

MOCKBATTLE – ARENA

France, 1944

It is late July 1944. The Allied landings in Normandy took place seven weeks ago. The Allied armies have established a bridgehead in occupied Europe and are advancing further and further into France. American, British, Canadian, Polish, Dutch, Belgian, French and other Allied troops are fighting their way through the country.

But the advance comes at a heavy cost. There are many casualties on both sides. The French population is also suffering greatly from the violence of war.

In a small French village, the traces of the fighting are already clearly visible. Buildings have been damaged and civilians have been killed or wounded.

A group of villagers gathers for a funeral. Together with the priest and several musicians from *Le Petit Papillon*, they bring a deceased villager to a simple emergency cemetery. As the coffin is slowly lowered into the grave, it briefly seems as though the violence of war in the background has come to a hold.

The German soldiers present in the village pay little attention to the funeral. They are mainly concerned with their own defence. Around the village, they have established defensive positions with bunkers and anti-tank obstacles.

But the brief moment of silence is about to come to an end.

The Germans prepare

A German convoy appears from the direction of the woods. Soldiers and vehicles enter the village. The German commander is immediately informed that the Allies are getting closer.

He orders the German troops to take up their defensive positions. The villagers must leave immediately. The village is about to become part of the battlefield.

The mayor tries to oppose the order. He attempts to convince the German commander that the civilian population cannot simply be sent away. But there is no room for discussion.

The mayor is arrested and taken away.

The remaining inhabitants are driven from the field.

The attack begins

As soon as the civilians have left the danger zone, the battle begins.

Allied fighter aircrafts appear above the village. They fly low over the German positions and open fire with machine guns and rockets. The German soldiers hastily seek cover.

Explosions shake the village.

A bunker is hit, and an ammunition depot is destroyed in a huge explosion. The German anti-aircraft position opens fire in an attempt to bring down the Allied aircraft, but the attack cannot be stopped.

Within a short period of time, the village has become a battlefield.

The resistance takes action

As the German defences are under attack, several villagers return. But these are not ordinary civilians.

They are local resistance fighters, supported by French SAS soldiers.

They take advantage of the chaos and sneak back into the village. Their goal is to rescue the captured mayor.

During the funeral, they have taken a hidden supply of weapons from the coffin. They now use these weapons to free the mayor.

But the Germans discover what is happening.

A short and intense firefight erupts. German soldiers, resistance fighters and an SAS soldier are wounded.

The resistance group throws a smoke grenade and manages to escape through the woods behind the church, taking the wounded with them.

The Allies advance

Meanwhile, the first Allied scouts arrive near the village. From the high ground, they have a clear view of the German positions.

They request artillery support by radio.

Soon afterwards, the next bombardment begins. The village and German defensive positions come under heavy fire. German soldiers seek cover while the German commander calls for reinforcements by radio.

The Allies are also requesting additional troops.

The battle for the village is about to erupt in full force.

Tanks attack

The first Allied tanks emerge from the woods. They open fire on the German positions while the infantry advances under their covering fire.

But the Germans have no intention of surrendering without a fight.

German armoured vehicles appear from the opposite direction. The German anti-aircraft position opens fire and manages to knock out an Allied tank with a well-placed shot.

A second Allied tank drives over a land mine. The vehicle is badly damaged and comes smoking to a halt near the church.

The Allies urgently call for support and request smoke cover along the front.

Under cover of a dense smoke screen, the first Allied soldiers advance.

Then the main force arrives.

The battle erupts once again.

More Allied tanks drive onto the battlefield from the woods and open fire on the German anti-aircraft position. The position is eventually put out of action. But there are casualties here as well: another tank is disabled by a land mine.

The remaining tank continues to support the infantry as the Allies push further forward.

The end of the battle

After the intense battle, the German commander realises that further resistance is pointless.

He orders his men to surrender.

Weapons are laid down. German soldiers are taken prisoner. The wounded are treated and taken away.

Slowly, silence returns to the battlefield.

But for the inhabitants of the village, there is no reason to celebrate.

Once the Germans have been taken away, the civilians return. Carefully, they walk across the area where fierce fighting took place only moments before.

They see the destruction left behind by the battle: damaged vehicles, destroyed defensive positions and the remains of a village that has suffered heavily from the violence of war.

Freedom

The civilians walk towards the former German camp. Behind them, the Allied soldiers follow.

One by one, the different units and groups come forward. They line up at the edge of the battlefield.

The battle is over.

But the memory remains.

Because behind the impressive vehicles, explosions and fighting is the story of people who actually experienced the war: soldiers who fought and died, resistance fighters who took great risks, and civilians who lost their village and their freedom.

Seven weeks after D-Day, the Allies are on the verge of finally breaking through the German defences in Normandy. The road to the liberation of Western Europe has been opened.

The performance shows how a small French village became part of that much larger struggle in 1944. A struggle that was ultimately not only about territory, but about the freedom of millions of people.