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AS PART OF ITS ONE SQUARE MILE: HERITAGE ON OUR DOORSTEP PROJECT, CHILDREN FROM ST JOHN'S GREEN PRIMARY SCHOOL HAVE LEARNT ABOUT TWO SEMINAL SECOND WORLD WAR BATTLES THAT DEFINED AND SET THE STANDARDS OF AIRBORNE FORCES TO THE PRESENT DAY 16 AIR ASSAULT BRIGADE

The two-year long project funded by the National Heritage lottery fund research heritage on the school's doorstep, that includes the building and development of Merville Barracks, and the basing of the Brigade in Colchester since 1999; the 21st century home of airborne forces.

On the 79th anniversary of D-Day, 6 June 2023, 90 Year 5 pupils visited Merville Barracks. The children were shown around the camp's Dakota gate guardian, the iconic transport aircraft used in Second World War airborne operations and heard from curators from Airborne Assault - The Museum of the Parachute Regiment & Airborne Forces about the attack on the Merville Gun Battery in Normandy by the 9th (Essex) Parachute Battalion, from which Merville Barracks takes its name; learnt about Pegasus, the defining emblem of British airborne forces since their formative days; watched British Army Band Colchester

rehearsing for the Brigade's Freedom of Colchester parade that took place on Thursday 22nd June which was the anniversary of Winston Churchill's Second World memo to raise a force of 5,000 parachute troops viewed as the for the airborne forces; and as a STEM activity learnt about the mechanical engineering skills of 8 (Para) Fd Coy REME. The visit ended with the soldiers, schoolchildren and staff joining together at the Dakota for a wreath laying ceremony remembering the bravery and sacrifice of those who fought and died on D-Day.

In September on the 79th anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem, pupils from the school joined the Lord-Lieutenant of Essex, Jennifer Tolhurst, and other civic dignitaries including soldiers from the Garrison at a commemoration service at the City's war memorial. Along with other local schools, the children laid sunflowers in remembrance mirroring the tradition

of the Dutch flower children who tend and laid flowers at the graves in Arnhem and the surrounding area. The service was themed around rescue, and Operation Berlin which was the name given to the dangerous withdrawal by remaining airborne forces from the Oosterbeek perimeter who in the dark followed a path marked by white ribbon made from their parachutes to the river Rhine.

On Monday 25 September, the same pupils who visited the barracks in June, and now in Year 6, took part in an inaugural 'Battle of Arnhem - White Ribbon Mile' trail walk around points of military interest in Castle Park. These included the tree lined Brigade Walk, Regimental and Association memorial stones, Tommies Wood, Lower Castle Park where Royal gun salutes are fired by 7 Para RHA and ending at the war memorial with the airborne prayer and moment of silence and reflection. The walk designed by the High Steward, Sir Bob Russell,



was guided by the Garrison Commander, Lt Col Ed Rankin, and GSM, Mr Lamont. The walk begun with a special video message from the Mayor of Renkum, Agnes Schaap. In 2019, Colchester signed a Bond of Friendship with Dutch district of Renkum including the town of Oosterbeek where the 1st Airborne Division landed and made their final stand until the withdrawal on the night of 25/26 September 1944.





PHOTOS BY: One Square Mile: Heritage on our Doorstep. St. John's Green Primary School; Photographers Adrian Rushton and Laura Davison.