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Hello Friends!

We hope this finds you in a cool-ish place with hydration close by!

The museum staff has had a busy summer so far with Cursive Camp, interns and intern projects and donations, in addition to our day-to-day work. Cursive Camp was a big success, if you haven't seen all the photos on our social media, do have a look. We want to thank our generous #GivingTuesday donors

again, as well as the local foundation who contributed funding--all of these donations allowed us to keep camp FREE for all the campers this summer.

If you missed our first summer concert with Billy Michael, you have two more opportunities to join us! Billy will be performing this Friday, July 28, at 6pm. Due to the extreme heat we'll be holding this concert inside Huntington Hall. All are welcome and the concert runs from 6-7. This month's theme is "As Seen On T.V."--the terrific songs of the weekly western TV series from the late 1950s through early 60s, where we met the cowboys on our Motorolas! If you want to arrive a little early you'll have time to view our exhibit, "The Art of Danbury Photography."

The Danbury Museum is once again participating in Governor Lamont's CT Summer @ the Museum program. Thanks to a grant from CT Humanities and CT Office of the Arts, all tours (both the Ives Birthplace and the historic buildings on our Main Street campus) are FREE through September 2. We advise registering in advance as these tours do fill up. Go to our [Eventbrite](#) page and book your tour!

Please note that during the first two weeks of August, museum staff will be working offsite on various digitization and other projects so the museum will be open to the public for limited hours. Tours, research, and the "Art of Danbury Photography" exhibit will be available Fridays, August 4 and 11, and Saturdays, August 5 and 12. We look forward to sharing some of this digitization work this autumn!

We're so pleased to have an essay from John O'Donnell once again; this month he writes about a literal local hero, Joseph P. Vaghi, Jr of Bethel.

Keep well and we'll look forward to seeing you all here again next month.

Brigid Guertin

Patrick Wells

Michele Lee Amundsen



**Music in the Museum
Gardens with
Billy Michael!**

Friday, June 30 5:30 pm
Friday, July 28, 6:00 pm
Friday, August 25, 6:00 pm

Bring your friends and lawn
chairs and join us for music under
the tent in the museum's garden.

DanburyMuseum.org

Join us under the tent for music with Billy Michael!



Joseph Peter Vaghi, who was believed to be the youngest Navy beachmaster on Omaha Beach on D-Day. He is shown here with French villagers in the days after the invasion. (Family Photo)

Local Hero

By John O'Donnell

Recently a good friend of mine, who knows my keen interest in World War Two, sent me an article from the *New Yorker* magazine archives by A. J. Liebling, who was one of the premier writers for the magazine. In July 1944 he published an article entitled *Cross Channel Trip* which was about his visit to the troops on June 5th and after who were preparing for Operation Overlord, the D-Day invasion of Normandy. Liebling boarded an infantry landing craft designated LCIL 88 (landing craft infantry large) with thirty odd members of the “ambiguous farce” as the amphibious force, with an impressive taste for wordplay, styled themselves. Liebling wrote a masterful article and interviewed members of the group. I was enjoying the article and then he wrote about a man named Joe Vaghi who was from Danbury and looked like a football player. I almost

fell out of my chair while reading this. I decided to investigate the career of Joe Vaghi and stumbled upon an extraordinary story of heroism which I was unaware of.

Joseph P. Vaghi Jr. was actually born in Bethel, Connecticut, on June 27, 1920. He was the son of Joseph P. Vaghi Sr. who had immigrated to the United States from Italy and had a prosperous business in wood working with a specialty in cabinet making. He and his wife, Battistina, ultimately had nine children. They had six boys (Joe was the third) and three girls. They lived in a thirteen-room house on Elizabeth Street. Joe described (in his interview with Lynn Novick for *The War* documentary of Ken Burns) growing up in Bethel as glorious. He had extremely positive memories of his youth there.

As Liebling noticed correctly, not only did Vaghi look like a football player, but he actually was one. After graduation from Bethel High School in 1940 he went to Providence College in Rhode Island on a football scholarship and was a good student as well. After the debacle at Pearl Harbor, Joe, who had two brothers in the Army already, enrolled in the Navy in June 1942. He was allowed to remain at Providence until December 1942 when he graduated.

Upon graduation he was sent to the University of Notre Dame to attend midshipmen's school and then after graduation he was sent to England for the lead up to Overlord. Before he left to go overseas he was given leave and his parents had a dinner party for him before his departure. Among the guests that day were Marian Anderson and her husband Orpheus Fisher.

When he arrived in England, he hoped to be the skipper of a landing craft. But seasickness prevented him from doing this,

so he became a beachmaster instead. These were a group of unsung heroes who were critical to launching a successful invasion of Omaha Beach. On the journey to Omaha, he played poker and stopped playing after a five aces hand won him a large pot. He was unfortunately seasick on the voyage over. When he went ashore on Omaha, at the age of twenty-three, Vaghi was the youngest of the four beachmasters. His challenge was to lead a company of men, vehicles, and supplies from their landing craft across three hundred yards of sand to the dune line while being fired upon by German artillery and machine guns. In the breast pocket of his waterproof overalls was his guide--a meticulously detailed, two-sided map that described the beach topography of the Normandy coast including tidal charts and water depths, sand dunes, hedges, houses, cemeteries, and villages.

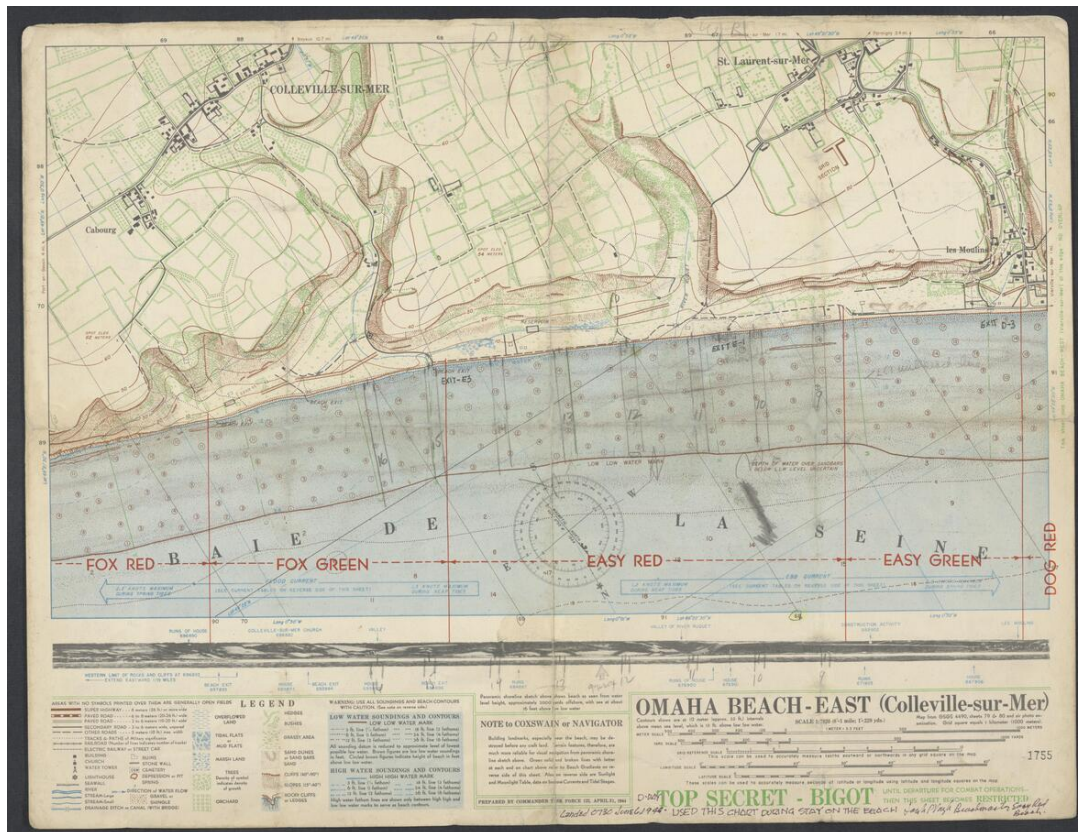
Omaha Beach was a very difficult landing. The United States suffered two thousand four hundred casualties on the first day which was the highest for any of the five invasion beaches. Joe Vaghi was knocked unconscious by a German artillery shell and when he came to his clothes were on fire and he was wounded in the knee. But he kept at it, struggling to remove cans of gasoline from a burning jeep before they could explode and kill the wounded lying around him. An officer told him to tell the men with his megaphone to get off the beach which he proceeded to do. One of the men used a Bangalore torpedo to blast a hole in an obstacle and they were able to get off the beach. Joe remained in Normandy until June 28 and celebrated his 24th birthday on the beach on June 27. When he initially landed he met a fellow Providence student, Edward Gallogly who asked him "Joe, what the hell are you doing here?" Mr. Gallogly became Rhode Island's lieutenant governor and chief judge of the Rhode Island Family Court.

For his heroic behavior on Omaha Beach, Joe was awarded the Bronze Star. He studied architecture at the Catholic University of America on the GI Bill. He became a very successful architect and lived in Kensington, Maryland. Like many veterans he was quiet about his World War Two experiences. But his participation in the Fiftieth Anniversary of D-Day changed all of that. He was invited to accompany President Clinton to Normandy on the Queen Elizabeth II as the United States Navy Representative. This opened the floodgates for recognition of what he had done on Omaha. He was included in Ken Burns' documentary *The War* and was articulate, knowledgeable, and modest during his interview. When asked by Lynn Novick if he was afraid as D-Day approached, he said he was certain that God would see him through. He had grown up in a faith filled Catholic family and "it wasn't a talking religion; it was a living religion." The other reason he cited for not being afraid was the superb training that he received while preparing in England for Overlord. He said that when you hit the beach you followed what your training had taught you and it acted as a buffer and it made the experience palatable.

The importance of Omaha Beach to Joe Vaghi can be gleaned from this quote of his in telling his son what to do with his D-Day map which he had kept in a filing cabinet in his basement. He told his son: "you know, Joe, the map is the most important thing in my life next to Agnes (his wife) and you boys (he had four sons). I'll give it to you because I know you'll do the best thing." His sons donated the map which never left his side, as well as Lieutenant-Commander Vaghi's log book with the personal information about his men, letters, and photographs to the Library of Congress.

(Editor's note: The Joseph P Vaghi collection can be accessed via the [Library of Congress website.](#))

John O'Donnell first became a history devotee while in elementary school. He was raised in Brooklyn and frequently went to Prospect Park which has a Revolutionary War monument. He was hooked!



D-Day Map from Joseph Peter Vaghi Collection (LOC)

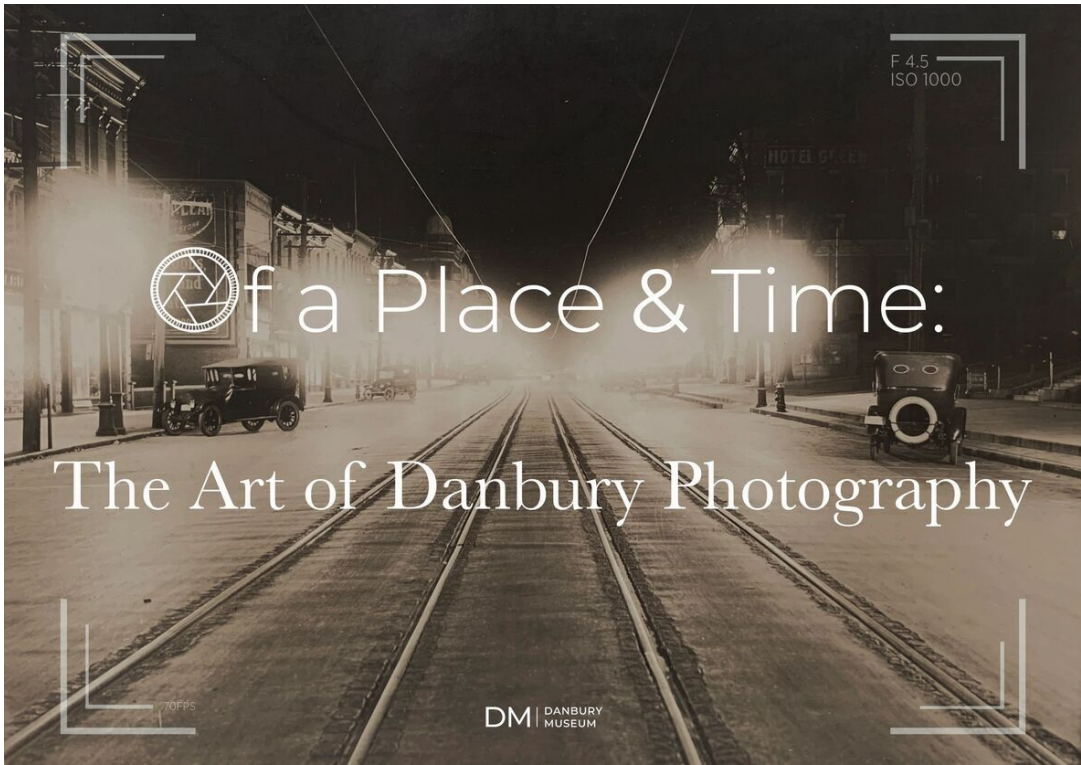


Exhibit open Wednesday through Saturday, 12-4. And visit the online extra, too!



Summer at the Museum 2023!



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