American wartime history brought to life

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The project will reach out to young people and community groups through school visits and at local venues, giving talks and film shows enabling them to discover the wartime history of North Devonand gain a greater understanding of wartime life and the experiences of local people and American troops in times of conflict.

Project activities will culminate in a two day 'living history' exhibition open to the public at Woolacombe on 31st August and 1st September 2013.

The US Army Assault Training Centre was established on 1st September 1943 to teach and train American soldiers the tactics of amphibious assault in preparation for D-Day, 6th June 1944. During its six month existence over 10,000 troops passed through three week training courses before putting their new found skills into practice on the beaches of Normandy.

Colonel Paul W. Thompson, then commandant, said: “If the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, then the Assault Training Centre contributed in no small measure to the success of D-Day.”

The arrival of American forces in North Devon had a significant impact upon local communities and this project and its finale aims to bring to life those dark and uncertain days with the help of living history groups of American soldiers, their vehicles and equipment. Explosive demonstrations and vehicle convoys will take place, supported by film shows and exhibition stands of local attractions and national charities; a replica landing craft, constructed as part of the project, will be on display and. experts will be on hand to answer questions, all helping to create an enjoyable and educational event.

Project leader, Richard Bass, said: “We must keep memories alive of those brave young men who were so far from home fighting a war for a freedom that we now all enjoy. This project will bring to life North Devon’s vital contribution to the Second World War for the enjoyment, entertainment and education of several generations.”

Commenting on the grant award, Richard Bellamy, HLF's acting Head of South West, said: “Advances in technology in the last few decades have made the world seem a smaller place and we are all now much more aware of each others lifestyles and cultures, yet in the 1940s the arrival of American troops in North Devon must have seemed fascinating and even exotic to the local community. We were delighted to be able to support this project, which will help local people and visitors alike to relive both the excitement and the trepidation of those difficult but decisive wartime days.”

Notes to editors

Braunton and District Museum were successful in securing a previous Heritage Lottery Fund grant to produce a DVD illustrating American wartime activities. That project involved young people and those that remembered the Americans, weaving a fascinating storyline of recollection and exploration.

Further information

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