

The band plays on

D-Day switch didn't deter musicians

By **LYNNETTE HINTZE**
The Daily Inter Lake

Seven Flathead Valley Community Band members performed at a D-Day ceremony in France, but it wasn't where they expected to play their instruments.

The local musicians were among 110 American community band members scheduled to play June 6 at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial during the 70th anniversary of D-Day.

On June 6, 1944, Allied forces

Band member sounds off

■ PAGE A4

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.

Shortly before leaving for France, however, commu-

nity band members learned their performance was being replaced by a military band.

Music Celebrations International, the Arizona-based company that had spend more than two years working out the logistics for the community band concert, also found out about the switch at the 11th hour.

"At the last minute the White House and Elysee Palace (the French equivalent of the White House) took over the ceremony," Music Celebrations

See BAND on Page A8



FLATHEAD VALLEY Community Band members who performed on the beach at St. Laurent-Sur-Mer in France for the 70th anniversary of D-Day are, from left, Paul Erickson, Jim Lehner, Deanne Lehner, Linda Sole, Irv Milheim, Wendell Tharpe and Paul Sebesta.

BAND Continued from A1

Performance Specialist Mara Klein said. "They made a decision to commission the U.S. Army Band of Europe."

President Barack Obama spoke during the ceremony at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial where the community band had been scheduled to perform.

The story, though, has a happy ending for the local musicians.

"Fortunately the little village of St. Laurent-Sur-Mer invited our band

to participate in their service on Omaha Beach later in the day," said tuba player Irv Milheim of Dayton. "We were very, very well-received."

Klein said Music Celebrations International has numerous contacts overseas and learned that St. Laurent-Sur-Mer was looking for a band to play during its D-Day observance.

"It was a beautiful ceremony and was more special because it was right on the beach," Klein said. "There was a huge audi-

ence."

The community band was able to play its entire repertoire of songs prepared for the D-Day commemoration.

The Flathead band members included Milheim; Paul Erickson, clarinet; Linda Sole, bass clarinet; Paul Sebesta, French horn; Wendell Tharpe, trombone; Jim Lehner, trombone; and Deanne Lehner, clarinet.

Features editor Lynnette Hintze may be reached at 758-4421 or by email at lhin-

BAND Continued from A1

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.