

Community band members to play for D-Day concert



FROM LEFT (front row) Paul Erickson, Deanne Lehner, Linda Sole, (back row) Paul Sebesta, Jim Lehner, Irv Milheim and Wendell Tharpe are members of the Flathead Community Band that will be traveling to Europe to play in a concert for the 70th anniversary of D-Day. (Patrick Cote/Daily Inter Lake)

Musicians head to France for June 6 event

By **LYNNETTE HINTZE**
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Seven members of the Flathead Valley Community Band are headed to France for a concert — but it's not just any concert.

The local musicians are joining about 100 community band members from throughout the United States to perform a memorial concert to commemorate the 70th anniversary of D-Day on June 6.

On that day in 1944, Allied forces

invaded northern France, storming the beaches at Normandy in a pivotal battle that led the way for the eventual liberation of Europe from Nazi occupation during World War II.

The concert at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial will feature a wide array of largely patriotic pieces such as "Stars and Stripes Forever," "Bugler's Holiday" and "Chimes of Liberty," according to Allen Slater, director of the Flathead Valley Community Band. He's not among the musicians

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who will play with the memorial band, but he has been assisting those who are going.

"Some of the tunes we did at our spring concert are some of the numbers they'll be doing," Slater said.

Col. Arnald D. Gabriel will direct the memorial band.

The Flathead band members participating in the historic event are Paul Erickson, clarinet; Irv Milheim, tuba; Linda Sole, bass clarinet; Paul Sebesta, French horn; Wendell Tharpe, trombone; Jim Lehner, trombone; and Deanne Lehner, clarinet.

Erickson, who served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War era, said band members received the music some time ago and have been practicing the 15 pieces. Their last rehearsal was Wednesday night.

The band members are leaving for Europe at varying intervals. Some are combining sightseeing tours with their trips. The musicians are paying their own way.

The memorial band will hold its first practice in Paris on Tuesday. Many of the band members, such as Erickson, had fathers who served in World War II and consider it an honor to be a part of the 70th anniversary commemoration

of D-Day. His father worked with radio communications in Greenland during the war.

According to the National World War II Museum historic documents, planning for the

invasion of Northwest Europe began in 1943, and in the months leading up to D-Day commanders worked around the clock planning strategic and tactical operations.

The D-Day landing included more than 5,000 ships, 11,000 airplanes and more than 150,000 servicemen. Allied forces suffered an estimated 10,000 casualties in the invasion.