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The Little Paper That Comes In The Mail

“Freedom Isn’t Cheap”: About Our Town’s Own Bill Moore Speaks with Students about World War II

By Michael Vandenberg

“You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months,” General Dwight D. Eisenhower said to the Allied Expeditionary Force.

“In the company with our brave Allies and brothers in arms on other fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.” And with those brave words, Eisenhower readied his men for the largest amphibious invasion in history.

D-Day was, of course, a decisive victory for the Allies. In the days and months afterward, the Omaha site, among others, was built up and established as a major beachhead for the Allied cause. That’s where Bill Moore comes in.

Chances are, you may already know Bill if you’ve advertised in our publications before. He’s the salesman always carrying around the smile, quick wit, and stories. I met him once or twice before this project, never knowing his veteran status and the details of his time in 1944-45 Europe. I learned about the D-Day and Omaha Beach aspects of the war from the same place most people have: history books.

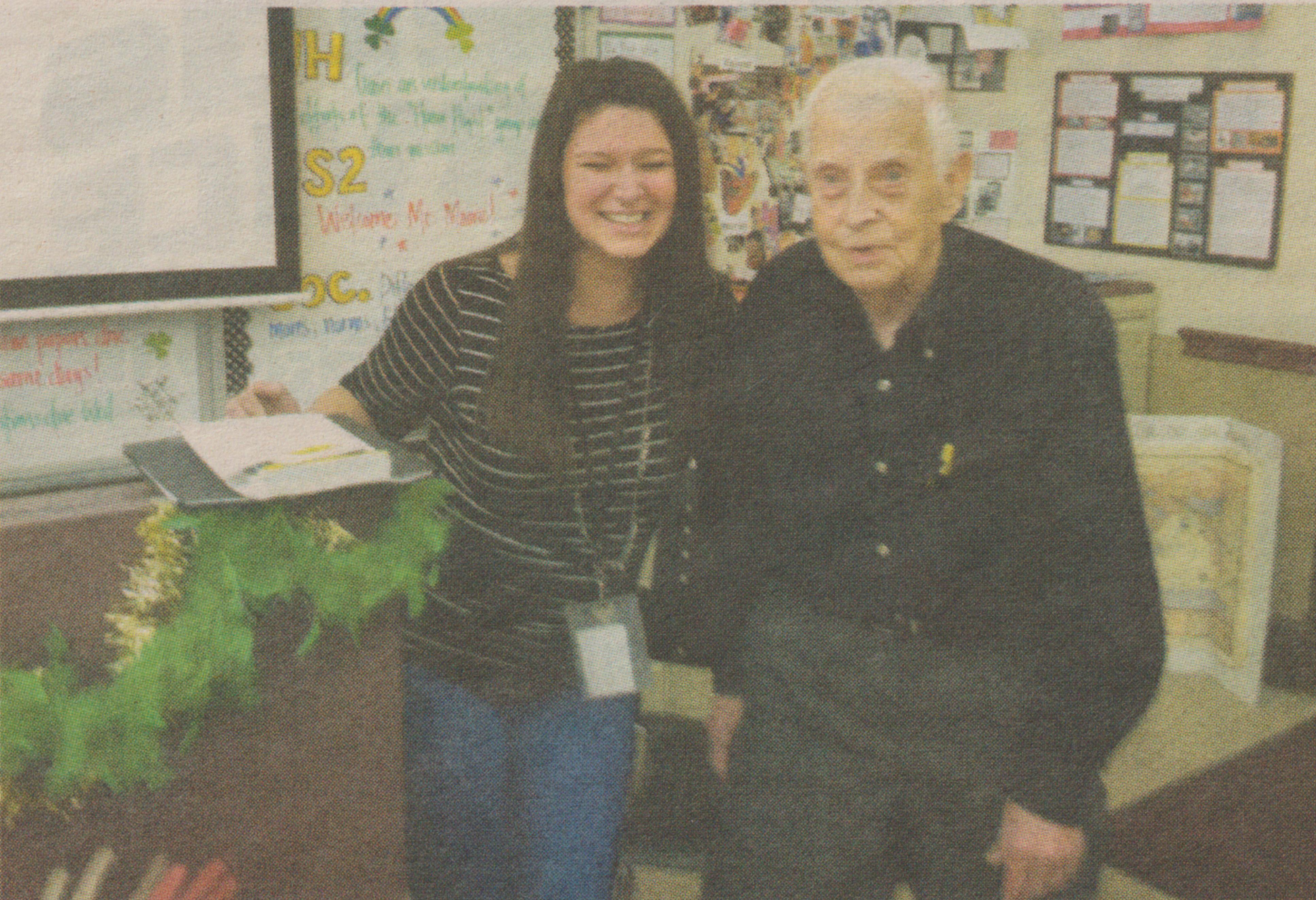
Not that historians don’t do a good job explaining the main details of that time and

place, but they gloss over, “the little things that people don’t talk about,” as Bill says. It’s those smaller tidbits and anecdotes that help shape an event and make it more personal to those who were never there.

Melanie Veilleux, a teacher at the Middlesex County Academy for Allied Health and Biomedical Sciences in Woodbridge, sensed that disconnect in her Honors US History 2 students when she taught the subject. The school is a part of the county vocational system, with a focus on the health and science fields. Students can attend by application only, keeping enrollment down to just 210 students. Though the best and the brightest could learn World War 2 out of a book, they too often craved a personal perspective.

“So I went to my mom, who works with seniors, and said, ‘I need names,’” said Melanie. She wrote letters to any World War 2 veteran who turned up. Bill Moore answered her back, more than willing to present his personal experiences of Omaha Beach post-invasion and the remaining days of World War 2 to her students.

Over the course of two days, on March 9th and 10th, Bill spoke on his personal war experiences. The result was a history lesson that, because of its exclusive nature, you literally can’t get from anyone else. Attending on the second day, the students and I were treated to an engaging presentation.



Melanie Veilleux, a teacher at the Middlesex County Academy for Allied Health and Biomedical Sciences in Woodbridge, introduces Middlesex resident Bill Moore as he prepares to speak to the students about his personal World War 2 experiences.

When Bill first walked in, he asked the class for a show of hands. “Do you think the US was just in declaring war on Germany?” Although shyness was a factor in the room at first, most everyone raised their hands. The students were thus immediately engaged, giving answers about the unavoidable escalation of the war, along with the difficulty of isolationism after Pearl Harbor.

Bill went on with his perspective, having landed on Omaha Beach not long after the invasion to help set up a base of operations. Up on those tall cliffs were the apple or-

chards where the soldiers slept. Down below, the beach was a bustling operation trying to move in more troops and supplies.

Such an open area was vulnerable to strafing, which is when enemy aircraft fly low to shoot at them with machine gun fire. Bill remembers an odd defense mechanism deployed by the allies: “They had barrage balloons, probably 12 or 14 feet in length. They inflated them and attached a quarter-inch steel cable to them. Now, these balloons went up about 300 feet, and there were many of them. All over the place.”

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Another highlight included how the allies needed a place to land planes on the beach. So they actually built a landing strip with tons of shipped-in connecting metal pieces. Or how, as their theater of the war was winding down, Bill was instructed to not only drive a big truck for the first time to Lisbon to reinforce surrounded allied troops, but teach a Brooklyn guy (who had never even driven a car before) to drive one too.

When the allies were living in occupied

houses in Austria, they'd require the family to sleep in another room. In farmland, this often meant sleeping next to livestock. Bill remembers that during morning roll call, the Austrian children would try to get the soldiers to crack by making funny noises and faces. His friend gave him a good comeback that had instant success: "You live in the cellar with the cows."

It's the personal stories like these, sometimes silly, sometimes terrifying, that you



The Normandy American D-Day Cemetery in Colleville-Sur-Mer, France is situated on a cliff overlooking Omaha Beach and the English Channel.

can only gain from first-person perspective, as the children at the Academy learned. Although time is slowly taking away these storytellers, we all still can find someone connected to World War 2, whether it's one student's grandfather who was in the navy, or one teacher's father who took part in the Sicily invasion, or even my own relatives that were Holocaust survivors and grandparents who were teenagers in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands.

Then of course are those who never got a chance, like one student's great-great uncle who is buried at the American D-Day cemetery in Colleville, along with many of Bill's acquaintances. We respect these heroes' sacrifices by learning from the survivors who were there to tell us about them.

Survivors like Bill, who can tell his story with a good attitude and humor. "What was your proudest moment?" asked a student. "Coming home," Bill said, relieved.



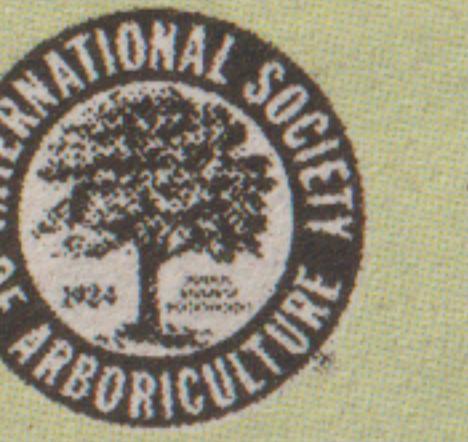
Looking down onto Omaha Beach, one of the landing beaches of the Normandy Invasion

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