

WORLD WAR II CHRONICLES

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D-DAY

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“Soldiers, sailors, and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force, you are about to embark upon the Great Crusade towards which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you; the hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you.

In company with our brave allies and brothers in arms on other fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed people of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world. Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well-trained, well-equipped, and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely. But this is the year 1944, much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940, 41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats in open battle, men to men. Our air offenses have seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our home fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and ammunitions of war and placed at our disposal, great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned, the free men of the world are marching together to victory.

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full victory. Good luck and let us all beseech the

blessing of almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.”

--General Dwight D. Eisenhower addressing the Allied troops before the invasion of Europe that would take place on June 6, 1944.



In the hindsight of history, many have come to believe that the success of the D-Day landings, as well as the ultimate victory of the Allies in World War II, was a foregone conclusion, an inevitable result of the superior might of the United States and its allies. In reality, the outcome was far from certain. In addition

to this moving call for the Allied forces to advance toward victory, General Eisenhower had written, on July 5, 1944, a letter in which he accepted full responsibility for the failure of the landings at Normandy.

Of course the landings were not the failure that Eisenhower had feared, but an incredible success; a success made possible by the efforts of thousands of men and women, on both sides of the Atlantic, in the days and weeks leading up to June 6, 1944. In this issue of *World War II Chronicles* we feature the personal experiences of some of these people who made the success of D-Day possible. From the sands of Omaha Beach to the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc, from the nurses to the Army Rangers, without their bravery and sacrifice, this “Great Crusade” may well have fallen well short of victory.

WWII

THE STORY OF A SCREAMING EAGLE IN NORMANDY

THE D-DAY MEMORIES OF DONALD BURGETT

ARMY PARATROOPER, 101ST AIRBORNE DIV., 506 PARACHUTE REGIMENT, COMPANY A

I have been asked many times over the years why I volunteered for the airborne. The answer is simple. The attack on Pearl Harbor was an atrocity against our country and the American people. That single act welded all Americans to one cause as no other act could have done. Americans wanted more than justice, we wanted revenge. Young men wrapped in blankets slept on the sidewalks in front of the draft boards the night of the bombing to be among the first to volunteer when that office opened in the morning.

When my brother, Elmer, joined the paratroopers in the fall of 1942, I felt that I had to do the same. I had to be a paratrooper. But my parents would not sign a release so that I could join the military early. I went to my draft board and signed a “voluntary induction paper” when I was 17; I would be called up on my eighteenth birthday without my parents knowing that I had in fact volunteered. I was sworn in on April 5, 1943—my 18th birthday—and entered active service May 11, 1943.

During World War II, I served with the 506th “Currahee” Parachute Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division. Brutal training from basic through jump school in Fort Benning, Georgia was programmed to encourage those that just did not have the right stuff to quit. Get rid of the chaff in the beginning so there would be no time lost in training those who would drop out later. When landing behind enemy lines, every man had to be one who could be counted on.



Originally I was part of the 541st Parachute Infantry Regiment when it was activated at Camp Mackall, North Carolina, October 1943. We took advanced training there, including practice jumps and experimented with jumping with equipment. But plans for the Normandy invasion were underway and the

101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions would have to be brought up in manpower to handle their assigned missions. The 541st Rgt. was sent to Europe as replacements to those divisions.

The group of replacements I was with joined the 506th “Currahee” Regiment and placed in Company A, which was billeted in horse stables in the small town of Aldbourne, England. Phillips, Benson and I were assigned to Stable 13 with one of the original paratroopers, Donald B. Liddle.

Here, night jumps and advanced training intensified. After reading my book “Currahee,” long after the war was over, Niel Stevens of Marlborough, England formed a group to research and preserve these stables in memory of the Americans.

In one practice tactical night jump in preparation for the Normandy drop, Company A 506 ran into a German bomber formation over London. The Germans were dropping bombs and we could see fires on the ground. The British put up a good barrage and hit a couple of our planes; fortunately none of our men were killed. Still, we managed to continue our flight and jump on our assigned drop zones that night due to the skills and training of the troop carrier pilots.

In further training for Normandy, we moved for maneuvers to Torquay in southern England where the countryside resembled the hedgerow country of Normandy. The day after our arrival in Torquay, while marching to the mess hall for breakfast, we witnessed two German torpedo boats roaring into the bay and releasing torpedoes at vessels anchored there, sinking two Allied ships. Many infantry troops aboard those ships were lost, most to drowning. The German torpedo boats immediately made a sweeping turn, escaping back out to sea. After these maneuvers we returned to Aldbourne. Later our 506th Rgt. moved to southern England again where we entered the marshalling area on Upottery Airfield. This is where we would take off for Normandy.



Donald Burgett and other “Screaming Eagles” prepare to depart on their D-Day mission

During the several days that we were in the marshalling area at Upottery Airfield we were briefed extensively on our missions. Sand tables and maps were on hand and aerial photographs brought in several times a day were hung in display over the sand table. Here we were briefed not only on our missions but on those of the 82nd as well, in case by some accident we found ourselves in each other’s areas. We were even informed of the German Commandant of St. Com-du-Mont, a man who rode a white horse and went with a French schoolteacher. She lived on a side street in the town just two buildings away from a German gun emplacement.

My group’s assignment was to capture and hold the four exits that ran from the beachhead to the inland, allowing our men landing on the beaches a road off those beaches to attack inland. Exit 1 ran through Pouppeville, exit 2 through Herbert, exit 3 through Audoville-la-Hubert, and exit 4 though St. Martinde-Varroville. We were also assigned to capture the high ground behind the beaches and to aid in the capture of the four bridges leading to Carentan.

On the night of June 4, 1944, we were loading the planes in a downpour of rain and high winds. A jeep

pulled alongside our aircraft carrying a message that the jump was postponed until the next day, June 5. We returned to our tents and slept in our wet jumpsuits without bothering to change.

The following day, June 5, 1944, we marched to the parked C-47s, found the one assigned to us by the chalked number beside the door, and ID numbers 8Y on the nose with 292717 on the vertical stabilizer. We made ready to chute up and load. While some troopers were making up pararacks to fasten to the underbelly of our C-47, the rest of us were getting extra ammo and whatever else we needed.

We were among the first of the many planes to take off, and it was still light enough to see. The last thing I saw on the ground was a large haystack and a line of trees to our direct front. We were among those in

the lead as we gained altitude and began circling wide over the English countryside like a giant comet. Each time we circled, other planes were taking off to join the ever-growing tail of our comet-like flight.

It had become totally dark as we continued our circling. When the flight was formed we made our way across the English Channel circling around behind and across the Continton Peninsula, heading toward Normandy from the backside. Our route would take the Troop Carrier Command flight in a counter-clockwise pattern while the ships of the sea-borne landings would be coming straight into Normandy; then circle clockwise back toward England when it came their time to return.

Lt. Bill Muir, gave the order to “Stand up and hook up” before we reached the shore of the peninsula. The anti-aircraft fire was the heaviest I had ever witnessed, even compared to what was fired over London during enemy air raids. We received the signal to jump; Lt. Muir yelled, “Let’s go!” and we followed him out into the prop blast. I began the

count. "One-thousand, Two-thousand, three – the opening shock nearly dislocated every joint in my body. I grabbed my risers and looked up to check my chute and saw machine gun tracers going through my canopy. Finally, I hit the ground. My drop was made at 11:14 AM June 6, 1944, at approximately 3000 feet above ground level. I have a copy of my plane's manifest, which verifies the jump time and the name of our take-off field.

The first trooper I met was Hundley, then Slick Hoenscheider and Red Knight. Just before first light, we met Lt. Muir with several other troopers. We made our way towards a church steeple visible against the lighter skyline. There we met other troopers including some men from the 82nd; together we mounted a successful attack on the town of Ravenoville. It has been recorded that Ravenoville was the first town liberated in Europe in World War II. St. Mere Eglise was the first large city to be liberated that evening by the 82nd Airborne.

During the battle for Ravenoville, one of our troopers chased an enemy soldier into the church only to find a large group of Germans hiding there. Quickly leaving, he returned with several more troopers and a shootout ensued right inside the church itself. One of our men was killed and a lieutenant was badly wounded.

On June 7, 1944, men of the 4th Infantry broke through to us from Utah beach, securing the town of Ravenoville. The men of the 82nd went to pursue their objectives, and we headed towards St. Com-du-Mont on a road running parallel with the beach.

One area we passed through just outside Ravenoville had been destroyed. A complete forest had been obliterated either by bombs or heavy shelling from our warships. Not even a blade of grass was visible. We turned right through Herbert and within a short distance we came across the bodies of two Germans lying in a ditch. A cameraman stood over them with a camera on a tripod. The camera was of an old type with a billows front and a black cape over the back. The GI took the photo and popped up from under his black cape. "Are you taking a picture of the dead?" I asked. "No," he replied. "I'm



Burgett (front), Paul Carter and Prentice Hundley pass Germans killed in ferocious fighting in Normandy

taking a picture of troops coming inland, and you're in it." This photo was taken on exit number 2 between Herbert and Ste. Marie-du-Mont and has appeared many times in publications over the years. Paul Carter and Prentice Hundley, following me, were later killed in Zon, Holland.



Not even churches could be spared when defending against deadly sniper attacks

Within minutes after that photo was taken we ran into White Russian Cossacks attacking into us on horseback and the battles began. We were hit in turn by the Cossacks, the German infantry, the SS and finally the German 6th paratroopers. Each battle was fierce but we fought our way to St. Com-du-mont. Parts of these battles I still cannot recall to this day.

The church steeple in St. Com-du-mont was blown off by our artillery to get rid of German artillery spotters that were sure to be there directing their own artillery against us. Just about the first thing done when entering any village or city would be to blow the steeple off the church to save lives of our own men.

The German paratroopers then made a frontal attack on us at point blank range while we were reforming on the road. They opened fire with Schmeissers through a hedgerow at a distance of not more than six to eight feet away, wounding and killing some of our men. We charged straight into their fire, overrunning and killing them, and carrying the attack through the hedges close to the main road and toward the bridges to Carentan.

While fighting on the far side of Le Drouries, with us this side of the road and the Germans on the other side, a light American tank came to our aid. It was knocked out by what I thought for years to be an 88. A photo recently surfaced which confirmed that a Panzerfaust had, in fact, knocked it out. The entire crew was killed. This corner is still known today as “Dead Man’s Corner.”

After establishing static lines, American graves registration teams arrived to identify our dead, move them to temporary burial sites and place them in marked graves. Afterward, when time allowed, these same teams gathered up enemy dead, identified them by their dog tags, and buried them with military respect.

We made a night attack over three remaining bridges into Carentan. The Germans had destroyed the second bridge and we crossed the Douve River at night on ropes strung by the men of the 501st. Col. Cole, Commander of the 501st, led his regiment through the night ahead of us to attack straight into Carentan. We, the 506th, followed the 501st under heavy fire to the enemy held side. After crossing the bridges we made our way through swamps to the right and attacked that city from the right flank. Again we lost men, some killed and some wounded.

The photo shown is that of a “Belgian” gate which blocked our way in crossing the bridges. It was later torn down and dragged by jeep into the outskirts of Carentan.



A “Belgian” gate used to prevent Allied troops from crossing bridges in Normandy

On the 13th of June, the 4th Division was to relieve us from combat. As it turned out, the 4th bogged down against stubborn SS men and SS armor. We were soon sent in. After moving forward on foot to the area, we crawled on hands and knees along a hedgerow with the Germans on the other side; we could hear them talking.

The order was given. “Fix bayonettes! We’re going over the top.” We crawled to the top of a ten-foot hedgerow and waited.

The command “let’s go!” came and was echoed down the ranks, and we went over the top. We killed the enemy from the start and then ran across the field of grazed-over grass, without cover, and only one way to go: forward.

The enemy opened up with at least six machine guns, riflemen, 81mm mortars, 75mm high trajectory shells, and high velocity flat trajectory 88mm shells straight into us. We kept running forward in the attack, even though we were being wounded and killed.

I was wounded twice in this attack. Once by a German potato masher grenade and left for dead by my comrades. I

came to, but could hear nothing. I was stone deaf. Recovering my rifle, I continued forward and was hit again, this time by a shell fragment that nearly severed my right arm. I was recovered by a medic and eventually ended up in the 216th General Hospital in Coventry, England, where I later healed and went back into combat. We came to call that battle “The Battle of Bloody Gulch.” So many of our men were wounded and killed there.



Nearly 60 years later, Burgett stands in the very spot he was wounded

FLIGHT NURSE

BY CAPTAIN LILLIAN KINKELA KEIL

R.N., UNITED STATES AIR FORCE (RET.)

A strange stillness had settled over the Air Station at Bottesford, England, that June day in 1944. We were awakened, not by the sound of the Junker 88's overhead on their regular bombing runs to London, nor by the bustle of activity on the base, but by the silence. The paratroopers were gone! "D-Day," we whispered simultaneously.

The greatest amphibious landing in history was taking place across the channel on a 50-mile stretch of beach in Normandy, and although we had not been alerted to the exact date and time, we knew this was "it." Our 801st Medical Air Evacuation Transport Squadron, along with the 101st and 82nd Airborne paratroopers, and the glider pilots, had officially become the First Allied Airborne Army of the 9th Air Force. My personal part in this historical event was about to get underway.

I had recently returned from temporary ambulance line duty at the Bassingbourne base hospital that housed the B-17s of the 8th Air Force Bombardment Group. My duties there were to attend the wounded when the B-17s returned from bombing runs and "V-Bomb" sites in Germany. The targets were heavily fortified with anti-aircraft batteries and our bomber crews suffered wounds from flak and shrapnel, as well as from 101 millimeter shells. Frostbite was also a constant and serious concern in the winter in unheated, high altitude aircraft.

We always knew when our bombers were due back, especially when they were overdue, and strained to catch the first glimpse of them as they limped back to the safety of the airfield. The lineup of fire trucks and emergency vehicles were poised and ready to help. I watched for the red flare that signaled wounded aboard, and held my breath whenever I heard an engine sputter. I'd pray that the plane would land safely. Some did, some did not.

The planes with wounded always landed first and taxied to a revetment (air raid shelter) where our ambulances were assembled. Medical personnel climbed aboard to render first aid and unload the wounded. Once they were in the ambulance we took them to the station hospital, or drove them to a nearby military hospital where special surgical teams awaited them. On other occasions, I traveled by ambulance with two corpsmen to tend to and return crewmen who had ditched in the English Channel and were rescued by fishermen, or had made their way to areas along the coast of England.



After the Normandy Landing, the pace picked up for the 801st Air Evacuation crews. Wherever a toehold was established and called a battle zone; that would be our destination. The pilot & copilot, my medical technician and I, would scramble aboard a C-47 crammed full of gas, oil, rations, and medical supplies, and head out over the channel to the battlefield. Since we carried military supplies, we couldn't hide behind the safety of the Red Cross insignia. Despite that fact, and since sleep was something we never got enough of, I learned to doze with my head resting on my oxygen tank sitting atop an oil drum. We always carried our own C-rations wherever we went, since we never knew when we'd be back or have time to eat.

Our C-47 flew to the designated battle zone and landed in the fields and flats of the countryside, as close to the action as possible. We brought in medical supplies for the hastily assembled Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (M.A.S.H.), as well as supplies needed to run the army.

Wherever we landed, smoke rising in the distance and the dull roar of heavy artillery marked the front line. Everyone pitched in to help unload our supplies. Some

wounded soldiers were already stabilized by corpsmen in the field. Those on litters came directly from the Mobile Hospital with more critical wounds that would require special attention. My heart ached for those carefully covered and lying silently in neat rows awaiting another plane for their ride home.

We quickly converted the inside of the plane into an efficient medical ward. The litters were arranged into four tiers with the grips fitting comfortably and safely into heavy nylon loops affixed to long nylon straps that dropped down from the ceiling and were attached to the floor. Other airplanes had metal posts from ceiling to floor with slots for the litter's grips. When in place, they looked much like bunks. The C-47 could hold a maximum of 24 wounded soldiers. Sometimes we would squeeze in three litters on the floor. My tech and I instructed the corpsmen to arrange the patients according to the seriousness and the location of their wounds. The wound was always on the aisle side for easy access. As patients were passed on from battlefield medic to field hospital to us, their forehead was marked with a "MS" indicating that he had received morphine sulfate; other information regarding his wound would be written on a tag attached to his clothing.

Ambulatory patients would sit against the fuselage in bench-like seats. Sometimes we would have a mix of litter patients and ambulatory patients. More than once, I was grateful for the walking wounded on board to assist us in restraining a patient.

En route to England, I moved from one man to the next, stanching the flow of blood, dressing wounds, check-

ing IVs, giving plasma or medicine, and always comforting them by saying, "You're doing fine; you'll soon be home." When turbulence hit or the mood was down, I'd pull out my compact and apply my lipstick; every head turned to watch and spirits rose. I would smile when a few of the less seriously wounded would press a note into my hand with a name and address that read, "Look me up when you go through Broken Arrow, Oklahoma," or some such place. For the most part, many of the boys joked and were cheerful, especially when we headed out over the English Channel, and they knew they were really going home.



Lillian Keil tends to a wounded soldier following intense combat in Europe



Lillian Keil (left) with actors Forrest Tucker and Joan Leslie. Tucker and Leslie starred in *Flight Nurse*, a 1954 movie based on Capt. Keil's experiences during the war

well as to retrieve our wounded. And, if our planes were grounded by bad weather, Patton's Army could not move either. General Patton sent the flight nurses a case of champagne from Rheims to thank them for bringing the gasoline.

The pilots, my medical tech, and I worked as a team charged with the safe return of these young men to the hospital. Often an Air Evacuation plane could be diverted to an airfield closest to a hospital that specialized in treating the particular kinds of wounds we had on board such as burns, head cases, or amputees. Regretfully, we never saw or learned about the patients after they left our care.

This same routine was repeated again and again; only the faces and battles were different as our evacuation flights followed General George S. Patton's 3rd Army across France to drop off gasoline, oil drums, ammunition, weapons, and supplies, as

THE GUNS OF POINTE DU HOC

AS REMEMBERED BY LEONARD G. LOMELL

ARMY RANGER, 2ND RANGER BATTALION

In the days leading up to the invasion of Europe in June, 1944, a major worry of the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force was the five giant 155MM coastal artillery guns believed to be stationed by the Germans at Pointe du Hoc in France. These "big guns" had a range of 10-12 miles that could be fired at the planned American landing points of Omaha and Utah beaches, as well as the thousands of ships of the invasion fleet anchored off the shores of Normandy on what would soon be known as D-Day. One of the most important objectives of the early hours of the invasion, believed General Dwight D. Eisenhower, was to make certain that these guns were made inoperable...

Located on the west flank of Omaha Beach, fortress Pointe du Hoc was believed to be one of the strongest forts in Hitler's Atlantic wall, possessing incredible firepower. Located on cliffs 100 feet high, Pointe du Hoc held five large coastal artillery guns. These guns, along with the German Army divisions located nearby, were totally able to prevent the successful invasion of France if they were not put out of action quickly and early on June 6, 1944.

The risk of tremendous loss of life was immeasurable. In all the history of wars in the world to date, the invasion of France was by far the greatest military operation yet seen. The battle for Normandy would take two and a half months, longer than either Iraq war. On D-Day, thousands of military personnel and innocent civilians would die, homes and communities would be destroyed, and the invasion fleet would be severely damaged if the "guns of Pointe du Hoc" were not put out of action by American forces as early as possible before 6:30 AM, when the troops were scheduled to land.

The U.S. Army Air Corps, as it was then known, unopposed by German aircraft because of bad weather, flew 1,365 bombers, dropping 2,746 tons of bombs on or near the American landing areas of Omaha and Utah beaches before tens of thousands of Allied troops landed. The American Navy fired

21,600 rounds before the landing. Unfortunately, there was very little damage, if any, to the German targets, including the guns at Pointe du Hoc and the 30,000-plus German soldiers. According to historians, the targets were missed by up to three miles. The Allied landing was not going to be the 'piece of cake' some predicted it would be. Due to bombing errors, there were no bomb craters on Omaha Beach that could be found or used for protection in the assault. Thousands of Americans would die on "Bloody Omaha Beach," and many thousands more were wounded.



Fortunately, the most dangerous ground mission of D-Day was assigned early on to the Rangers with orders to "find the guns of Pointe du Hoc and render them inoperable as soon as possible," in case the described mighty American firepower had not succeeded as expected, which it did not. The biggest surprise of all to the

Rangers when they climbed the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc was that there were no big guns in the encasements, only long wooden shafts reminiscent of telephone poles. The United States Army and Army Air Corps intelligence units had unintentionally and unknowingly misguided the Rangers by use of their aerial photography and other misinformation. The French Underground Resistance Units informed the Rangers right after D-Day that the "big guns" were never installed at Pointe du Hoc. They claimed that the U.S. Army intelligence had been duly informed about this several times before D-Day. Nevertheless, the guns were in an undisclosed alternate position over a mile inland, still capable of killing tens of thousands of allied troops and innocent civilians. These Ranger volunteers strongly pursued and accomplished their mission by rendering the guns inoperable by 8:30 AM. It was the answer to the surviving Allied troops' prayers. Now, let me tell you the rest of the story. I was there.

I was First Sergeant of Company D of the 2nd Ranger

Battalion, U.S. Army, acting as leader of the 2nd Platoon. We were short one officer when we landed at Pointe du Hoc on D-Day, June 6, 1944. He was transferred to Battalion Headquarters for a special duty a few days before D-Day. After the hours of tremendous aerial and naval bombardment as earlier described, the greatest invasion in history started landing troops at 6:30 AM, as planned. After a stormy two-hour trip in our LCA, through cold rain and high seas and running the gauntlet for three miles, 300-plus yards offshore and under fire from the German soldiers on cliff-tops along the way, we Rangers finally fired our grappling hooks up over the 100-foot cliffs of Pointe du Hoc. Had we been on time, we would have caught the Germans asleep in their underground quarters, but we were 40-minutes late due to a British navigational error. They were waiting to cut our ropes, drop grenades and shoot us down. We could not fire back or defend ourselves very well while climbing. Though we were seriously outnumbered, we prevailed.

Shot through my right side as I led the men ashore in a wet landing, I suddenly disappeared in water over my head as I stepped off the ramp into an underwater bomb crater, which I could not see. I came out of the water with the help of my men, cold and wet, my right side hurting and arms still full of combat gear. We hurriedly headed for the nearest ropes and up we went as fast as we could climb.

There had been twenty-two of us in our British LCA, and we were all up the cliff within fifteen minutes, rushing through the German small arms fire as quickly as we could to the three-gun emplacements that were our original objective on the west flank of the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc on Omaha Beach. The fortress at Pointe du Hoc had underground tunnels and troop quarters, and the Germans would pop up, firing their weapons from where we least expected. We moved on very quickly to avoid

more sniper and machine-gun fire, as well as flat trajectory anti-aircraft machine-gun fire, which was becoming much more of a serious problem. We neutralized one German machine gun position on our way across the point and temporarily quieted down

the anti-aircraft position in order to get by it quickly and not get pinned down or delayed as we continued our assault. We got to our first objective in a matter of minutes after the assault; only the three guns in positions number four, five, and six were not there. Remember, there were no big guns anywhere on the Pointe's 40-acre fortress that we could see; only telephone poles or something similar sticking out of bombed out encase-

ments. By this time we were taking mortar and heavy-88 fire, crawling fire to our rear. We moved out of that position fast, hoping to locate the missing guns, thinking they were in an alternate position inland and would soon be firing. It did not happen that way.

By the time we fought our way about a mile or so to the blacktopped coastal road (about one-hour) I had only a dozen men left, some of whom were lightly wounded but able to fight on. Of the original 22 Rangers in my boat team, 15 had been killed or very badly wounded. We still had not found the guns nor had any idea where they were. It seemed we were surrounded and greatly outnumbered by German troops, and stuck in broad daylight.

We were now behind the Germans' second line of defense. Fortunately, the enemy had no idea we were in their midst. I left all of my men except S/Sgt. Jack Kuhn behind to set up a roadblock.

S/Sgt. Kuhn and I started leapfrogging down this sunken farm road heading inland, following wagon tracks between the high hedgerows with trees, not knowing where it was going. It led to a little swale, or draw, in an apple orchard. There was netting with camouflage over the missing guns; their barrels were over our heads. There was not a shell or bomb crater



One of the "Big Guns of Pointe du Hoc"



Allied bombers soften up the German defenses at the Pointe

anywhere that we could see. Looking over the hedgerow, I saw the five big 155MM coastal artillery guns with their ammunition and powder bags neatly in place, aimed at Utah Beach. The German gun crew could easily turn the “Big Guns” around to fire on Omaha Beach when they so desired. The five guns were located a little over a mile from where we had landed. About one hundred yards away, a German officer was talking to about 75 of his men, which we believed to be his gun crews, at a farm road intersection. A few minutes earlier, S/Sgt. Kuhn and I had discovered another 50 Germans, a combat patrol about two hundred yards in the other direction. They eventually passed within 20 feet of us on their way to join the German gun crews.

Our Rangers had totally surprised the Germans. They never expected an attack from the sea, up those 100-foot cliffs of Pointe du Hoc. The E Company Rangers were continuing to attack the German observation post a mile away at the cliffs, so there were no firing orders coming back to the German crews where Kuhn and I were. We thought the Germans could have a roving observation post patrol out trying to relocate in another advantageous spot to send firing orders back to them as soon as possible. Still, there were no “sitting targets” guarding the guns themselves that I could see, so I told Jack to cover me.

Between us, we had two incendiary grenades, later called thermite grenades. When the pin was pulled and the incendiary compound was exposed to air, it poured out like solder, flowing over the gears and crevices setting and hardening up like a weld. I used them to weld and fuse fast the traversing mechanisms of two of the guns. I also silently smashed the sights off all five guns with my gun butt. I had wrapped my field jacket around my submachine gun stock to silence any sound that could possibly be heard. Then Jack and I ran back down the sunken road about 200 yards out of sight of the Germans to the blocking position, got more thermite grenades from our guys, and hurried back to finish the job of rendering the remaining three guns inoperable. Since thermite grenades make no noise, we managed to do our job quickly and escape without being discovered.



U.S. Army Rangers trained intensively to take the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc

All of our especially chosen 225 Rangers had the same mission, but not our good luck. Our Ranger front moving inland searching for the guns was well over a mile wide. S/Sgt. Kuhn and I just stumbled onto the guns in our efforts to find them. We were at the right place at the right time. Luckily, we were a couple of well-trained Rangers on patrol doing our job. The guns were rendered totally and completely inoperable by 8:30 AM D-Day morning, as ordered.

From the time we landed at 7:10 AM until the time we crested the Pointe, no more than 15 minutes had

passed. Because we moved very quickly, kept our objective in focus, and worked as a disciplined team, we had completed the operation in little more than one hour. Sergeants Harry Fate and Gordon Lunning of D Company, using different routes back to our command post on the Pointe, notified Col. Rudder, our CO, “mission accomplished” before 9:00 AM.

Our work at the alternate gun positions completed, we rejoined the other D Company men at the roadblock and began to consolidate our defensive position for the rest of D-Day and to protect our D Company roadblock. In the meantime, Sgt. Koenig of our platoon destroyed all the German

communications along the coast road. About this time, the remnants of our 1st platoon of D Company joined us (only about 11 men); they had been helping to defend the Pointe where half their platoon became casualties. We needed them now to strengthen the roadblock. Our third LCA, with the rest of D Company, had earlier sunk offshore. Ranger companies consisted of 68 men. At this point we only had 20 men left.

The original battle plan indicated we would be relieved by noontime on D-Day by the American troops on Omaha Beach. It didn't happen; they were over two days late. We had gathered about 85 other Rangers during the afternoon to defend our roadblock on D-Day night. Our orders were to hold our blocking position on the coastal road until relieved, which we did until D+2. Despite on and off shelling and three counterattacks, as well as being massively outnumbered by 10-1, we never lost control of our

D-Day roadblock. No German troops ever got through to help their comrades at Omaha Beach.

Of the 225 Rangers who attacked Pointe du Hoc, only 90 were left standing when we were relieved on D+2 (June 8, 1944). Eighty-one had been killed in action, and the rest of the casualties were unable to fight. Many of the 90 left standing were lightly wounded; nevertheless, they fought on. D Company had the highest number of casualties at Pointe du Hoc.

Like everyone else that day, we did what we were trained to do. With a lot of luck and a lot of casualties, I like to think we did it well. The Ranger Force consisted of the 2nd and 5th Ranger Bns of the U.S. Army, under the command of Lt. Col. James Earl Rudder, 2nd Bn. CO D, E, F, and part of Headquarters Co. of the 2nd Bn. We were assigned to assault Pointe du Hoc. All of these Rangers had the same three part mission: First, destroy the guns of Pointe du Hoc as quickly as possible. Second, destroy all German communication along the blacktop coast road. Third, create a roadblock to prevent any Germans from coming through from the west coast road to help the Germans on Omaha Beach.

Our D Company of the 2nd Ranger Battalion accomplished this important and dangerous mission. C Company of the 2nd Ranger Bn took Pointe de la Percee and accomplished their mission. A and B Companies landed at the Vierville Draw and successfully did their part, and the 5th Ranger Bn, led by Lt. Col. Max Schneider, landed east of them, later leading the troops off Omaha Beach to the high ground above at the command of General Coda of the 29th Infantry Division, when the General, at the top of his voice, shouted his command, "Ranger, lead the way!" It has become our motto ever since. All Rangers eventually gathered at Pointe du Hoc and prepared for their next objective on D+3.

The angry tidal drifts, underwater obstacles, and the terrible pounding from the enemy caused the early landings at Omaha Beach to experience extremely high casualties, and scattered units up and down the



Rangers rest on the cliffs following the first day of intense fighting.

beach. The unplanned landing and fighting of Rangers on Omaha Beach added an element of stability just at the right time to overcome the enemy and establish the beachhead. Captain James W. Eikner, our 2nd Bn. Communication Officer, explained that the above information distracts nothing from the heroic efforts of the combat engineers, the troops of the 1st and the 29th Div., and other forces including the Navy, Air Corps, Marines, and allied

troops. Fighting together, we got the job done.

For their bravery and combat excellence, the 2nd Ranger Bn. was awarded the U.S. Presidential Unit Citation. There were no Medals of Honor awarded by Congress to a Ranger in World War II. The highest medal for valor the Army can award is the Distinguished Service Cross, which Col. Rudder presented to me. S/Sgt. Kuhn received the Silver Star. General Omar Bradley, Commanding Officer of all American ground forces, who assigned this mission to the Rangers, said it was the most dangerous and one of the most important missions of D-Day.



The Ranger Monument overlooking the English Channel at Pointe du Hoc was built by the French to honor the 2nd Ranger Battalion.

The Rangers of World War II fought in nine campaigns, 13 invasions, 11 major battles, and six Ranger raids. They conducted innumerable combat patrols and just as many recon patrols. Many of our missions were classified or secret. The Rangers also cleared

up and resolved many pockets of resistance and successfully completed the many missions assigned to them by various divisions they were attached to. In World War II, there were only 3,000 Ranger volunteers chosen after testing and qualifying, plus many chosen volunteer replacements. Their casualties were

D-DAY: I WAS THERE

THE D-DAY ACCOUNT OF MAJ. GEN. J. MILNOR ROBERTS AIDE DE CAMP TO GENERAL GEROW OF THE 29TH INFANTRY DIVISION

The first real feeling I had about D-Day was on the evening of June 5, 1944, when we left Portland Naval Base in England, bound for the beaches of Normandy. Looking at the rest of the men on board the *USS Carroll*, I could not help but think that by the next night, half of these guys would be dead. I hadn't thought to consider myself among them, but I guess one never does.

At about 0530 on June 6, the Naval bombardment of the German defenses began. Battleships, cruisers, and destroyers opened up with everything they had. There wasn't anything the Germans could do about it. They just had to sit there and take it.

While the *Carroll* sat five miles out to sea with the rest of the transport ships during the bombardment, the GIs began to board the LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicles and Personnel) that would take the men ashore. Once we received the word to go in, the LCVPs broke for the beach in a ragged line. That is when our hearts stopped, and we just stood there watching them speed toward the shore.

The LCVPs caught fire as they got in close enough for the German guns to be in range. First we were hit with 88s (three-inch anti-aircraft guns fired like field guns, point blank) about a mile out. Then

came the automatic weapons, machine guns and such, at about six hundred yards. It was like a summer thunderstorm; a few drops at first, then everything all at once. Only this was lead.



Confusion quickly set in as we were pounded by 88s about two hundred yards from shore. The captain of our LCVP was killed and the crew panicked. We got hung up on a sand bar about one hundred yards out and we were catching the full force of the German guns. Though we should have backed up, the ramp was lowered. We had gone as far as that boat was going to take us. We were now on our own.

Someone yelled, "This is it!" and we went scrambling into the water. The water was deep, deeper than we had expected. Men who had been cramped and seasick inside the landing craft were now splashing about in the water, the zip and snap of sniper fire cracking in the air around them. We were overloaded and top-heavy with equipment, and some of the men who had instinctively inflated their life preservers began to capsize and drown.



The D-Day Generals: Bradley, Gerow, Eisenhower, and Collins. J. Milnor Roberts served as Gerow's Aide de Camp

By this point, I was terrified. It was tough to move and I was having trouble breathing with the water almost up to my mouth. To get ashore, we had to hop along with the waves. The water was becoming red with blood as I neared the shore, rifle overhead, gasping for air. Fortunately, I had decided against

inflating my life vest, and I eventually made it to the mangled shore, which was littered with the bodies of my fellow soldiers.

The 29th Infantry was suffering about a thirty percent casualty rate for the day, a little over ten hours into the invasion that began at dawn. Some estimate that about 2,700 men were dead by the time my feet hit the water that afternoon. When we landed, much of the 352nd German Division had been pushed back from the beach, but there were still many lingering German snipers remaining in the hills surrounding the beach. Dug in along the little pathways in the tall grassy hills beside the bluff, they were firing at the soldiers approaching the shore. As the bullets whizzed by, I quickly scrambled for some cover, trying to get off the beach as quickly as possible.

Running for cover across the beach I passed an Allied amphibious tank that had caught fire. I could hear the men screaming from deep inside the tank, but there wasn't a thing I could do about it. With feet wet and facing intense fire, I charged up a ravine only to find myself face to face with a sniper. I drew my carbine and pulled the trigger, but nothing happened. The salt water and sand had fouled the weapon to such an extent as to make it unusable. Diving into a nearby abandoned foxhole, I attempted to fix my gun. Luckily the sniper soon disappeared, and I was able to continue toward the top of the bluff.

Once I reached the top of the bluff, I turned to look out over the English Channel. It was just something else. The largest armada of battleships, cruisers,

destroyers, and merchant vessels ever assembled anywhere on Earth could be seen stretching all the way to the horizon. The awesome sight of that power and force, assembled to save the world, was simply unforgettable. For the Germans, this sight would prove to be the sign of their ultimate defeat. The landings on D-Day would come to be regarded as the beginning of the end of World War II.



Milnor Roberts (left) assists General Gerow in awarding battle stars to soldiers for their heroics on D-Day

After making it through that first night, hiding in a ditch and under fire from snipers, artillery, mortars, and bombings, the worst seemed to be over. I was assigned to make contact with an element of the reserve unit back at the beach when

I came upon a soldier I had recognized. He was on his knees, dead, behind a sea wall, shot right in the forehead. The bullet had penetrated right through his helmet. I had just met the soldier the night before the landing. We were the same rank, the same age. We had similar training and similar backgrounds. For all intents and purposes, we were interchangeable. We were like two peas in a pod; we just had different assignments. Not until then did I feel the real power of all that had happened.

Looking down on my fallen comrade, I could not help but think that it could have been me. It has really stuck with me all of these years.



Roberts (front row, far left) poses with General Gerow's staff at Eupen, Belgium, November, 1944

Major General J. Milnor Roberts would participate in five campaigns in Europe during World War II. Following the war he served as Chief of Army Reserves, Legislative Director of the Space Transportation Association, and Chairman of the Eisenhower Society. He is currently President of High Frontier, an organization that supports the Strategic Defense Initiative, and hosts The Greatest Generation radio show on the Radio America network.

WWII

OMAHA BEACH: EASY RED SECTOR

BY LT. COMMANDER JOSEPH P. VAGHI

BEACHMASTER, UNITED STATES NAVY, OMAHA BEACH

At the outset, permit me to define what a BEACHMASTER was and what his duties were. A Beachmaster is much like a traffic cop at a very busy intersection. All sorts of activities were taking place all around you and it was your responsibility to establish and maintain order. The Beachmaster controlled all traffic coming onto the beach – men and material – and arranging for all movement from the shore to ships at sea. It was the Beachmaster's responsibility to establish radio communication between the beach and the ships at sea. We were responsible for rendering medical aid to injured personnel until they could be evacuated to the ships offshore. In addition, we provided hydrographic assistance to incoming landing crafts – instructing them where to land, placing markers, and such. We had a boat repair section which provided temporary repair to disabled landing craft.



The Beachmaster for each sector of the various beaches, of which Easy Red was one sector, was responsible for all activities between the low tide mark and the high tide mark. The rise and fall of the tide amounted to some 18-20 feet twice a day in the English Channel. Our 6th Beach Battalion was responsible for most of Omaha Beach.

I was the Beachmaster of Easy Red Sector on Omaha Beach, Normandy. I was a Platoon Commander of Platoon C-8 which was one of nine Platoons in the 6th Naval Beach Battalion. The Battalion was composed of three Companies: A, B & C, with each Company having three platoons – my Platoon was one of the three in C Company. The landing craft that my Platoon was assigned to for the crossing of the English Channel was a Landing Craft Infantry (large) or LCI.

A secret report by Lt. H.K Rigg, the Skipper of LCI (L) 88 (our LCI) to the Commander in Chief, United States Fleet of 12 July 1944 contains this statement: "This vessel beached on schedule at 0735B, 6 June, the first LCI(L) on Easy Red Beach." Platoon C-8 of the 6th Battalion arrived in France at 7:35 AM, British Double Time on June 6, 1944, one hour and five minutes after H-Hour.

My platoon, along with the Commander of the 6th Beach Battalion, Commander Eugene Carusi, USN, some Army personnel, and A.J. Leibling, a writer for the *New Yorker* magazine, were aboard the LCI 88 when it beached on Easy Red, some 1000/1500 yards from the dune line of the beach. Our ship kissed the sands of Normandy when the tide was at its lowest. As noted above,

the tide would rise and fall some 18-20 feet twice a day, thus the greatest distance to the dune line was at low tide.

I was the first person to leave the LCI after beaching. The craft had ramps on each side of the bow for purposes of discharging the passengers. Shortly after leaving the craft, the right ramp was blown away by an enemy shell, causing several casualties both on the craft and in the water.

D-Day, needless to say, was a day of memorable events. I shall attempt to recount a few that were extraordinary. These events occurred along that sector of the beach known as Easy Red Beach which was assigned to our platoon.

The beach was cluttered with thousands of beach obstacles placed there by the Germans to thwart an invasion attempt by the Allies. A Navy Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) had landed prior to our

arrival and was successful in clearing away some of the obstructions, so as to permit movement into the beach by various landing crafts assigned to this and other beaches.

My first awareness that what we were doing was for real was when an 88mm shell hit our LCI(L) and machine gun fire surrounded us. The Germans were in their pillboxes and bunkers high above the beach on the bluff and had an unobstructed view of what we were doing.

The atmosphere was depressing. The top of the bluff behind the beach was barely visible; the sound of screeching 12 and 14-inch shells from the warships, the *USS Texas* and the *USS Arkansas*, offshore were new sounds never heard by us before; the stench of expended gunpowder filled the air and rocket launchers mounted on landing craft moved in close to the shore and were spewing forth hundreds of rounds at a time onto the German defenses. The sea was rough. Purple smoke emanated from the base of the beach obstacles as the UDT prepared to detonate another explosive in the effort to clear a path through the obstacles to the dune line – this was the state of affairs as the Platoon made its way to the dune line oh, so many yards away.

Using the obstacles as shelter, we moved forward over the tidal flat under full exposure to machine-gun fire as we finally reached the dune line. All C-8s made the long trek including Commander Carusi. God was with us!

Having reached the high water mark, we set about

organizing ourselves and planning the next move as we had done so many times during our training period. The principal difference was that we were

pinned down with real machine gun fire with very little movement to the right or the left of our position and absolutely NO movement forward.

Because the UDT had opened gaps through the underwater obstacles into Easy Red, most of the personnel and vehicles came ashore on my beach with the result that we were very crowded and became “sitting ducks” for the enemy fire.

I believe the most dramatic event I experienced that morning on Easy Red was when an Army officer came to me and asked that I, as the Beachmaster, pass the word over my powered microphone that the soldiers were to “move forward.” As a consequence of this request by the Officer, I gave the order after which an Army Sergeant pushed a “bangalore” torpedo through the barbed wire at the top of the dune, exploded it, which then opened a gap in the mass of barbed wire. He then turned to his men and said “follow me.” The men rushed through the gap onto the flat plateau behind the dune line to the base of the bluff, a distance of some 50 yards or so through heavily mined areas where many lost their lives or were seriously wounded. The Sergeant said, “Follow me.” He did not order his men forward, but actually went in front himself, which is the sign of a leader.

Once this heroic act of the sergeant was accomplished, the Army began its offense against the



Joseph Vaghi explains the worth of invasion money on June 19, 1944 to Villagers of St. Laurent Sur Mer, France



50 years after D-Day, Joe Vaghi meets with the young boy and girl from the photograph above

Germans as the GI's began to attack the Germans' strong points and began to fan out for their movement into the countryside of Normandy – the Battle of Normandy was underway.

As a component part of our C-8 Platoon, our Communication section established contact with our control vessel offshore and reported all the conditions on the beach as furnished by our Company Commander Lt. George Clyburn, our Battalion Commander, Commander Carusi and elements of the 5th Engineer Special Brigade to which we were attached.

Because we were sending so many messages via radio, it was later reported to us that the Germans “zeroed” in on our radio frequency and proceeded to pinpoint our exact location.

As best as I can recall, it was mid-morning when an Army first-aid man came to the area on the beach where I was standing and attempted to roll a soldier who was dead off a stretcher. I told him not to do that but to take hold of the other end of the stretcher and together we would place the body away from the area where trucks and jeeps were passing for travel to the openings in the German defenses.

As I bent down to pick up the stretcher, a very large explosion occurred. I was momentarily stunned; when I regained my senses, I discovered my clothes were on fire. After regaining my bearings and extinguishing the fire off my coveralls, I noticed that a jeep close by was burning. I turned to one of my men and told him to come with me. We went to the jeep and removed two 5-gallon cans of gasoline and a number of boxes of hand grenades. I was concerned that if these two elements were to explode, more deaths would occur in addition to those that were already dead due to the explosion. Amin Isbir, Seaman First Class, who was the oldest man in my

Platoon, born in 1909, suffered an instant death due to the explosion. Prior to leaving England for D-Day, Isbir confided in me that he would not come back alive – how prophetic!

As Beachmaster, I had the awesome responsibility of being very much entwined with the overall aims of the landing operations and the safety of those whose lives would be affected by carrying out my duties.



Joseph Vaghi explains the Top-Secret “BIGOT” map he used in directing the landings on Easy Red Sector of Omaha Beach to a young Marine just returned from Iraq in the summer of 2003

At one point, I ordered Seaman First Class Jim Gately to go out some distance in the turbulent waters to assist a soldier who was floundering while pulling a large Army weapon. Gately followed my orders only to come back and report that he had been hit by machine gun fire in the shoulder while giving assistance. His expression was, “I did what you told me to do.” He was evacuated later in the day.

Another incident that I remember because of its humor was when an Army bulldozer reached a point some 20 to 30 yards from the high water mark even though there was

no operator on it. I ran out to the “dozer” and after a few moments got it running and started towards the beach.

I had not traveled more than 10 to 15 feet when one of my men ran up to me and reported that Commander Carusi wanted me off the bulldozer – “I was more valuable as a Beachmaster than a bulldozer operator,” was the message. A short time later we did get the “dozer” off the beach area. I say it was humorous only because I had always wanted to operate a bulldozer but on this day I was denied the opportunity.

Perhaps the most touching moment that day was when a young soldier lay dying on the beach. I bent over him and told him to hang in there and that I

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“THE BOYS OF POINTE DU HOC” TWENTY YEARS PASSED

THE D-DAY ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT RONALD W. REAGAN: JUNE 6, 1984

In the days before this issue of World War II Chronicles was due to be sent to press, we learned of the passing of one of our most beloved American Presidents, Ronald Reagan. President Reagan, often called “The Great Communicator,” was known for giving some of the most powerful and moving speeches ever delivered in our nation’s history. From consoling the country following the loss of the space shuttle Challenger, to his inspiring call for General Secretary Gorbachev to “Tear down this wall!”, his eloquence touched all of us. Among the most memorable speeches of this former Army Air Corps Captain were the two addresses he gave on June 6, 1984 in Normandy, to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of D-Day. Delivered from the Ranger Monument at Pointe du Hoc and at Omaha Beach, these two speeches remain the best remembered from any of the D-Day anniversary ceremonies yet held. World War II Chronicles is proud to reprint the famed speech at Pointe du Hoc delivered by President Reagan on that day 20 years ago as a tribute to his memory. He is, and will continue to be, greatly missed.



We’re here to mark that day in history when the Allied armies joined in battle to reclaim this continent to liberty. For four long years, much of Europe had been under a terrible shadow. Free nations had fallen, Jews cried out in the camps, millions cried out for liberation. Europe was enslaved, and the world prayed for its rescue. Here in Normandy the rescue began. Here the Allies stood and fought against tyranny in a giant undertaking unparalleled in human history.

We stand on a lonely, windswept point on the northern shore of France. The air is soft, but 40 years ago at this moment, the air was dense with smoke and the cries of men, and the air was filled

with the crack of rifle fire and the roar of cannon. At dawn, on the morning of the 6th of June, 1944, 225 Rangers jumped off the British landing craft and ran to the bottom of these cliffs. Their mission was one of the most difficult and daring of the invasion: to climb these sheer and desolate cliffs and take out the enemy guns. The Allies had been told that some of the mightiest of these guns were here and they would be trained on the beaches to stop the Allied advance.

The Rangers looked up and saw the enemy soldiers—the edge of the cliffs shooting down at them with machine guns and throwing grenades. And the American

Rangers began to climb. They shot rope ladders over the face of these cliffs and began to pull themselves up. When one Ranger fell, another would take his place. When one rope was cut, a Ranger would grab another and begin his climb again. They climbed, shot back, and held their footing. Soon, one by one, the Rangers pulled themselves over the top, and in seizing the firm land at the top of these cliffs, they began to seize back the continent of Europe. Two hundred and twenty-five came here. After two days of fighting, only 90 could still bear arms.

Behind me is a memorial that symbolizes the Ranger daggers that were thrust into the top of these cliffs. And before me are the men who put them there.

These are the boys of Pointe du Hoc. These are the men who took the cliffs. These are the champions who helped free a continent. These are the heroes who helped end a war.

Gentlemen, I look at you and I think of the words of Stephen Spender's poem. You are men who in your "lives fought for life . . . and left the vivid air signed with your honor."

I think I know what you may be thinking right now—thinking, "We were just part of a bigger effort; everyone was brave that day."

Well, everyone was. Do you remember the story of Bill Millin of the 51st Highlanders? Forty years ago today, British troops were pinned down near a bridge, waiting desperately for help. Suddenly, they heard the sound of bagpipes, and some thought they were dreaming.

Well, they weren't. They looked up and saw Bill Millin with his bagpipes, leading the reinforcements and ignoring the smack of the bullets into the ground around him.

Lord Lovat was with him—Lord Lovat of Scotland, who calmly announced when he got to the bridge, "Sorry I'm a few minutes late," as if he'd been delayed by a traffic jam, when in truth he'd just come from the bloody fighting on Sword Beach, which he and his men had just taken.

There was the impossible valor of the Poles who threw themselves between the enemy and the rest of Europe as the invasion took hold, and the unsurpassed courage of the Canadians who had already seen the horrors of war on this coast. They knew what awaited them there, but they would not be deterred. And once they hit Juno Beach, they never looked back.

All of these men were part of a rollcall of honor with names that spoke of a pride as bright as the colors they bore: the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, Poland's 24th Lancers, the Royal Scots Fusiliers, the

Screaming Eagles, the Yeomen of England's armored divisions, the forces of Free France, the Coast Guard's "Matchbox Fleet" and you, the American Rangers.



President Ronald Reagan delivers his famed D-Day address at the Ranger Monument at Pointe du Hoc

Forty summers have passed since the battle that you fought here. You were young the day you took these cliffs; some of you were hardly more than boys, with the deepest joys of life before you. Yet, you risked everything here.

Why? Why did you do it? What impelled you to put aside the instinct for self-preservation and risk your lives to take these cliffs? What inspired all the men of the armies that met here? We look at you, and

somehow we know the answer. It was faith and belief; it was loyalty and love.

The men of Normandy had faith that what they were doing was right, faith that they fought for all

humanity, faith that a just God would grant them mercy on this beachhead or on the next. It was the deep knowledge—and pray God we have not lost it—that there is a profound, moral difference between the use of force for liberation and the use of force for conquest. You were here to liberate, not to conquer, and so you and those others did not doubt your cause. And you were right not to doubt.

You all knew that some things are worth dying for. One's country is worth dying for, and democracy is worth dying for,

because it's the most deeply honorable form of government ever devised by man. All of you loved liberty. All of you were willing to fight tyranny, and you knew the people of your countries were behind you.

The Americans who fought here that morning knew word of the invasion was spreading through the



President Reagan meets with veterans of the United States Army Rangers on the 40th Anniversary of D-Day; June 6, 1984

darkness back home. They thought—or felt in their hearts, though they couldn't know in fact, that in Georgia they were filling the churches at 4 a.m., in Kansas they were kneeling on their porches and praying, and in Philadelphia they were ringing the Liberty Bell.

Something else helped the men of D-Day: their rock-hard belief that Providence would have a great hand in the events that would unfold here; that God was an ally in this great cause. And so, the night before the invasion, when Colonel Wolverton asked his parachute troops to kneel with him in prayer he told them: Do not bow your heads, but look up so you can see God and ask His blessing in what we're about to do. Also that night, General Matthew Ridgway on his cot, listening in the darkness for the promise God made to Joshua: "I will not fail thee nor forsake thee."

These are the things that impelled them; these are the things that shaped the unity of the Allies.

When the war was over, there were lives to be rebuilt and governments to be returned to the people. There were nations to be reborn. Above all, there was a new peace to be assured. These were huge and daunting tasks. But the Allies summoned strength from the faith, belief, loyalty, and love of those who fell here. They rebuilt a new Europe together.

There was first a great reconciliation among those who had been enemies, all of whom had suffered so greatly. The United States did its part, creating the Marshall Plan to help rebuild our allies and our former enemies. The Marshall Plan led to the Atlantic alliance—a great alliance that serves to this day as our shield for freedom, for prosperity, and for peace.

In spite of our great efforts and successes, not all that followed the end of the war was happy or planned. Some liberated countries were lost. The great sadness of this loss echoes down to our own

time in the streets of Warsaw, Prague, and East Berlin. Soviet troops that came to the center of this continent did not leave when peace came. They're still there, uninvited, unwanted, unyielding, almost 40 years after the war. Because of this, Allied forces still stand on this continent. Today, as 40 years ago,

our armies are here for only one purpose—to protect and defend democracy. The only territories we hold are memorials like this one and graveyards where our heroes rest.

We in America have learned bitter lessons from two World Wars: It is better to be here ready to protect the peace than to take blind shelter across the sea, rushing to respond only after freedom is lost. We've

learned that isolationism never was and never will be an acceptable response to tyrannical governments with an expansionist intent.

But we try always to be prepared for peace; prepared to deter aggression; prepared to negotiate the reduction of arms; and, yes, prepared to reach out again in the spirit of reconciliation. In truth, there is no reconciliation we would welcome more than a reconciliation with the Soviet Union, so, together, we can lessen the risks of war, now and forever.

It's fitting to remember here the great losses also suffered by the Russian people during World War II: 20 million perished, a terrible price that testifies to all the world the necessity of ending war. I tell you from my heart that we in the United States do not want war. We want to wipe from the face of the Earth the terrible weapons that man now has in his hands. And I tell you, we are ready to seize that beachhead. We look for some sign from the Soviet Union that they are willing to move forward, that they share our desire and love for peace, and that they will give up the ways of conquest. There must be a changing there that will allow us to turn our hope into action.



A young Captain Ronald Reagan of the United States Army Air Corps in 1940

SPEAK OUT

BY HUNTER SCOTT

NATIONAL YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE, WORLD WAR II VETERANS COMMITTEE

The “D” in D-Day

Perhaps one of the greatest unsolved mysteries surrounding the Normandy Invasion is the meaning of the *D* in D-Day. As I was polling a few of my friends at the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill, I found that they, too, were a bit perplexed by the question. Nonetheless, came up with some very unique answers. “Dooms-day? Death-Day? Dismay-Day? Disaster-Day? Dispatch-Day?” Or just plain “Dang-good-time-to-invade-Day.” The list of responses could really go on for, well, as many pertinent “D” words as there are in the dictionary, but let me offer a few more realistic suggestions. Hopefully this column will finally answer the number one asked question at the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans.



commonly associated with perhaps the most well known battle of World War II, the battle of Normandy; however, the actual term is more generic. D-Day is a general term which refers to the beginning day of any engagement.

Historians and etymologists have been debating the meaning of the *D* for more than fifty years. Hopefully this column has shed some light on the more widely-accepted meaning of the letter. Now those *doomsday* or *dispatch-day* traditions can finally be silenced. For now you know.

(Hunter Scott is National Youth Representative for the World War II Veterans Committee. He was instrumental in persuading Congress to pass legislation to overturn the court martial of Captain Charles McVay of the USS Indianapolis.

Hunter is currently a freshman at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and is a member of his school's Naval ROTC program.) WWII

The *D* question is by no means a new question. In fact, even in 1944 many people were wondering about the meaning behind the *D*. According to the D-Day Museum, the *D* in D-Day stands for—are you ready for this? “Day.” Seems a little redundant, eh? Day-Day. It is hard to believe that after all the creative guessing by my fellow Tar Heels, the meaning of the letter *D* was right in front of us all along. The Army has said that the *D* in D-Day is more alliteration of the *D* sound and stands for the “Day” of engagement or the opening day of an event. For instance, H-Hour of D-Day would mean that a plan is to be executed at a certain hour, *H*, on a particular day, *D*. In the case of the Normandy Invasion, D-Day was June 6, 1944. For any day after D-Day, one would simply say *D* plus the number of days had passed since the invasion. The day after D-Day would be *D*+1; the week after would be *D*+7, and so on.

The letter *D* stood for the opening “Day” of a scheduled mission, and was often referred to as D-Day if a date had not yet been set, or, for security matters, if those in “the know” wanted to keep the date a top secret piece of information. The term D-Day is most

WORLD WAR II CHRONICLES

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would send help. Dr. Jim Davey, Lt(jg) M.C. of my platoon administered morphine which relieved some of the pain, and shortly after, he was dead. I shall always regret that I did not get his name. He was so young and so dependent on us to help him.

The word D-Day indicates the day of the landing, but to the men of the 6th Beach Battalion, it meant at least three twenty-four hour days which became one long day. Each night at dusk, German planes would strafe our beach with gunfire causing much anxiety and some casualties. John Hanley, Seaman First Class of Boston, who had jumped into a foxhole was hit in the leg by a strafing plane and was evacuated.

The evening of the first day, our communication section sent repeated messages to the control vessel at sea that the Army was in desperate need of “bazooka” ammunition in order to repulse an expected counter attack by German tanks. As it turned out, we did not get the ammunition nor did the Germans counter attack.

We also experienced the fear and anxiety of a gas attack. An alarm was sounded indicating gas. All of us, without exception, ran to retrieve the gas masks that we believed would never be used. As luck would have it, the warning was a false alarm.

On D-Day, a college classmate of mine, Ed Gallogly from Providence College, Rhode Island, came ashore. He saw me and said, “Hi Joe, what the hell are you doing here?” Ed later became Lt. Governor of Rhode Island.

The greatest satisfaction that the men of the 6th Naval Beach Battalion experienced was that we were the welcoming committee for the thousands and thousands of men who came ashore over our Easy Red Beach and fought their way to ultimate victory over the German war machine.

Joseph Vaghi went on to serve as a Division Officer of the landing team that invaded Okinawa. For his services beyond the call of duty, he was awarded the Bronze Star. After serving in the Navy for five years, LCDR Vaghi returned home, where he later founded his architecture firm, Joseph P. Vaghi AIA & Associates. He currently resides in Kensington, MD.

WWII

On December 16, 1944, the German army launched its last great counter-offensive of the war. The Battle of the Bulge brought together more than a million men in what was meant to be Hitler’s “last stand” in attempting to break apart and defeat the Allied forces.

I remember the bitter cold at Ardennes that December. Our planes landed and took off in light snow, or on slippery metal runways. Frostbitten toes and fingers were black and to the bone. Often it was so foggy that we couldn’t land. I cried more than once for the wounded anxiously awaiting evacuation whenever our planes could not land. Once we were grounded by a storm, so we stayed aboard our aircraft with the wounded trying to keep everyone warm. During that long and sleepless night, I wondered what the sisters at St. Mary’s Hospital, who taught me to be a nurse, would think if they could see me now. I also wondered if my job as a stewardess with United Airlines would be waiting for me when I got home, especially that warm tropical Hawaiian route they planned to add.

The Battle of the Bulge ended in late January when the original lines in Ardennes and Bastogne were restored, but at a terrible cost on all sides. Germany’s final defeat was only months away.

During those final days, our Air Evacuation crew continued to retrieve and transport a diminishing number of wounded to hospitals throughout Britain, until one day I realized that I had accrued 250 Medical Air Evacuation missions—24 of them transatlantic. It would become 25 when I finally brought our wounded, along with myself, all the way home.

After the war, I got my old job back with United Airlines and later flew the Honolulu to San Francisco Inaugural flight in May of 1947.

Captain Lillian Kinkela Keil returned to service in Korea, where she flew 175 additional missions. She would finally retire from the military in 1954 as the most decorated woman in United States military history, having been awarded 19 medals, including a European Theater medal with four battle stars, a Korean service medal with seven battle stars, and four air medals. The 1953 movie Flight Nurse, for which she served as a consultant, was based on her experiences.

WWII

very high, with almost 500 Rangers killed in action or dying of their injuries, and countless more wounded. Few escaped without a Purple Heart.

Our 2nd Ranger Bn., while in Europe in 1943-45, trained in Scotland and England, later fighting through France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and Germany, finally meeting the Russians on the River Elbe in Czechoslovakia. The war in Europe ended in May, 1945. I was wounded three times, and honorably discharged on December 30, 1945.

The two Rangers who found and rendered the “Big Guns of Pointe du Hoc” inoperable, Len Lomell and Jack E. Kuhn, each returned to a successful civilian life. Jack E. Kuhn had been promoted in service from platoon sergeant to First Sergeant of D. Co. 2nd Ranger Bn, and retired as the Chief of Police in his hometown of Altoona, PA. While still in service, I was promoted from 1st Sergeant of D. Company in June 1944 to Sgt. Major of 2nd Ranger Bn. In October 1944, I was given a battlefield commission to 2nd Lt. And was assigned to D. Company 1st Platoon. In civilian life, with the help of the G.I. Bill to complete my legal education, I became a lawyer. I am now retired and live in Toms River, NJ.

Incidentally, the French people of Normandy have erected another monument to the Rangers on Pointe du Hoc, part of which is a large 155MM coastal gun like the D-Day artillery previously described. Over a million tourists visit Pointe du Hoc every year.

The Ranger volunteers of World War II were America’s brightest and most proficient counterpart to the commandos of other nations; Special Forces for dangerous missions. The Ranger motto was “Be the best of the best” and “Rangers lead the way,” and still is today. Many generals and other members of the “high brass” as well as some historians thought the Rangers were the best soldiers in any army. Please excuse my modesty, or the lack thereof...whatever, “C’est la guerre.”

Leonard Lomell would be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroics on D-Day. Historian Stephen Ambrose credited Lomell as the single individual, other than Eisenhower, most responsible for the success of D-Day. After the war, Lomell studied law, and would go on to start his own law practice. He now resides in Toms River, New Jersey.

WWII

I was wounded near a white wooden gate in a hedgerow. I have been told many times since that there were no painted gates in the hedgerows of Normandy. A few years ago I went back with three others, two of whom were historians, and found that gate. The gate itself was gone, removed by the farmer when he widened the opening in the hedge. The white wooden gatepost with hinges is still standing where it was when I was wounded.

I jumped into Holland before my wounds were fully healed and fought there for 72 continuous days. Though I was not wounded at that time, we lost the majority of Company A under Montgomery’s command. My company of approximately 197 men came back with less than one third of that complement.

We were out of Holland for only three weeks when the Battle of the Bulge began. We were shipped to Bastogne with orders to hold that city. There would be no withdrawal, no surrender. We held against nine heavily armored German divisions to our one. I was wounded for a third time by rifle fire.

We then fought the rest of the war making our way through Alsace, the Ruhr Valley, the Rhineland, Bavaria, and finally into Berchtesgaden, Hitler’s home. We were scheduled to spearhead the invasion of the Japanese mainland but the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended that war and saved untold lives on both sides.

I returned home after serving 2 years 9 months and surviving four major campaigns and three separate wounds-but could not vote or buy a beer. I wasn’t old enough. I was 20 years old. I would not turn 21 until April 5, 1946.

For his bravery and sacrifice, Donald Burgett would receive the Combat Infantry Badge, Bronze Star, two Purple Hearts, four Campaign Stars, two Bronze Arrowheads, two Presidential Unit Citations, in addition to a number of commendations from France and Holland. He would go on to write four books on his experiences in World War II, including the renowned book Currahee, which was the only book on the war endorsed by General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

WWII

A LETTER HOME

FROM SPC RYAN SWENSEN, 1487TH TRANSPORTATION COMPANY

SPC Ryan Swensen of Germantown, Ohio, is a member of the 1487th Transportation Company and currently serving in Iraq. Prior to going to Iraq, SPC Swensen was a student at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. In an attempt to give all of us at home a better view of the events unfolding in Iraq, he has written the following letter home.

The nature of warfare has changed again, as it has with every conflict our nation has faced. No longer are we faced with a uniformed enemy with a front line. Our homeland has become a battlefield of sorts and everywhere in the affected region is considered a combat zone. Much of what we remember from Vietnam can be compared to Iraq and Afghanistan; even the women and children can be considered potential threats.

Prior to heading to Iraq in January, I lived my life as a typical American college student. I would get up for class, go about my day and socialize with friends in the evening and often late into the night. I am also an American soldier that answered the call to duty. I went to my National Guard unit for my weekend drill and was met by the news that we were, in fact, being deployed. Things were about to change for my fellow guardsmen and me.

My MOS (military occupational specialty) is 88M, a motor transport operator, and I am essential to this War on Terrorism. All troops that have been deployed in the combat branches depend on me to supply them when brought in, and also to bring their equipment back when sent home. The difference is that there are no front lines anymore. I have become an infantryman on wheels. Today, the enemy recognizes that they stand no chance against a tank or a fully equipped infantry soldier, so they will engage a convoy that supports combat units. We are the

soldiers that have been thrown into the business of war fighting.

There are a lot of comforts we enjoy at the base camps such as excellent chow halls and showers. As a sign of the times, we also have internet access that can allow instant contact with our loved ones at home. It's amazing that now we can keep in touch instantly rather than waiting weeks for letters to go back and forth. The deployed soldiers work hard, and for the most part, there are some amenities to relax with at the end of the day.

Most of us are careful not to let complacency set in, however. We can see on the news the names of units and soldiers scrolling at the bottom of our television screens that are being injured and losing their lives every day. Because of the nature of this conflict, it's hard to know when the next

attack will come, whether in the middle of the day by a rocket-propelled grenade hastily aimed at an Army camp, or by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) laying in wait for the next military convoy to pass on the road. This is why all coalition soldiers are constantly on guard.

The climate of Iraq is complex. Some parallels *can* be made to Vietnam, when we can't tell who the enemy is. It could easily be the person dressed in civilian clothing waiting by a broken-down car by the road, signaling ahead that a convoy is coming or one of many people looking out their windows or off their rooftops. There is an easy majority that are just going about their lives as farmers or shepherds and are happy that the dictatorial regime of Saddam is at an end. It's the restless minority that are causing the



LETTER HOME

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

FATHER FOUND

THE STORY OF A SON'S QUEST TO RECONNECT WITH A FATHER LOST SIXTY YEARS AGO

BY DUANE HEISINGER

Duane Heisinger, the oldest of three sons of Grace and Lawrence Heisinger, was born in 1930 and raised in Fresno, California. After several years in college and a year in the Air Force, he entered the U.S. Naval Academy, graduating in 1956. He served thirty years in the Navy, retiring a Navy Captain with assignments primarily at sea including two ship commands, three combat tours in Vietnam, and over eleven years in overseas intelligence assignments including three years as the Defense Attaché, London. In recent years he has conducted extensive research on the life and death of his father as a POW of the Japanese in WWII. Duane and his wife, Judith have three married daughters and ten grandchildren.



Lawrence Heisinger stands with his family for the last time before leaving for Manila (son Duane is on the far right)

“I remember the day Father left. I remember the pictures taken of us together with him in his Army uniform, I remember that long line we were in at the pier, waiting to say goodbye. Good family friends were nearby . . . What was happening? How could I help as mother’s tears were flowing? What did all this mean? None of us really knew . . .”

On April 21, 1941, Samuel Lawrence Heisinger said goodbye to his wife and family on the docks of San Francisco, and boarded a ship for Manila. Charting a successful career path with the Fresno District Attorney’s Office, the young Army reserve officer and lawyer accepted a new posting to Manila,

working on MacArthur’s JAG staff. It would only be a year’s assignment and he would return to take up his duties once again in Fresno. Maybe it was a call to do something different, adventurous even answering a need to his country. Perhaps the motive

was to advance his family’s financial security, especially after some very unsettling years during the depression. There had been a small build-up going on in the Philippines, but nothing much to worry about. After all, many felt that America needed to more closely scrutinize Japanese expansionism, even though there were debates going on in Washington as to whether the threat was real or imagined. By July, events in the Pacific took on ominous tones. More men came flooding in by ship, but necessary military supporting equipment was slow to arrive, and often from old stocks. The war came in December.

What happened next has continued to haunt Americans for 60 years. Captain Samuel Heisinger never came home, and it continued to influence me and my mother and two brothers and the families of thousands of others who were caught up in the terrible tragedies of Bataan and Corregidor during those first crucial months of late 1941 and early 1942. In the end, 20,000 Americans with even more Filipino troops marched off to POW camps

from which 62 percent survived by war's end. These POW survivors lived to tell the full story of America's second biggest humiliation after Pearl Harbor.

Ten years ago, I set out on a long, involved, personal quest to find out more about my father's final days knowing that some of the answers might be found with the personal accounts of the few survivors - and the few letters left behind by my father. Exhaustive research uncovered much more:

"Father did not return from the Philippines. He said only a few words before death came a few days after the second prison ship bombing. He smiled in responding to the last person who spoke with him before he slipped into a coma and died. Death had been his companion for over two-and-a-half years and certainly within the holds on the two-ship final journey. Numbers of his close friends had died, but he held on and was not taken until that cold day in the upper hold of the *Enoura Maru* in the port of Takao, Formosa (Kaochiung, Taiwan)."

The story really began with my early involvement in an organization, the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor. These were the survivors of the POW time. The key was to search out those who knew my father, or knew of him during those terrible, final days. After 50 years few were left, but I sought them where they were.

"Yes, I knew him." These simple words spoke volumes to me as I continued the search. I was led through many stories heard and other clues to the National

Archives, libraries and repositories of personal diaries. I found scraps of paper, and lists of prisoner names. I was given diaries of some men who re-

turned. From the sons and daughters of these men, I was given diaries which had been buried, recovered or found and returned to the grieving families. These small bits helped me construct the missing parts of my father's story. I was starting to understand. I was starting to find my father.

Those who had suffered the most in the darkest times had the heroic fortitude to make sure that at least some record was kept of the brutality—

even if the only method at hand was the use of the smallest scrap of paper, an old discarded label from a can, bits of paper with names and dates taken off the dead, buried in the prison camps, or passed from one to another. These men wanted their families to know. Maybe news would get back home of what had happened since those difficult days fighting on Bataan and on Corregidor and then the POW camps—and these men could leave a final message.

This is not an easy book to read. Last year's best-seller *Ghost Soldiers*, by Hampton Sides, was a great story with a happy ending. Sides's mission was to concentrate on the Army Rangers' raid on Cabanatuan and the rescue of over 500 POWs. *Father Found* tells the rest of the story. It tells of those who could not tell their story, for they did not return. Though many tried to hold on and return to their country and family, and they had the

needed will to survive, years of starvation and little or no treatment to the endemic diseases of the



Site of the initial POW holding area on Corregidor Island where Lawrence Heisinger was held



The Enora Maru in Takao Harbor, Formosa, on January 9, 1945. Major Lawrence Heisinger died aboard this ship three to four days later

Philippines compounded by human cruelty beyond belief, broken leadership, slow and sometimes quickly administered death, and the final degradation of the experience of the Hell Ships made return for many, impossible. You know how this book is going to end, but the ending is probably the biggest shock to the system.

I used diaries, recollections, letters, and my ten-years of research collected from a wealth of material left over from the living and the dead. I weave the history of those terrible days in the Philippines as WWII was about to explode into Asia and the Pacific. The story is told as it unfolds through the eyes of those who suffered the consequences of Japanese captivity. My father remains at the center of the book, and it's as if he in some strange sense is telling the story. There is no condemnation here. No rehashing of the right or wrong reasons behind the actions of the commanders. Men caught up in a horrific situation tell their individual stories in the simplest and most straight-forward terms.

The book works on many different levels: for the historian, for the student of leadership principles, for the psychologist or psychiatrist who deals with combatants under great stress, and finally for myself, as I tried to sense my father's thoughts as he looked from afar to his children. He wanted to return but saw that possibility slipping away within the events taking place around him.

Indeed, some of the stories found in these diaries and introduced within *Father Found* point to the extreme effort made by these men to reach across the miles perhaps in a final message. They wanted to provide fatherly comfort, understanding, even guidance, from seven thousand miles away to family, all while imprisoned within a seemingly hopeless situation—father to son, father to daughter. As sons and daughters, we looked upon these messages as directed to us by our fathers, a final message for many of us:



Lawrence Heisinger in the field before being captured

"A few tears appeared in your mothers eyes, the first time I ever saw that happen in all the years of many goodbye . . . I have many times wanted to write to you, and for you, my intimate thoughts and feelings . . . both during the five months I was actively engaged in the hostilities . . . and thru the years in which I have been held a captive . . . You were born after your Dad had given up

hope of ever having a son . . .

(Navy) Duty has not permitted that you and I share as many of your formative years together as I would like. There still lives in me a hope that I may be permitted to give (you) my hand and ask you to face life with me . . . my prayer being that

. . . I can add something that you may find . . . a treasure worthy of perpetuation in your own children

. . . But you do not know me, Son. You only 'know of me.' These pages should help that, and, supposing I don't 'make the grade'. . . these pages may survive, and I would then

be glad, for somehow, it could be a little less regrettable to me to take the mud in

my teeth if I knew that you would come to know me better. This (un)fulfilled desire to share life with you . . . has become the ever present goal of my life . . . I have taken you with me thru this war . . . I have wanted to make you proud of me, not for any great outstanding deed as appraised by man as 'beyond the call of duty' for to me there is no act beyond the call of duty. We owe our all . . . but what you would think about it all in days to come has always crossed my mind. It is but natural . . . I should have the urge to write these pages . . . (that) you might read of and know more of the man who is your father . . . Why have I not written this before now? First and foremost, I haven't had the guts to do so. Denied all contact with your world, painfully obsessed with wonderings of how you may be faring, all of my paternal love pent up within me and denied expression, in constant fear of having my future with you frustrated thru one of the common occurrences in this precarious life of a prisoner of war . . . fear of having to die without you and (I) having known each other . . . I evaded things which tended to keep paramount in my mind that I had a young son, from whose life I am denied being a part and enjoying—indefinitely so—

FAREWELL TO A TRUE AMERICAN HERO

ADMIRAL THOMAS MOORER (1913-2004)

BY JAMES C. ROBERTS

With the recent death of Admiral Thomas Moorer at 91, America has lost a military leader, strategist and hero-the likes of which we shall not soon see again.

His military career was one of the most remarkable and distinguished of our time. His meteoric rise through the ranks was presaged by his being named valedictorian of his high school class in Mount Willing, Alabama at age 15. At 17 he received an appointment to the Naval Academy from which he was graduated in 1933, a star academically and on the football field.

A highly decorated pilot in World War II Admiral Moorer was rapidly promoted, serving as assistant chief of naval operations to the legendary Admiral Arleigh Burke in the 1950s. In 1958, he was promoted to Rear Admiral at age 45, then the youngest man selected for that rank.

Admiral Moorer later served as commander of both the Atlantic and Pacific fleets (the only officer to do so), and was named Chief of Naval Operations in 1967 and was appointed by President Nixon to the chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1970.

Despite the prestige and responsibility attached to the CNO and Chairmen's positions, Admiral Moorer found these jobs frustrating in many respects.

As Chief of Naval Operations and later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Johnson and Nixon administrations, Moorer pressed hard to modernize the U.S. Navy which was then composed mainly of aging, World War II – era ships.

His entreaties went largely unheeded by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and his whiz kids, however.

The same was true of his advocacy of massive and decisive application of force in the Vietnam War – a tactic he felt certain would win the war. When this approach was finally implemented by President Nixon in 1972 – including the mining of Haiphong Harbor which Admiral Moorer had long pressed for – it decimated the North Vietnamese forces and brought Hanoi to the bargaining table.

As Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Nixon administration Admiral Moorer also clashed repeatedly with Henry Kissinger over his policy of détente with the Soviet Union, especially the Secretary of State's advocacy of the ill-advised Strategic Arms Limitation talks. Instead, he advocated a muscular policy of economic pressure and military superiority as the only way to check Soviet expansion and ultimately reverse it. This strategy was vindicated 20 years later in the

policies of the Reagan administration which brought about the collapse of the Soviet empire.

Admiral Moorer retired from the military in 1974 but the next 30 years were hardly inactive. Instead he maintained an active interest and involvement in policy issues and politics, opposed the ratification of the Panama Canal treaty, campaigned for causes such as military preparedness and the development of a missile defense system, and campaigned for candidates that he supported such as Ronald Reagan. Military, conservative, patriotic and civic organizations found in him a selfless and tireless friend and champion.

As President of Radio America and the World War II Veterans Committee, I got to know him well over the past 10 years and came to esteem his many admirable qualities.



He was intensely interested in the youth of America and concerned that they develop an informed patriotism and a knowledge of history. I remember calling him in late October of last year, to confirm his participation in the World War II Veterans Committee conference due to convene 10 days later.

“Are the young people going to be theyah?” he asked in his distinctive Alabama drawl.

Informed that there would be two hundred high school and college students present, the Admiral noted, “That’s very important,” adding that he most certainly would be there.

The Admiral explained that he was now using a wheelchair but that his son would make sure he got there.

He was a superb raconteur and young and old alike were captivated by his “sea stories.”

Newly assigned to Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked, he was one of the few pilots to get his plane off the ground, which allowed him to fly all night and all day in search of the Japanese fleet.

Later sent to the south pacific to aid in the defense of Australia, his PBY aircraft was attacked by nine Japanese fighters and sent plunging towards the ocean. Then - Lieutenant Moorero, though wounded, managed to land the plane in the sea and the crew was rescued by a Philippine freighter.

He anticipated another attack, which shortly ensued, as the ship was hit by Japanese dive bombers. Lieutenant Moorero and his men escaped the sinking ship in two lifeboats equipped with sails and set out

for Australia. At night they came upon a deserted island and the next day wrote SOS – WATER, MEDICINE in huge letters in the sand.

An Australian Army pilot flew over and dipped his wings, acknowledging the plea for help. He returned later and dropped several glass jugs of water which shattered on impact.

“I was mad as hell,” Admiral Moorero recalled, “until I remembered that the Australians don’t drink water. They drink beer. The pilot just didn’t know any better.”

The next day an Australian destroyer rescued Moorero and his crew and dropped them off in Darwin, Australia.

“We went ashore,” the Admiral says, “and the town was completely deserted. Every man, woman and child had fled into the bush,” thinking a Japanese invasion was imminent.

“I had been to Darwin,” Moorero noted, “and I knew where the hotel was and so we all walked over. We were barefoot, ragged clothes, unshaven, but there were steaks in the ice box and whisky on the bar and so we had a fine old time.”



Then-Commander Thomas Moorero (far right) stands with his fellow United States Navy men before leaving Tokyo for home



Admiral Moorero speaks at the 2003 Committee Conference last November

As this remark indicates, the Admiral had a great sense of humor.

Having served under MacArthur at war's end, he reflected on the General's penchant for large staffs.

"If you asked MacArthur what time was sunset on that day, he would press a button and the Colonel in charge of tracking sunsets would enter the room and give you the precise time," Moorer said.

During the period Moorer also got to know many of the senior Japanese military leaders against whom he had fought.

He recalled an occasion years later when Commander Mitsuo Fuchida, the leader of the aircraft strike force that attacked Pearl Harbor, visited him in Washington.

Moorer asked Fuchida what he was doing. Fuchida explained that he was now a Methodist missionary and was traveling around to the schools in Japan teaching the students about Christianity.

To which Moorer replied, "You'd better not let the Supreme Court catch you doing that in this country. They'll lock you up."

Speaking at our 2002 conference, Admiral Moorer reflected on the effects of advancing age, noting, "I'm 90 years old. I can't walk, I can't see, and I can't hear. But other than that, I have a hell of a good time."

Clearly a major reason for his positive outlook on life was his family. He and his wife Carrie were married for 69 years and he rarely spoke without making an affectionate comment about her.

On one occasion he said, "They say that a good wife can make a man happy or successful. Well my wife has made me both happy and successful."

On February 24th Mrs. Moorer received the tri-cornered American flag at the formal funeral service held at Arlington National Cemetery. There, with full military honors, the nation paid tribute to a great American, wishing him, in the words of the old Navy farewell, "fair winds and a following sea."

WWII

maybe for me forever . . . I have always prayed for you and your happiness and well being, earnestly and reverently asking God to keep you and join us that we might know a happy life together . . . At times I even avoided prayer, because there could not be prayer without you in it, and after praying, you would linger with me—and it would hurt—and it wasn't best for me nor for the job I had to do. All this may be very difficult for you to understand . . . I crave a normal father and son existence which has been denied me and I am afraid—horribly and painfully afraid—that such an experience will never be mine. . . . what might have been . . . We have been too busy living life to record it."

Thomas Hayes left his notes, his diary and memories in Bilibid Prison. He died later en route Japan on the Japanese ship *Brazil Maru*, having earlier survived the bombings on the *Orokyu Maru* and then the *Enoura Maru*. The date was approximately January 23, 1945, one week before the survivors reached Japan. Hayes was buried at sea. And so it was with my father. He died in Takao, Formosa aboard the same *Enoura Maru* after the effects of the two bombings, malnutrition, and a reoccurrence of the cerebral malaria that had struck him down in the Davao Penal Colony. A place where he and another two thousand had slaved for almost twenty one months from late 1942 to June 1944.

The history of these horrific Philippine days is well known. *Father Found* is a son's effort to relate the reader to the issues of day-to-day survival and the desire to understand the need to connect to a father-lost, but now found-after sixty years.



To purchase a copy of *Father Found*, send a check for \$19.50 to Duane Heisinger, 7401 Bull Run Drive, Centreville, VA 20121. E-mail heis56@aol.com or order it from the publisher, XulonPress.com, Amazon.com, Borders.com or Barnes & Noble.com.

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THE WORLD WAR II BOOK CLUB

FEATURING BOOKS ABOUT WORLD WAR II: SPECIAL D-DAY EDITION

CURRAHEE!:

A SCREAMING EAGLE AT NORMANDY

by Donald R. Burgett

Presidio Press; 256 pages \$26.95 (Hardcover)

Dell; 224 pages \$6.99 (Mass-Market Paperback)



“A fascinating tale of personal combat...portrays the courage, endurance, initiative, and fighting qualities of an American soldier on a European battlefield of World War II.”

—Dwight D. Eisenhower

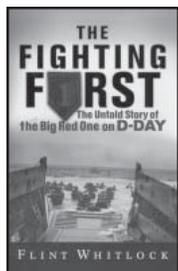
Though it was originally published over 40 years ago, Donald Burgett's *Currahee!* continues to be a must read for any student of World War II. Burgett's masterwork, which was the only book from World War II personally endorsed by

General Eisenhower, was recently republished in both hardcover and mass-market paperback. *Currahee!* is Donald Burgett's first-hand account of serving as a “Screaming Eagle” in the legendary 101st Airborne Division. As described by *Life* magazine at the time *Currahee!* was first published, “Without false heroics, everything is here, man's cruelty and kindness under stress, fear and courage, hope and despair. Because he writes of acts rather than thoughts or sensations, Burgett is cool as only a 19-year old can be cool, committed to immediate action, to his comrades and to survival.”

THE FIGHTING FIRST

by Flint Whitlock

Westview Press; 378 pages \$27.50 (Hardcover)



The Fighting First tells the untold story of the 1st Infantry Division's part in the D-Day invasion of France at Normandy. Using a variety of primary sources, official records, interviews, and unpublished memoirs by the veterans themselves, author Flint Whitlock has crafted a riveting, gut-wrenching, personal story of courage under fire. Operation Overlord - the Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944—was arguably the most important battle

of World War II, and Omaha Beach was the hottest spot in the entire operation. Leading the amphibious assault on the “Easy Red” and “Fox Green” sectors of Omaha Beach was the U.S. Army's 1st Infantry Division—“The Big Red One”—a tough, swaggering outfit with a fine battle record. The saga of the Big Red One, however, did not end with the storming of the beachhead. The author concludes with an account of the 1st in their fight across France, Belgium, and into Germany itself, playing pivotal roles in the bloody battles for Aachen, the Huertgen Forest, and the Battle of the Bulge. *The Fighting First* is an inspiring, graphic, and often heartbreaking story of young American soldiers performing their D-Day missions with spirit, humor, and determination.

D-DAY

by Martin Gilbert

Wiley, John & Sons, Inc.; 240 pages \$19.95 (Hardcover)



It was the most massive, complex, and spectacular amphibious assault ever attempted, the long-awaited turning point in the bloodiest and most savage war in history. But when 7,000 ships, 11,000 aircraft, and 150,000 troops converged on the coast of Normandy on 6 June 1944, the outcome of the attack, code-named “Operation Overlord,” was far from certain.

In *D-Day*, one of the foremost historians of the twentieth century provides an incisive and dramatic account of the strategic planning, in-fighting, invention, deception, and hard labor that led up to that momentous day. Through vivid, firsthand accounts of the battle, Martin Gilbert also captures the horror and heroism of D-Day, from daring paratroop attacks behind enemy lines to grim determination under withering fire on the beachheads.

Tracing the genesis of D-Day to the early days after Dunkirk, Gilbert recounts how the results of numerous commando raids—some successful, others disastrous—shaped the Allies planning for a full-scale assault. He reveals Churchill's hands-on involvement in both strategic and tactical planning, and explains why the invasion was delayed for more than two years after America's entry into the war.

Complete with twenty-seven maps prepared especially for this book, *D-Day* offers a fascinating, moving, and inspiring account that sheds new light on one of the greatest achievements in military history.

OMAHA BEACH:

D-DAY, JUNE 6, 1944

by Joseph Balkoski

Stackpole Books; 410 pages \$26.95 (Hardcover)



Omaha Beach witnessed the greatest drama and loss of life on D-Day. Across a four-and-a-half mile front consisting of sand, stones, and cliffs, largely untested American troops assaulted Germany's Atlantic Wall head-on, encountering fierce resistance but eventually securing the beachhead. Their actions paved the way for Allied victory in World War II, yet until now, a truly comprehensive history of the momentous battle for Omaha Beach has not been written.

In *Omaha Beach: D-Day, June 6, 1944*, Joseph Balkoski picks up where other historians left off and weaves personal recollections and historical analysis into a gripping, unforgettable narrative of one of the U.S. Army's most costly days of World War II.

We will pray forever that some day that changing will come. But for now, particularly today, it is good and fitting to renew our commitment to each other, to our freedom, and to the alliance that protects it.

We are bound today by what bound us 40 years ago, the same loyalties, traditions, and beliefs. We're bound by reality. The strength of America's allies is vital to the United States, and the American security guarantee is essential to the continued freedom of Europe's democracies. We were with you then; we are with you now. Your hopes are our hopes, and your destiny is our destiny.

Here, in this place where the West held together, let us make a vow to our dead. Let us show them by our actions that we understand what they died for. Let our actions say to them the words for which Matthew Ridgway listened: "I will not fail thee nor forsake thee."

Strengthened by their courage, heartened by their valor, and borne by their memory, let us continue to stand for the ideals for which they lived and died.

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speed bumps towards a better, more peaceful Iraq. It will take time for the people of Iraq to succeed at creating a peaceful democratic Iraq. They need the help of the coalition nations, both financially and militarily to accomplish this. It has been and will continue to be a rough road.

I am not here putting my life on the line every day so Americans can pay a couple pennies less per gallon of gas. I am not here to fulfill a vendetta. I am here because I volunteered to be a part of something bigger than myself and to serve the country I love. I am here because I want others to enjoy the freedoms I have always known. The Iraqi people have the potential to achieve this, they need time and help to continue to overthrow generations of fear and oppression. If the least I can do is take a year of my life to further this change, it is a sacrifice that I am willing to make, not only for the people of Iraq, but also for myself, family, and all those that enjoy the freedoms the American Founding Fathers created, and the "Greatest Generation" preserved.

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