

The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent gazette

grateful

November 24, 2021



Thank you for your service

By Richard Titus

We've just spent the last month thanking our military veterans for their service. As one of those vets I say, "You're welcome." But along with this thanking of vets, there comes the glorification of war. And war is the organized slaughter of conspecifics. Who else in the animal kingdom does this? Ants, that's who. Do humans really want to be known by the company we keep? And does the reader really want to know about the "service" that you are thanking me for?

When I graduated from college, there was the draft. But only for males. So while both sexes chose the politicians who got us into wars, back then only males were drafted to fight in the wars that the politicians got us into. Male draftees with some kind of liberal arts degree would probably wind up in the Army as an infantry Second Lieutenant. With an average life expectancy in combat of 43 minutes, I defaulted to US Navy Officer Candidate School, costing me another two years of my life. And almost my life as well! In very heavy weather, my ship rolled 63 degrees and with just three more degrees of roll, would have capsized. Ship's company would have perished, totally. My duty wasn't supposed to be dangerous: we took Naval Reservists on so-called "training cruises" of fleshpots of the Carribean. Nobody was supposed to die, but "s___ happens," as they say.

A total waste of my time and taxpayer dollars. I was bored silly and tried whatever to get off my ship. I remember trying to trade with an officer whose ship was going to Korea where the war was, and applying for deep sea divers school. Then in Washington I met a young lady who worked on the Ensign/LT(jg) desk of Naval Personnel. Thanks to her, I spent my last year

in Washington trying to find spies in the US Navy Bureau of Ordnance. Sound exciting? It wasn't. Bureaucracies are bureaucratic, no matter what they're working on.

Other than once almost dying, I spent almost four years being bored and waiting for it to end so I could resume my life.

Bottom line: I believe I merited your thanks, but maybe not for the reasons that you had in mind. 🍷



Black Friday

By Joe de Angelis

The expression Black Friday originated in Philadelphia in the late 1950s, and initially referred to the heavy and disruptive pedestrian and vehicle traffic in city center that occurred the day after Thanksgiving. It may or may not have grown out of the Italian expression "I see black," which was used to refer to any and all of life's negative events.

However, the use of the term began to spread outside the Philadelphia area around in the mid 1970s. Eventually, over the years, an alternative meaning was applied to the expression as a corollary was drawn between the heavy pedestrian and vehicle traffic and retail sales nationwide. Traditionally, retailers operated at a financial loss, or in accounting jargon, operated "in the red" from January through November of each year. The expression Black Friday was then used to indicate the point at which retailers begin to turn a profit for the year, or operate "in the black." 🍷

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photos, book reviews,
commentary, memoirs,
essays, analysis, poems,
suggestions, club news,
recipes, and free ads
A twice-monthly publica-
tion for the residents, by
the residents*

Cover photo by Miriam Rosenthal

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ESTATE SALE
UNIT 1-1015
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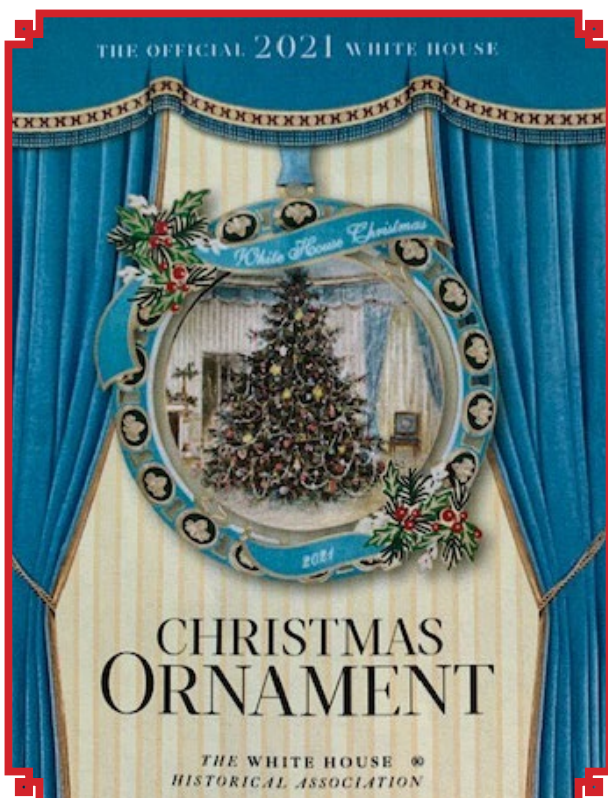


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Pet Club president Lauren Pierce with Lily (left) and Pumpkin

Photo by Dian McDonald



Montebello Music Club

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Thank you for your continued support

My journey with a Great American

Gen. Colin Luther Powell USA (Ret.)

By Col. Frank Francois III USA (Ret.)

It was a warm afternoon in April 1968 shortly after Dr. Martin Luther King was killed. I, along with six other African-American officers, were reassigned to the Pentagon in various jobs. I was assigned from Ft. Monroe Army base in Hampton, Va., to the Pentagon in less than two days.

There were African-American officers assigned to other military bases in the Washington, D.C., area, but no African-American Army officers in the Pentagon except BG Roscoe Cartwright. Two of the African-Americans assigned to the area was then-Lt. Col. Harry Brooks and Major Colin Powell. Brooks and I were in the Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, Ks., (1966 long course class). One Sunday afternoon, Brooks and his wife, Doris, invited me over to their house in Dale City for dinner.

After dinner, Brooks called Major Colin Powell, who lived nearby, up to his house to meet me. We chatted, had a drink, and I invited Colin to my new house when it was completed in Hayfield Farm. After my house was finished and my family moved up from Hampton, I invited Colin and Alma, his wife, over for my wife's favorite New Orleans dish, gumbo. Colin wanted to see houses in Hayfield Farm, where several military families who worked in the Pentagon lived. My family was the first African-American family to live there out of more than 2,100 white military and civilian families who worked at Ft.

Belvoir, other bases in Virginia, and the Pentagon. He was impressed, considering the commute he was making to his job at the Pentagon from his house in Dale City.

The second encounter I had with Colin is when I was selected to attend the National War College at Fort McNair in Washington, D.C. Colin was appointed to be my "turtle." He took

master's degree program there and recommended that I should do the same. I did as he suggested and got my master's degree from GWU.

My third encounter with Colin was when I was promoted to full Colonel and Colin was promoted to Lt. Colonel. I called him because my boss, LtG Arthur Gregg, who was the first African-American promoted to lieutenant colonel in the Army, wanted to meet Colin. He came up and I introduced him to Gen. Gregg, who at the time was the J4 (Logistics) in the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (OJCS). It was a good meeting and of course, the OJCS operation was discussed.

My fourth encounter with Colin was at a funeral service at the Ft. Myer chapel. We sat together and spoke about his new assignment as the 5th Corps Commander in Germany. I told him that my daughter and son-in-law were stationed in Germany and in the 5th Corps. He said that he would visit them. And he did. A 3-star general visiting a young captain in his company command was unbelievable. His battalion commander and others with General Powell came to James's company. James then called me and asked me to not tell any more top generals to visit because it caused too much commotion, briefings and tours that were not on the schedule. I agreed and he was not visited by a high-level officer. But because of Gen. Powell, he became the junior aide to the Commander-in-Chief (CINC) of Europe before his tour was up.

My fifth encounter was when my daughter-in-law, Diana, my son Frank IV's wife, both of whom were Air Force graduates and stationed in Germany,



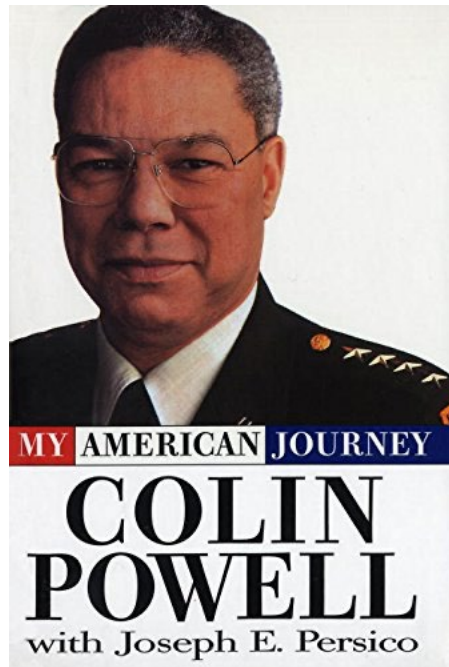
General Powell (left) and Colonel Francois (right) flank Diana and Frank Francois with their children before the Air Force awards ceremony at the Pentagon.

me on a tour of the National War College because he had just finished in the class of 1976 and I was in the class of 1977. His advice to me was to get a master's degree from the George Washington University's School of International Relations. He had completed his

unforgettable encounters

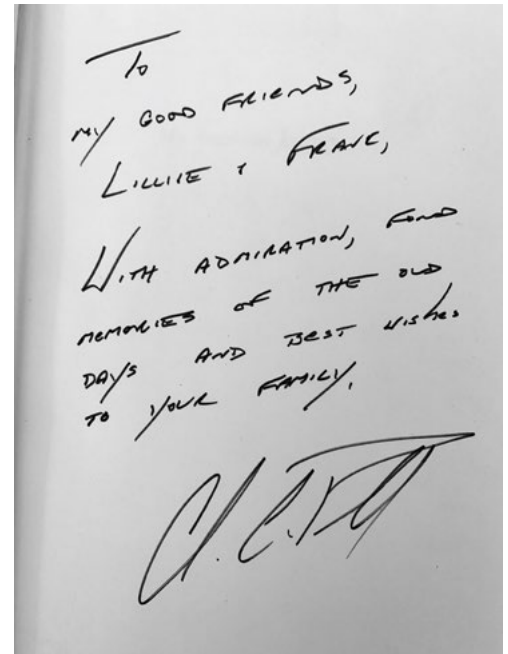
won the Lance P. Sijan USAF Leadership Award, which was given to the junior and senior officers in the Air Force. She and her family came from Germany to the Pentagon to get award. Upon hearing that they all would be in the Pentagon, I called Colin's office and asked if he could make time to meet my son and Diana's family, to which he immediately agreed. We met in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's office and took pictures. I asked if he would go up to the Air Force Chief of Staff office for the ceremony and he politely said no. As a 4-star general and Chairman of the JCS, all the attention would be on him and not Diana. He also remembered what happened with my son-in-law in Germany in the 5th Corps. The ceremony went well and he was right, because all of the generals on the Air Force staff were there. Diana got a lot of attention, especially because she was in the first class at the Air Force Academy to graduate females in 1980. She received an advance promotion to Major, a \$1,000 bond, and she could pick her next assignment.

Another encounter was when I met



him at the Ft. Belvoir Exchange when I got a copy of his book, My American Journey, and we briefly chatted and he signed my copy.

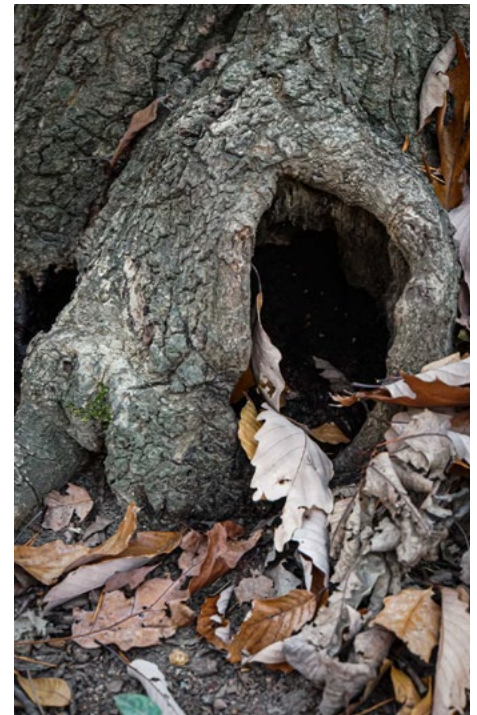
Colin was a Great American who I had the privilege of knowing. He will be missed by many of those he met, those to whom he gave counsel, and those who were best friends. We were born on the same day, April 5, but four years



General Powell's inscription in Colonel Francois's book

apart and we frequently exchanged birthday cards. He was known by many as a pioneer, a man of good character, and a leader who we all looked up to and respected. He will be long remembered as a father, a soldier, a comrade, a diplomat, and a friend. God bless his family and his many friends. 🙏

Photos by Miriam Rosenthal



An unsettling question – and a few acronyms

By Bob Shea

My assignment officer at the Army's Personnel Center asked a strange question on the day he called me to tell me that I was being transferred from being the chairman of the Military Science Department at Youngstown State University to Langley Air Force Base in Hampton, Virginia.

He then asked the question: "Once you get there, give me a call and tell me what this assignment is all about. I know nothing about it. All I have is a priority vacancy to fill as soon as possible, and by the way, it is a three-year stabilized tour." This was unsettling as I had always assumed that each assignment was a studied and careful match between the person and the proposed job. Now he was admitting that he was making a blind assignment, matching just my availability to an empty position where I would be for the next three years of my life. Okay. I was more than curious.

He sent me to the Airborne Command Post that supported the Commander-In-Chief, Atlantic, a four-star admiral (the CINC) based in Norfolk. It was called the CINCLANT-ABNCP. The latter portion was pronounced "abencap," another strange military acronym. It was code-named "Scopelight," one of three such organizations that supported the CINC's of Europe (Silk Purse), the Pacific (Blue Eagle), and the Atlantic by providing survivable command posts so the CINC could continue to do his job in the early stages of a nuclear war. This was in the early 1980s, long before the breakup of the USSR, when nuclear war was a horrible but acknowledged possibility. It was a lesser version of the famed Looking Glass ABNCP of the then-Strategic Air

Command (SAC), which was continuously airborne 24/7/365 for over 30 years.

The concept was that the CINC could continue to function and survive aloft in an airplane with unlimited communications capability and a small well-trained joint-service battle staff advising him. He would be in instant communications with every level of the National Command Authority. With many predictable installations potentially reduced to smoking holes in the ground, the ABNCPs hopefully assured continuity of nuclear operations and worldwide decision making.

To do this, we had four EC-135 air-

length of cable that would be trailed behind and below the aircraft. In peace time, it could be deployed only by prior permission in restricted air space over the ocean as it was obviously a significant hazard to other aircraft as well as to anything on land should it have to be severed and dropped if not retractable.

The aircraft themselves were military versions of the iconic Boeing 707. They had been upgraded many times over the years but the basic airframes were older than many of the flight crews in the cockpit – young USAF captains and majors. In addition to the pilot and co-pilot, the flight crew had a navigator, a crew chief, and a "boomer" who could "fly the boom" to refuel other aircraft during flight. With four such aircraft, the flight crews were required to maintain their refueling proficiency when planes were available and not designated the alert or standby aircraft.

The center of the aircraft was packed with 28 highly skilled USAF communications technicians who operated the multiple and redundant (meaning if one system failed, there was backup option) communications equipment. We could normally talk and exchange data with everyone in the world involved in the nuclear SIOP (Single Integrated Operational Plan) mission.

In the rear was the eight-man joint service Battle Staff. A colonel (Army, USAF, USMC or USN) as the commander with an operations officer (USN aviator), a communications officer (Army, USAF, or USN), an Emergency Actions Officer and an Emergency Actions NCO (both USAF), an Operations NCO (Army or USAF), a Logistics Officer (Army, me), and an Intelligence Officer (USAF, Army, or USMC). Our collective job was to rendezvous with the CINC at a pre-designated location, to know all the nuclear



craft (a variation of the workhorse USAF refueling tanker, the KC-135). The plane was packed with communication gear using every high-tech device (of the 1980s) known to the Department of Defense to include satellite communications plus a trailing wire antenna nestled in the belly of the aircraft, like a huge reel on a fishing pole. Unlike a bass reel, this drum contained almost 24,000 feet of quarter-inch copper cable with a large badminton-type birdie on one end. When deployed, the established frequency determined the

options, to maintain robust communications, and to advise him and assist in his decision-making until more normal operations could be reconstituted.

One of four Battle Staffs (BST) was always on alert (24/7/365) in a highly guarded Ground Alert Facility (GAF) sitting next to the tarmac where our planes were parked. The USAF security personnel were armed and had authorization to fire as necessary to protect the GAF from unauthorized entry. A fifth Battle Staff (always senior personnel who had spent at least 2 years on an alert BST) worked normal duty hours running day-to-day operations, planning exercises, and training newly-assigned personnel. The training process normally required three-four weeks of intense training once the required ultra high security clearances were obtained. The “skipper” was a senior Naval aviator captain who was our link to the admiral’s staff at the Naval Operating Base. As an aside, I received clearances that I had not known existed before my assignment. A Top Secret clearance was just the minimum starting point. In addition to the BST on alert, a second one was always in standby status with mandatory recall to the GAF within 2 hours.

A complex by-specialty examination, written and in-flight practical, was mandatory before the new individual could be certified to join a battle staff in addition to a successful flight physical, an exhaustive Personal Reliability Program (PRP) investigation, and an altitude chamber exercise. This an exotic environment for the typical Army officer who was not an aviator.

When on alert the entire crew (USAF flight members, communicator team, and battle staff members) were confined to the GAF which had quarters, a dining facility, offices, classrooms, and lounges. The periods on alert were either 48 or 72 hours long, usually with one training flight of anywhere from 10

to 12 hours during each alert period.

We were required to be aloft and at specified distance away from Langley AFB within minutes of the klaxon sounding. Routine exercises were conducted to test and verify this capability. The threat level determined the alert posture which ranged from normal (1) confined to the GAF, (2) to having an aircrew member already on board to start the engines as the rest of the team raced to the aircraft, or (3) to physically deploying to another airbase. Due to the prepositioned classified material on board, the aircraft was designated a “no lone” zone, meaning that when an aircrew member had to be on board, a BST member had to also be on board,



even on cold nights in the winter. The classified material pre-positioned on board could not be left without two-man security. We also had two armed USAF security personnel guarding the exterior of the aircraft 24/7 regardless of the weather. Additionally, we deployed up and down the East coast and inland to avoid adverse weather such as hurricanes or snow/ice storms that could make launching the aircraft impracticable.

The CINC joined us only periodically to familiarize him with his SIOP duties, as he obviously had many other duties competing for his time and attention. During my time with the ABNCP, I amassed almost 900 hours of flight

time, and experienced three unsettling flight emergencies. Non-aviators also received “non-rated crew member hazardous duty pay,” an amount that varied by rank and was a welcome addition to our monthly pay.

Without the CINC on board, we trained to maintain world-wide communications, practiced preparing, sending, receiving, and relaying simulated emergency action messages as well reacting to scenarios in our respective specialties. Logistics as I knew it, had a whole new meaning when working with the nuclear TRIAD of SAC bombers plus ground and sea-based missiles (ICBMs).

As an aside, none of this information is classified today. One can Google Single Integrated Operating Plan for all the details. The aircraft are probably sitting in a “bone-yard” in the Arizona desert, and the procedures used are gathering dust in military archives. What we did at that time, although then highly classified, is today totally in the public domain.

We were given a three-year schedule. Two-week leaves were available for each BST in January-February and again in July-August. If a member did not take his leave, he was assigned to the non-alert BST for duties appropriate to his specialty. This meant that anyone needing time for events such as weddings and funerals was required to negotiate a swap with a counterpart on another team and later also pull double alerts/stand-bys as “pay back.” A swap could be negotiated only with one’s counterpart by specialty on another BST. A simple head cold or a sinus infection could also render a BST member being medically classified by the Flight Surgeon as DNIF, duty not involved in flying. That required another member in that specialty to be assigned to the temporary vacancy. The

same could happen if the personnel pipeline, which normally did not account for the training delay, was slow in sending replacements. At one time, there were only two logistics officers assigned, meaning one of us was always on either alert or stand-by for almost 4 weeks.

The only exception to the three-year schedule was that no BST was on alert both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. There was always a change of alert on Christmas morning so that each team involved could have some holiday time with his family. As another aside, I have used the male pronoun throughout, for all BST members were male at that time.

I was later selected to command the non-alert BST and act as the Deputy ABNCP Commander. As such, I was also responsible for the mountain of highly classified national security mate-

rial that we maintained, a separate database for each BST. In the days before computers, each BST had a duplicate and massive hard-copy database that required all eight members just to carry the heavy leather satchels to and from the alert aircraft. As the commander of the Standardization and Evaluation BST, I was personally responsible for five of the famed presidential decision books, often referred to as the “football” carried by a presidential aide. It was not a red telephone or some other magical device. It simply was a loose-leaf binder outlining the various options available and their lethal consequences that the president needed to know should he be contemplating nuclear responses in coordination with the national security structure and the various CINCs. While we had duplicate de-

cision books, only the president had the launch codes. It was serious business.

The Joint Staff personnel were the most professional of any I had encountered during my military career. It also gave me a unique insight into the sister services in uniforms of different colors. Through judicious negotiations with my assignment officer, I managed to stretch the assignment to almost five years before I retired from active duty.

Once I was acclimated and certified, I did call my assignment officer and brief him on what was my best military assignment. His comment was “wow, now I know.” I thanked him for sending me to the ABNCP, even though he had been clueless on what the assignment entailed. I was the winner, and he received an education on what this thing called an ABNCP really was. 📖

Meet the winners of the Nature Photography Contest

By *Rebecca McNeely*



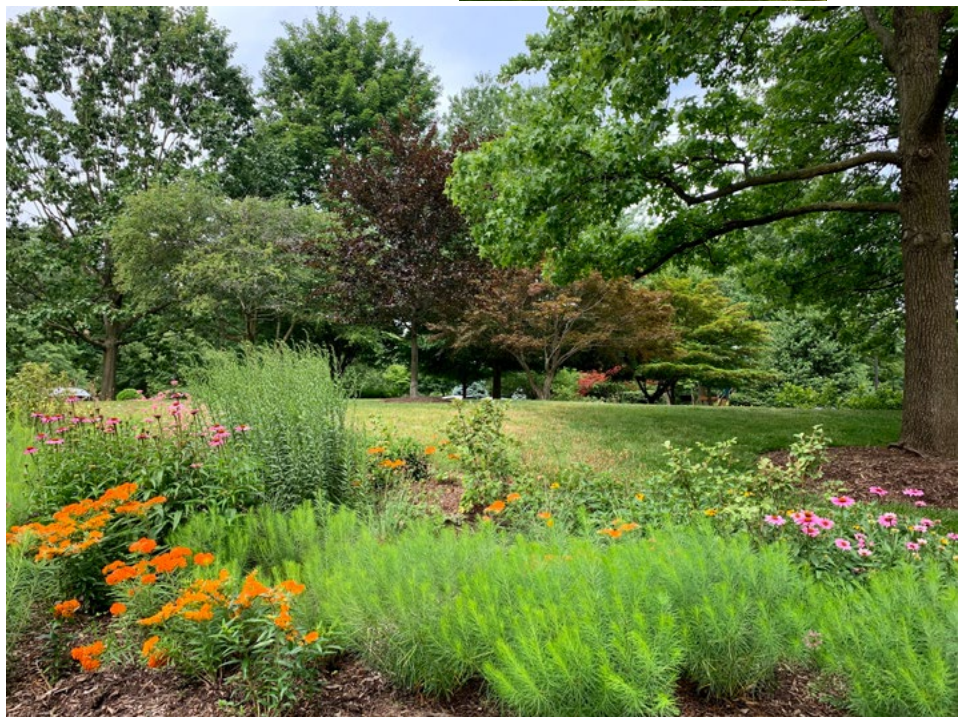
This year, 29 residents submitted 102 images to the Montebello Grounds Committee’s juried 2021 Nature Photo Contest. The committee will present the awards and honor our photographers at a Zoom reception

on December 11 at 4 p.m.

Join the event to hear comments from the juror and photographers and savor the beauty of Montebello’s flora and fauna documented during all four seasons.

A link to the presentation will be emailed before the date.

Next year’s contest will accept photos taken as early as November 2, 2020. Montebello’s winter wonderland, followed by another glorious Virginia spring, will soon be here for you to capture. 📖



The Sword of Taillefer

By Chester Taylor

Angoulême is a charming south-western French city that sits today much as it did in 930 AD, high on a limestone plateau overlooking the Charente River and surrounding fertile valleys. Elm trees and boxwoods thrive there in the temperate climate. Since Roman times, it has been a crossroads of trade with Paris to the north, Cognac to the west, Libourne to the south, and Limoges to the east. It was a town with money and its river, Charente, was navigable by ships, Viking ships.

Vikings had been a serious threat, not just for those living along the northwest coast, but the rest of France as well. The Vikings were brave sailors, and in their warships, they were able to reach France from Denmark in about three days with favorable winds. Angoulême had been raided, pillaged, and burned several times earlier, the last time by the Viking Chief Hastings and his men in 848. Now, there was a new chief, Stonius, who had heard the tales of Hastings, Gorm den Gamle, and others and the riches to be had in Angoulême. Stonius was the leader of a small Viking army from Northern Jutland in Denmark. He was experienced in the matters of sailing and fighting, a crusty sort, and a bold leader. For this raid, he had assembled a raiding party of about 300 men and 15 warships.

Guillaume II, Count of Angoulême, was kinsman of Charles the Bald, King of West Francia, King of Italy and Holy Roman Emperor. Guillaume had the responsibility for securi-

ty of this commune. He was a tall man, standing over six feet, and strong. He knew the Vikings would try again. With encouragement and resources from King Charles, Guillaume organized and equipped a defense force, established a chain of command, prepared a detailed security plan, and held rehearsals so that each militiaman knew exactly how to respond. He posted a series of lookout stations along the river.

He had the town's swordsmith, Wallander, make him a sword. Wallander was an experienced sword-maker and used the highest quality steel from Asia. He fitted the sword for the count, making the sword with a larger-than-normal grip and slightly heavier in weight than most. Wallander decorated the hilt of the sword in the Borre style, an intricate design of knots using bronze castings. He made an ornate scabbard for it out of wood and leather in the same style. Guillaume was pleased with the sword and named it "CORTO," meaning "I cut."

Then one early spring night just past midnight, Guillaume was awakened.



One of his sentries had spotted Stonius and his men moving up the river in their warships with their distinctive carved dragonheads riding high on the bows. This is exactly the scenario



Guillaume II, Count of Angoulême

Guillaume had anticipated and his security forces had practiced for. The alarm was sounded, and Guillaume gathered his forces in the town square. Stonius and his men docked shortly before sunrise just below Angoulême. A morning mist hung over the area. Stonius moved his men quickly off the ships hoping to gain surprise in an early morning attack. His forces hurried to clothe themselves in their fighting armor of helmets, breastplates, chained mail or leather body armor, and round leather-wooden shields. Some had swords or axes, others had bows, but most carried spears. Next, they oriented themselves and organized for the assault. This took time. Then, they marched uphill along the main road towards the bluffs of Angoulême to the south. The climb was steep, and their armor was heavy; it slowed them down. The city's terrain and ramparts, built in Roman times, narrowed their approach. As they got closer to the city, Stonius sensed things weren't as they had been

history lesson

in the past. The mist and the glare of the low sun made it hard to see. It was eerily quiet. He felt that he was being watched. There was no widespread panic of the town's people like before. He thought he saw the glint of freshly sharpened spear tips. Then, suddenly, there they were, standing a few hundred yards right in front of him, at least 600 French men with iron helmets and chained mail. Guillaume's forces closed ranks and formed a wall with their kite shields and spears. They waited. Suddenly trumpets sounded and the archers with longbows appeared on the city bluffs and let fly their arrows that came down like "iron rain." The Viking warriors looked up, and the hail of arrows took their toll. This organized action was completely new to Stonius; he had never encountered this type of resistance before. He hesitated and started thinking about a retreat to the ships to escape. The Vikings' formation started to crumble.

Then Guillaume shouted, "*Au demi-pas, en avant, march!*" the command for the French troops to march forward at a half step. Guillaume calmly drew his



sword and led his men in a slow march down the hill toward the Vikings. About the same time, a detail from Guillaume's forces set fire to the Viking ships, and smoke arose from the riverbanks. Now, the Vikings began to panic.

Contact was made, and a fight ensued. Stonius and Guillaume met in the center of their forces. Instantly, Guillaume raised his sword, Corto, high in the sky. With all his strength he thrust down his sword upon Stonius. The sword cut through his helmet, his

head, his breastplate, and split him in half down to the waist. The battle was soon over. Most of the Vikings were killed and thrown into the river. Upon orders from Guillaume, one boat was spared from burning. Guillaume had his men place several wounded Vikings and Stonius' severed body into the boat and push it out into the river current. Guillaume told the survivors, "*Dites aux Vikings qu'ils ne sont pas les bienvenus ici, et s'ils viennent, ils connaîtront le même sort que Stonius.*" The Vikings may not

have spoken French, but they got the message, "Tell the Vikings, they are not welcome here, and if they come, they will experience the same fate as Stonius." It was a decisive victory for Guillaume and his men. There were no more Viking raids on Angoulême ever.

Hence forth, by order of the King of France, Guillaume and his descendants were given and used the honorary title of Taillefer, "hewer of iron." 🏰





Photo by Azita Mashayekhi