

Buffalo Rock CEO tours Normandy, inspired to aid Wounded Warrior Project

Published: Wednesday, June 08, 2011, 6:25 AM



By **Michael Tomberlin** -- The Birmingham News



Jimmy Lee III, left, chief executive of Buffalo

Rock, toured the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial in France on Monday with retired British Brig. Gen. Johnny Rickett as his guide. (Special)

A trip to Normandy this week has inspired the head of Buffalo Rock to launch a new company campaign to benefit wounded warriors.

Jimmy Lee III, chief executive of the Birmingham-based Buffalo Rock bottling company, was in Pointe du Hoc, France, this week as part of the events to mark the 67th anniversary of the D-Day invasion.

"It was a really emotional time," Lee said in an interview from England on Tuesday. "You have 9,400 American graves there. It makes you proud to be an American to see what these great heroes did to liberate Europe and give their lives to preserve our freedoms."

Lee and other travelers had an exclusive tour with a retired British brigadier general as their guide. He showed them the machine gun nests where German soldiers peppered the beach with bullets. They saw the cliffs where U.S. Army Rangers took heavy casualties.

"I can't imagine landing on that beach and thinking you'll never live through the day," Lee said. "Too many of them didn't."

Following the Fourth of July holiday, Lee plans for Buffalo Rock to launch a campaign that will benefit the Wounded Warrior Project.

The Wounded Warrior Project, based in Jacksonville, Fla., is a nonprofit organization that seeks to raise awareness and enlist the public's help for the needs of injured service members. The organization works with corporations and facilities across the country to provide programs and services to meet the needs of injured military members.

Details of Buffalo Rock's support of the Wounded Warrior Project are still being worked out.

"We have a lot of military bases in our franchise footprint," Lee said. "The military is an important part of our company's operations."

Buffalo Rock supplies Pepsi, Gatorade, Dr Pepper, Snapple, Rockstar and other drink and vending products to Huntsville's Redstone Arsenal; Montgomery's Maxwell Air Force Base; the Anniston Army Depot; Fort Benning and the Marine Corps Logistics Base in Georgia; Pensacola Naval Air Station, Whiting Field, Hurlburt Field, Eglin Air Force Base and Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida.

Besides the company's military connection, Lee's late father, Jimmy Lee Jr., a former CEO at Buffalo Rock, was working in logistics in England to supply the U.S. Army throughout Europe.

Matthew Dent, president and chief operating officer at Buffalo Rock, joined Lee on the trip. Dent's grandfather also served in the U.S. Army in England during World War II.

Lee, a self-described fanatic for all things military, said visiting Normandy has topped his "bucket list" for many years.

"It was awesome. I've been wanting to go forever," he said. "I've got to create another top of the bucket list since I've checked this one off."□

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