-Maures
- Navy Troops Museum 📍 Fréjus *Reopening on September, 1st 2022 after a major renovation*
- Artillery Museum  
📍 Draguignan



## THEY PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE

There is little or no evidence today to suggest that they were at the heart of the events, and yet...



### > CHÂTEAU VALBOURGES - LA MOTTE

The plains and the large path made of plane trees, easily visible from the air, were chosen to allow American paratroopers and gliders to set foot on French soil.

For four days, **the château housed an emergency hospital**; the cellar concealed a radio centre.

A commemoration at the château is held every year on August, 15th and 16th in honour of the soldiers and their families.

### > CHÂTEAU SAINTE-ROSELINE - LES-ARCS-SUR-ARGENS

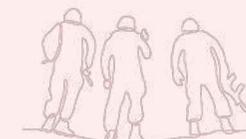
On August, 15th 1944, the cloister of the Château Sainte-Roseline was **transformed into a field hospital for American parachutists**. Today, a marble commemorative plaque on the wall bears witness to this.



### > MORE CONTENT...

#### SCAN ME !

Find all the videos on the landing





# THE PROVENCE LANDING AS IF YOU WERE THERE

Soon, go back in time thanks to « **La Route du Débarquement de Provence** » new app ! Dive into the heart of the Provence Landing thanks to archive images that are superimposed on reality.

A 360° vision in «hybrid reality », to know everything about those who liberated the Var.



**SMARTPHONE APP AVAILABLE FROM 2024**



**VARTOURISME**

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