

D-Day

Memories

IN THE WORDS OF
SOUTH TEXANS

EXTRA

EXTR

Allies Land in France

invasion
Bulletins



H4

Corpus Christi Caller

Allied Air Bases Established

U. S. Fliers See 27,000

E 2 **War stories**
South Texas veterans and heroes recall the triumphs ... and the tragic losses.

E 4-5 **The Longest Day**
Forces, D-Day map, leaders, weapons and letters from those here and over there.

E 6 **The homefront**
One of the loneliest, scariest days of the war for a young pilot's wife

E 8 **A turning point**
D-Day marked the beginning of the end for Nazi Germany, and its impact continues to be felt.

D-Day Memories

DAY OF SACRIFICE

A heavy price was paid during the horror of a battle that 'lives with a man forever.'

By Rob Harrill

OF THE CALLER-TIMES

Coastal Bend residents who took part in the Allied invasion of Normandy 50 years ago remember the day with emotional turmoil.

Pride, esprit de corps and an eagerness to do one's part came with the deployment.

There was fear when German bullets and artillery rained down on the invaders.

Then horror and heartbreak at the sudden, violent deaths of comrades.

The vividness of the memories is the tie that binds participants in what has been dubbed the Longest Day.

While other recollections may have faded over the decades, veterans remember the events before, during and after the June 6, 1944, invasion, officially known as Operation Overlord. Most recalled the day in precise detail - for some, more clearly than they preferred.

Almost all said the experience changed them forever.

"There has not been a day of my life since that time that, at some time, in some way, thoughts of that experience have not crossed my mind," said Robstown veterinarian C.H. Harrel, who survived his tour as a B-17 tail gunner in the bloody, prolonged battle for control of the skies that made D-Day possible. "That kind of thing will live with a man forever."

Monday marks the 50th anniversary of the massive Allied invasion on the beaches of Normandy - the attack that signaled the beginning of the end for Adolph Hitler's Third Reich.

"As historians like to say, it was a watershed event," said Maj. Michael Humm, a Marine Corps reservist with the 50th Anniversary of World War II Commemoration Committee. "It was the turning point of the war. After D-Day was successful, the Nazis were ultimately doomed."

"The basic question - 'What if it failed?' - was what made it a big risk. It was perceived as a one-shot deal. There was no backup to D-Day."

More than 175,000 Allied troops took part in the invasion, launched aboard 12,000 aircraft and 6,000 boats.

A mammoth commemoration is planned Monday at the French cemetery where more than 4,000 Americans were laid to rest. Thousands of U.S. veterans of the conflict will be in attendance.

One of them, Corpus Christi resident and war hero Joe Dawson, is scheduled to introduce President Clinton, the main speaker.

Although honored, Dawson said his

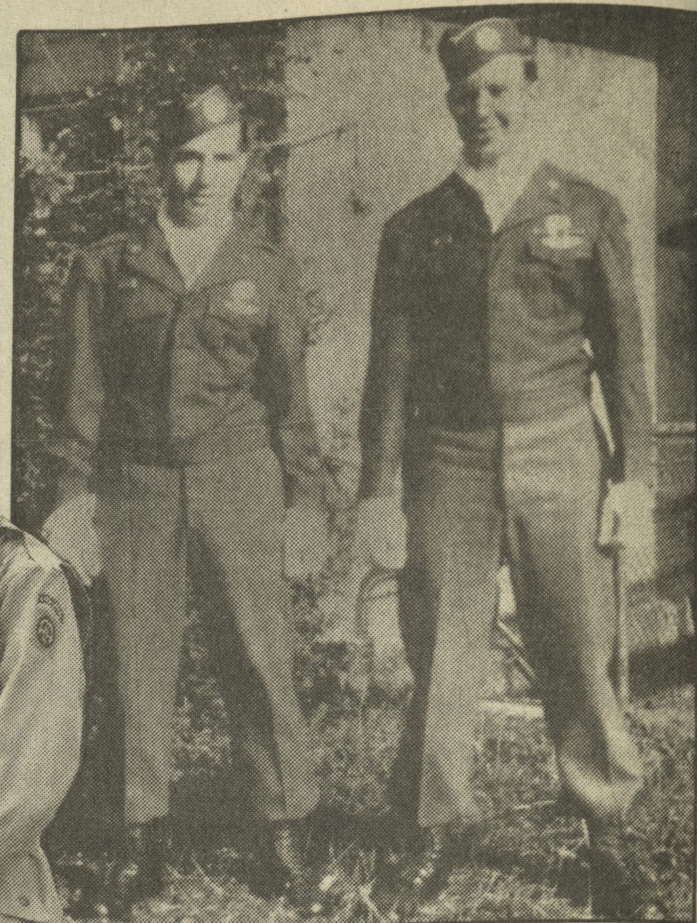
role in the commemoration is incidental - there were hundreds of heroes on the beach that day who easily could take his place.

He's just one of the soldiers who happened to get publicity for his actions 50 years ago.

"I will not be there as Joe Dawson - I am a symbol of all those veterans," said Dawson, an 80-year-old oilman and horse trader. "I am also representing the No. 1 man in the country, which I am honored to do."

Accolades are not new to Dawson, a man who holds the Distinguished Service Cross for his D-Day efforts and whose unit received a presidential citation for a stubbornly heroic stand on a strategically important ridge near Aachen, Germany, now named Dawson's Ridge.

On the wall of his office hangs a large
Please see **Veterans/E3**



COURTESY OF NELLIS VERHEY

Nellis Verhey of Corpus Christi (left photo) was a D-Day paratrooper. At the end of the war, Verhey (above photo, right) became a member of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's personal guard.



JAY JANNER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Letters

The following are excerpts from letters South Texans sent the Caller-Times regarding their D-Day memories.

In World War II there were no helicopters. When the Germans suddenly captured the impregnable fortress Eban Emael, using troop-carrying gliders, they astonished the world. They went on to take Crete by air, again using glider-borne forces - even though outnumbered by the British three to one.

You can imagine the panic in high places, since gliders could carry heavy weapons and vehicles, even tanks. Naturally, the drive to train and field American glider units became a red-hot priority and before the war ended the U.S. had over 5,000 men trained as glider pilots, many of them from Texas. Over 10,000 gliders were produced. The glider troops and pilots were on a one-way mission, behind enemy lines, as a rule, and could, and did at times, operate at night.

Almost a full division of Glider Borne Infantry landed behind enemy lines four to six hours before troops hit the beaches in the June 6, 1944, invasion at Normandy.

I was one of the pilots on that very dark night and my prayers on the way in surely must rank as among the most fervid of all time. My glider had 125 holes in it before it hit the telephone pole that ended our flight, and not one of the men aboard nor the mines we carried had been seriously damaged. Gen. Eisenhower was convinced that 40 percent of that initial assault force would be casualties, but isolating the German reserves from the beachheads was so critical to success he had to give the "go" signal.

Personally, after two days of sleepless firefighting, etc., I was evacuated to England and began preparing for the September Holland invasion ("A Bridge Too Far"). . . .

On May 28, I'm leaving for another landing in Normandy - this time with a daughter and three grandchildren instead of a load of Airborne. We'll be in good company. President Clinton and the European heads of state will also be with us on the anniversary of "The Great Crusade."

Col. Paul A. Tisdale
Corpus Christi

P.S. We recently had a reunion of surviving Texan glider pilots. . . .
P.P.S. The license tag on my little red Stealth sports car is D-Day 44.

I attended Corpus Christi High School and played on the 1938 State Championship football team.

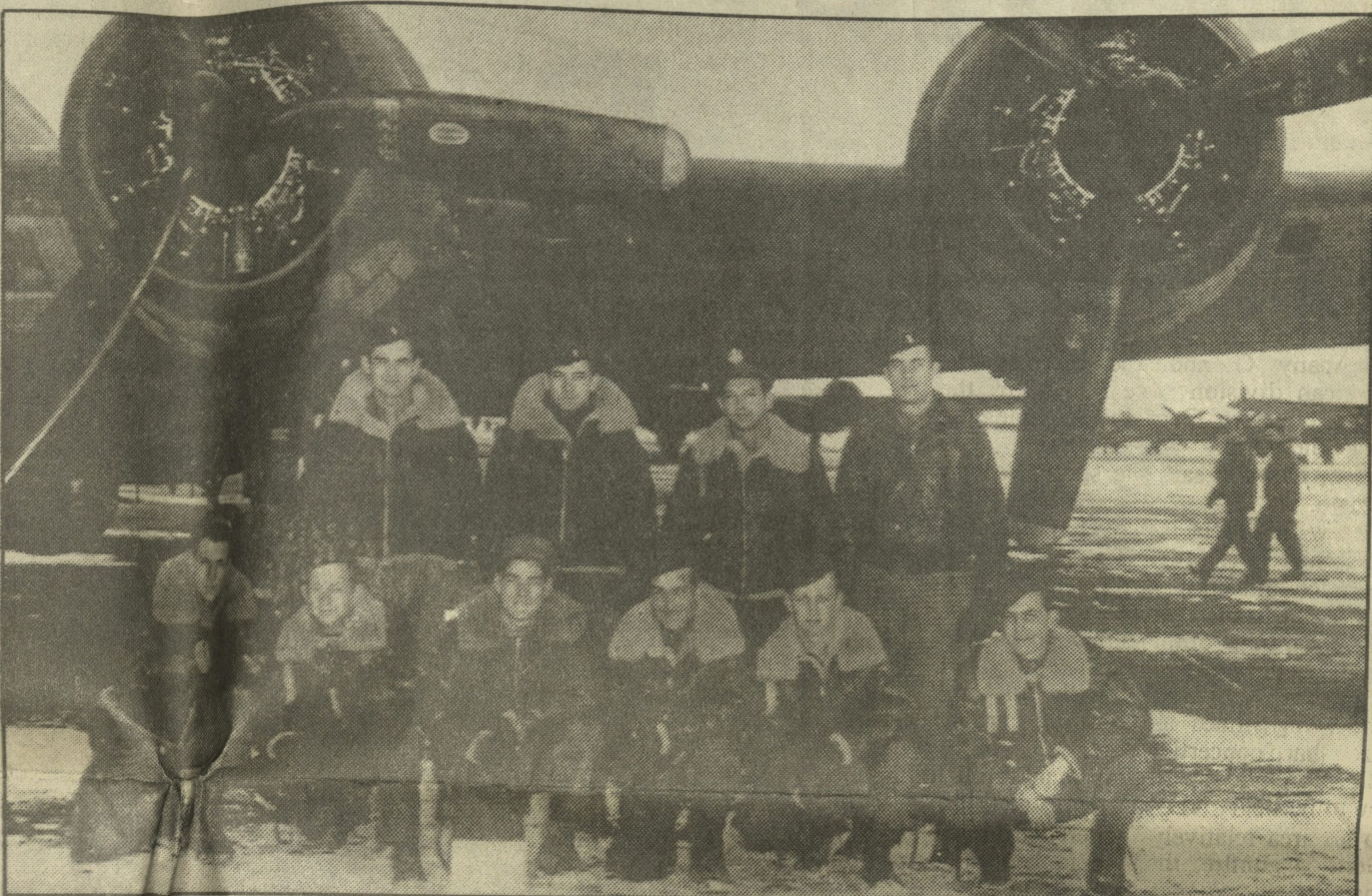
After I went into the Army, the first campaign that we participated in was North Africa, then on to England. My unit in England was the 2nd Engineers Brigade. Our mission in Normandy on D + 1 was to build a crash landing strip for our airplanes that were shot up and could not make it back across the channel to England.

June 5 is my birthday. On my 23rd birthday I was on a Liberty ship off the coast of France. That night we had an air raid. All 4,000 ships were firing their guns. There was so much flak falling from our shells you had to find cover to keep from getting hit. What a birthday - I thought at times it would be my last.

Bob Evans
Corpus Christi

I arrived on D-Day in England - got on a train and around eleven o'clock that morning after buying a newspaper - discovered it was D-Day. Every window and door was draped with the American flag - that was something to look at - the British were glad to see the American soldiers.

Elena Guerra
Hebbronville



COURTESY OF C.H. HARREL

D-Day B-17 gunner C.H. Harrel (front row, far right) of Robstown with fellow crew members and plane in Bassinsbourn, England, in December 1943.



COURTESY OF ROBERT EDLIN

Lt. Robert Edlin (far left photo) forced the surrender of more than 850 German occupants by holding an armed grenade to their commandant's stomach. Edlin (left) boards a landing craft in Weymouth, England, to cross the English Channel for the D-Day invasion. All but five of the 35 Rangers he commanded died or were wounded.



GEORGE GONGORA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Diary from the front

BY TRUETT WHITMIRE
who served as a pilot during D-Day.
MAY 27 - June 20, 1944

Saturday, May 27

Missions #14 and 15: We bombed a railroad bridge just east of Paris. Light flak was experienced. I flew #2 in C flight of #2 box. This afternoon we struck another bridge at the Thames River. Light flak. I flew #5 in C flight of #2 box. I let Lindy fly on the left seat. Very tired tonight. Time: #1 - 3:05 #2 - 2:55 Total combat time: 44:40

Sunday, May 28

Mission #16: Bombed a railroad bridge at Liege, Belgium. Hit target dead center. Flak was very moderate and accurate. My plane got hit three times by flak #1. I flew #5 in C flight of #2 box. Eleven miles from Germany. Got a headache from lack of oxygen. Still plenty tired tonight. Time - 3:40 Total time - 48:20

Monday, May 29

Mission #17: Bombed a no-ball at Franchi, France. Flak was very heavy. Missed the target a little. I flew #3 in the 2 box. Used oxygen for the first time. Sure did help. I am to fly two missions tomorrow. Still tired tonight. Time - 2:45 Total time - 51:05

Tuesday, May 30

Went to briefing at 8 o'clock, and when I went to take off I found a big cut in one of the tires, so I did not take off. This was my second aborted mission. They had a pretty rough time, so I guess it was best after all. I thought it was going to be an easy mission. They were off course. I fly twice tomorrow.

Wednesday, May 31

We bombed a bridge at Rouen, France. Heavy flak was encountered, although I did not get hit. We hit the target dead center. I flew #5 position in the second box in C flight. New crews came in today. Received a box from Butch. I fly tomorrow night. Time - 3:25 Total time - 54:30

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D-Day Memories

Veterans

FROM PAGE E2

photograph of Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower pinning the medal on the young captain's combat fatigues. The date is about a month after the start of the Normandy invasion.

During a recent interview, Dawson recounted the opening hours of the largest amphibious assault the world has ever seen.

Shot at from both sides

Then a captain in the 16th Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, Dawson was chosen to lead the 200 men in Company G. Loaded into seven landing craft, the company hit Omaha Beach - in the midst of the some of the fiercest D-Day resistance - about 7 a.m.

Two other companies, E and F, had landed a half hour before and had been ravaged by the tenacious Germans.

"All I saw was the carnage that resulted from the destruction of two of the finest companies in the Army," Dawson said. "All of the materiel that they had landed with - supplies, ammunition, packs - and the bodies lay there in disarray."

Dawson was the first off his boat. Two other men followed. Then a German artillery shell smashed into the craft, killing everyone else on board.

The other six boats landed without incident. Incredibly, despite the swirling chaos spawned by the massive invasion that participants say made just about everything go wrong, Dawson's company landed precisely on target.

The problem was getting off the beach, up the limestone cliffs and to the objective, Colleville-sur-Mer, a village about 1 1/2 miles inland, even as a crack German division blocked the way with a withering barrage of machine gun and artillery fire.

Dawson led his men over a dune to the cover of a "shingle," a 5-foot-high bank in the sand.

"It was absolutely covered with bodies," Dawson recalled.

Company G and the rest of the American division were pinned by the deadly effective German machine gun and artillery fire.

Then, Dawson said, he spotted a way through.

"I saw this path, just over the crest of the shingle," he said. "The path led off the beach and up toward the crest of the bluff. That seemed the place to go."

The beginning of the path went through a mine field. Dawson instructed his men to saturate the ground with rifle fire, detonating mines and cutting through razor sharp concertina wire.

Dawson said he led his men through the mine field and partially up the bluff, to an area relatively sheltered from the German gunfire, then he took a radio man and the two pressed on.

"There was a machine gun about 30 feet to the east of where I thought we would be able to get through," Dawson said. "I was able to get within a few feet of him, below him where he couldn't see me, and I tossed a few hand grenades over there and silenced the machine

gun."

Dawson led his company over the bluff and engaged in an hourslong firefight with the Germans, who began to fall back.

The first small hole had been poked through the wall of Hitler's Fortress Europe.

By early afternoon, Company G had secured Colleville. The path Dawson had cleared remained the only route off Omaha Beach until late in the afternoon.

Then, after the worst of the day appeared to be past, disaster struck.

"No sooner than we were able to contain the town, we were unfortunate enough that our Navy decided to shell our town," Dawson said.

Several men died because of the friendly fire.

By the end of the day, Dawson said, his company had incurred 64 casualties - men either killed or wounded during the fierce fighting.

Dawson himself was securing Colleville when a fragmented bullet embedded in his left knee and right thigh. He was shipped across the channel, back to England, to have the fragments removed.

He then went AWOL to rejoin his unit. Within three days, the young captain was back leading his company, pressing deeper into the Continent.

Missed signals, enemy's deadly aim

Lt. Robert Edlin never made it off the beach that day.

The 35-man group of Rangers he commanded were to take out the big French 155mm guns that guarded Utah and Omaha beaches, both American landing sites.

They pulled their craft near Pointe du

Please see Remembrances/E7

Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower pins a medal on Joe Dawson of Corpus Christi (right) one month after the Normandy invasion began. Dawson (photo below) will introduce President Clinton at a D-Day commemoration at the French cemetery where more than 4,000 Americans are buried.



COURTESY OF JOE DAWSON



There has not been a day of my life since that time that, at some time, in some way, thoughts of that experience have not crossed my mind.



GEORGE TULEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

COURTESY OF EDGAR MALONE

Edgar Malone (far left photo, center) stands by George Storms (right) at an Army camp in Oklahoma before leaving for England. Recently, Storms (left) and Malone displayed their souvenirs - which included a red Nazi armband and map of their artillery's position - from France and Germany.

Letters

It all started on the 12th of March, 1942. My name is Amando S. Garcia. I was drafted on the above date. I was sent to Fort Sam Houston. From there I was shipped to Camp Barkley in Abilene to form the 90th Division. We arrived in Liverpool, England, on April Fool's Day.

Just before June 6th, General Patton ("Blood and Guts") gave us a speech. He said, "Boys, this is it. We're just about to go to war with Germany. I ask you, just in case you get captured, do not give the enemy nothing but your name, rank and your serial number." Come June 3, 1944, we started up. We had the 357 Regiment, 358 and the 359. I was with headquarters in the I&R platoon. We were motorized and our job was to go on night patrols and get information. No matter who we came across, one of us could talk to him. I&R stands for intelligence and reconnaissance platoon.

Come June 6, all hell broke loose. At 0100 hours we could hear our bombers bombing the coast of France. . . . This was taking place at the Utah Beach just across the channel from England. The 82nd Airborne was supposed to land behind the Germans' front lines. The Air Force made a mistake and dropped them right on top of the Germans. The Germans were shooting them as they were coming down. I never saw so many planes in my life, the P-38 and P-39 fighter planes. Once we got them out of hedgerows in France, we had them on the run. The fighter planes used to demolish convoys after convoys. They used cows and horses to haul ammunition and whatever.

I got wounded on Hill 122, France. . . . I returned with a Purple Heart and cluster and Bronze Star.

Amando S. Garcia
Corpus Christi

I was age 15 living in Raymondville, Texas, on that hot June morning, wondering if the war would last another two years before I could enlist. The news from Europe and the war was via radio, newspaper or the Movietone News at the cinema and was anything but timely as we now know with modern electronics.

There were other ways of communication in small towns - the siren at the volunteer fire department and church bells. They all began at once. Everyone turned on their radios - the invasion across the English Channel had begun.

I remember going to church with the rest of town to pray for those who were prepared to give the last measure and for those who would receive the dreaded telegram from the War Department beginning with, "We regret to inform you . . ."

Atheists were hard to find on D-Day. Paul R. Wimberly
Corpus Christi

Diary from the front

Thursday, June 1

I was tower officer today while the group went on a mission. The weather was pretty

bad, but everyone came back OK. I fly a mission tomorrow with one of the new crews.

Night flying was canceled. I expect a tough target tomorrow.

Friday, June 2

Rivenhall 168 Did not fly a mission today. I went up and flew local for about three hours. Practiced single engine for a while.

From the way things are going, D-Day can't be very far off. It will really be rough on that day, I bet.

I just hope everything works out OK.

Saturday, June 3

Sta. 168 Lindy flew a mission with Berger over Le Havre. Just the name makes me shiver. They got shot up quite a bit.

I did not do much of anything today. I went into Braintree and saw a show, then returned back.

My day off is tomorrow, so I really have two days off, but there is nothing to do. Had a headache, too.

Sunday, June 4

Sta. 168 Dear Diary: I did not get up in time to go to the church. I had a physical examination today, for spinal meningitis. I sure hope I don't have it. Will know by day after tomorrow. I am duty officer tomorrow and none of my crew are scheduled to fly.

The wind is really blowing tonight. Looks like it might rain. I am a little lonesome.

Monday, June 5

England Dear Diary: I think the invasion of Hitler's Europe will begin early in the morning. I hope so.

I was duty officer today. No one in my crew flew today. Captain Berger was made a major today.

I guess I will always be a lieutenant. Just so long as I can get back home, I do not mind.

A big day tomorrow. Everyone was told to wear guns.



Truett Whimire

D-Day Memories

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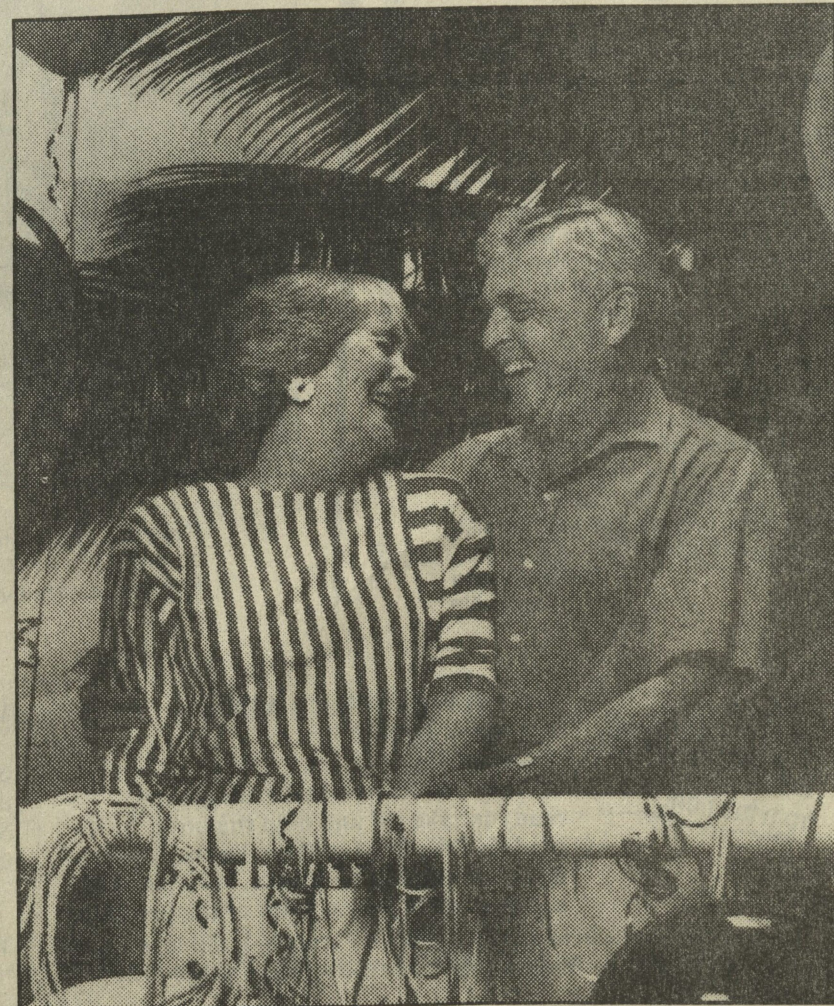
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D-Day Memories

JUNE 6, 1944

The invasion of Normandy

Letters

The following are excerpts from letters South Texans sent the Caller-Times regarding their D-Day memories.

June 6, 1944: It seems to me like it was yesterday. Let me tell you why. On that day, June 6, 1944, I was on a hospital ship coming back to the states. After fighting the enemy in the jungle of the Admiralty Islands with 1st Cav Division, the enemy didn't kill me, but the mosquitoes nearly did. They gave me malaria. That day, June 6, 1944. The ship shortwave radio. The president talked by radio saying the American forces were landing on Normandy. That day - June 6, 1944 - it seems like yesterday, coming back to the states. . . .

Jaime Diaz DeLeon
Kingsville

My memories of June 6, 1944, are of an Infantry soldier wondering why, after over 10 months of training with the 97th Division near Austin, Texas, I, along with others from my division, were being sent overseas as replacements to fill some of the losses suffered by an outfit who had already been in combat in another area. But on that day in June, as luck would have it, I was sick in the hospital with the mumps in Camp Shanks, New York. By the time I was ready for duty again, weeks had gone by since the invasion. I'll have to admit I sure breathed a sigh of relief when I realized I wouldn't get there in time for the invasion. I figured things should be a lot less dangerous without the need of all that massive firepower needed for an invasion. So weeks later, when our group got to Omaha Beach, the first thing that met our eyes after getting to the top was the people assigned to stacking the dead in piles like cord wood. You can imagine how this 21-year-old felt after seeing all those bodies. Yes, I sure thanked God I hadn't got there during that fight. No, I'll never forget that time in my life. And to this day I wonder if there was some reason I didn't get the mumps until that time in Camp Shanks in the last week of May, 1944. Yes, I was wounded in action October 7, 1944, near Aachen, Germany.

Douglas Sellers
Ingleside

I remember D-Day. I was five-and-a-half-years old. We lived in San Antonio, just outside Fort Sam Houston. My two-and-a-half-year-old sister, Jessica, and I had just welcomed a new baby sister named Carmen to our family. Dad was away "at the war." I wasn't supposed to know, but I'd heard Mom tell her friends that the new baby would be named Carmen after Dad if it was either a boy or a girl - just in case Dad didn't come home. Mom always listened to the radio in those days. She had her favorite soaps and comedy shows and, of course, she always listened to the news at night. She told me the news would tell her about Dad and the war. After the evening news she'd read to us and help us with our prayers - many prayers for Dad's safe return, of course. Then there came a time in early June of 1944 when Mom's routine changed. She kept the radio on the news all day and all night. She did little but sit at the kitchen table and listen to it. I knew something was wrong for she kept telling me to be quiet. It was years later that I realized she'd been listening to the radio account of the U.S. troops landing at Normandy, of which Dad was a part. Master Sergeant Charles Carmen Lepold returned safely to us after the war wearing the Bronze Star that he'd earned for gallantry in action at Normandy.

Veronica L. Ross
Corpus Christi

Remember that I was born in Guerrero, Mexico, and had not traveled except in Mexico and around the Kingsville area. I found myself across the ocean in territory unknown to me. I do not remember any specific details of D-Day as much as I remember talk of a big, big push that we were going to be involved in to try and end the war and go home. I do remember though that there was much preparation for this big battle that was to end the war. They worked us night and day to get ready. I can remember that we did go through some, they say, countries that I had never even heard of, always on the go. Some of us were involved in what they say now is one of the greatest battles in history, but being humble and without much formal education, we just did our job and wanted to come home.

Tomas Chapa
Kingsville

In early morning June 6, 1944, American, British, Canadian and French troops stormed a 60-mile beachfront in northern France. "Operation Overlord," as the battle plan was called, was the largest seaborne invasion in history. The Allies took the Germans by surprise, opening the way for the liberation of Paris.

Allied deception plans

- During weeks before invasion, actor impersonating British commander Montgomery sent to North Africa to distract Nazis
- Skeleton American First Army Group set up along England's southeast coast
- Dummy tanks deployed
- Fake messages radioed, hinting attacks would fall at Pas de Calais, Holland, Norway

Allied commanders



Eisenhower



Montgomery

- Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Commander of Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force
- British Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery, prepared detailed invasion plan; commanded ground forces

Allied plan

- Secure Caen early
- Destroy German armor
- Drive eastward with U.S. divisions into center of France

German commanders



Runstedt



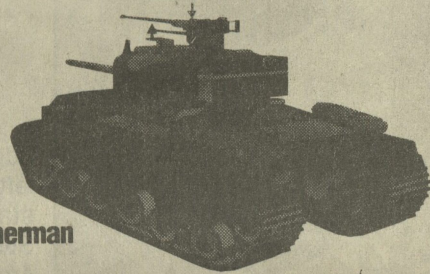
Rommel

- Field Marshal Gerd von Runstedt, western commander-in-chief at time of invasion
- Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, "The Desert Fox"; supervised buildup of defense of Channel coast before Allied invasion; commanded army division during Normandy battle

German strategic difficulties

- Defend entire French coast, because of Allies' success in disguising intentions

Weapons and equipment



U.S. Sherman tank



British Spitfire fighter



German Tiger Tank

Small arms

German soldiers carried high-quality small arms often as good as the Allies'

Grenades

German M1943 "Potato masher": Long handle made it easy to throw far

U.S. M1K1 "Pineapple"

Noiseless, smokeless and flashless; could be easily concealed

Machine guns

German MG 34 "Spandau": Fired 900 rounds per minute (RPM)

Soldiers who stormed the beaches

- ▶ D-Day assault force
- U.S. First Army: 1 armored and 6 infantry divisions
- British Second Army: 1 armored and 5 infantry divisions

German defenses

- Troops in battle zone on D-Day

June 6 landing

12% became casualties

Casualties 10,550

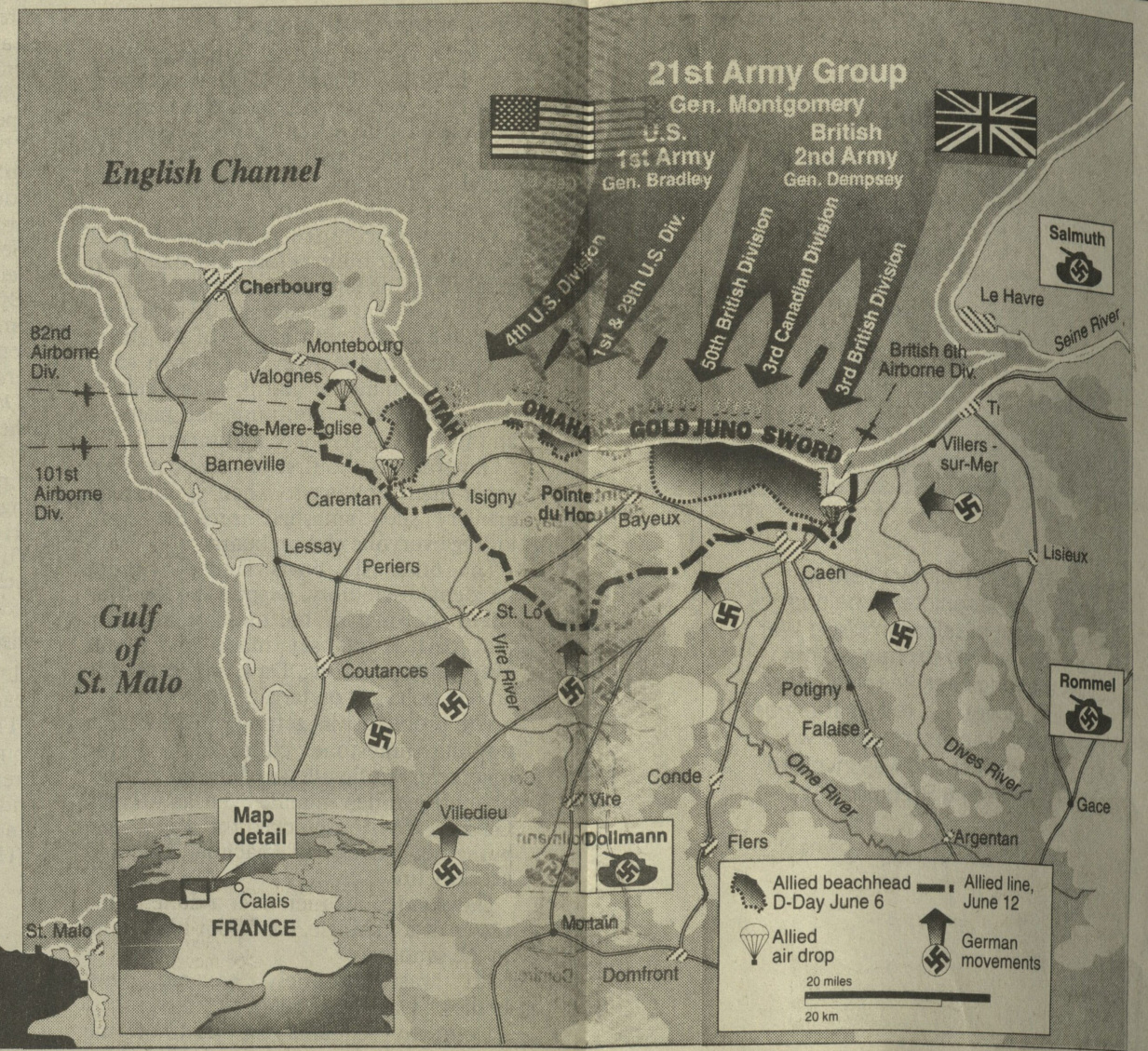
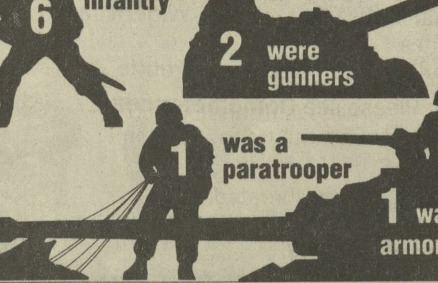
U.S. 6,600

U.K. 3,000

Canada 950

Type of soldiers who landed

Of every 10 soldiers who landed on D-Day:



Sources: West Point Atlas of American Wars 1900-1953, France Magazine, Atlas of World War II, Triumph and Tragedy

Corpus Christi man awarded Congressional Medal of Honor

The bloody air battle over Germany that prepared the way for the success of D-Day also brought Corpus Christi's only Congressional Medal of Honor recipient for World War II.

Air Force 2nd Lt. Lloyd H. Hughes was posthumously awarded the country's highest military decoration for bravery after he was killed in an air raid on the Ploesti oil fields in Romania in August 1943, 10 months before the mass invasion on Hitler's Fortress Europe.

According to news accounts, Hughes' bomber was badly damaged by anti-air-

craft fire during the raid. Although the craft was on fire and leaking gasoline, Hughes maintained his course, piloting the bomber directly over the burning oil fields to hit his target. The airplane then crashed in flames.

Hughes was a graduate of Refugio High School. After graduation, he moved to Corpus Christi. He attended Texas A&M University and Del Mar College, where he played basketball in 1941 before joining the service in Corpus Christi.



COURTESY OF ROBERT F. HEARN, ROCKPORT

Robert F. Hearn (right), now a retiree living in Rockport, was a co-pilot on a B-17 crew. His bomb group led more than 1,000 8th Air Force bombers over the invasion coast targets on D-Day.



COURTESY OF ODA McMEANS

Oda McMeans (right), who grew up in Banquete, followed the invasion force as a medic. The Red Cross flag on his half track did not deter the enemy from shooting. McMeans, now 75, is a retired oilfield gauger who lives near Robstown. This photo was taken in Germany some time before the Battle of the Bulge.

... The night before D-Day we were awakened to board naval ships. Our tanks and our half tracks were already loaded. We crossed the English Channel during the night, listening to the bombs and watching the skies glow red with flames. As we landed at Le Havre, France, the beaches were on fire. . . .

Hats off to the brave infantrymen who went ahead of us to clear the way, many losing their lives so that we could pass and our great country could keep its freedom. . . .

I was the driver of a half track and also a combat medic. . . . We flew the Red Cross flag on our half track, which was a sign not to shoot, because we were not armed, but we were shot at, many times.

Oda McMeans

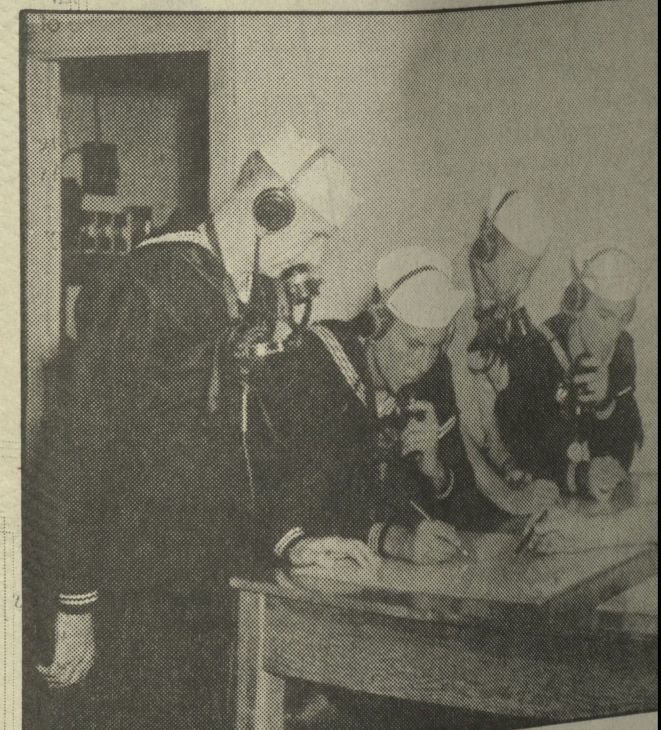
... My crew had taken part in over 15 missions when we reported to the briefing room on June 6, 1944. I cannot describe my own personal thrill nor those of my peers when the curtain was opened with the map ribbons displayed from our aircraft assembly point to the Normandy Coast, highlighted by a large "D-Day."

... While most of the target area was

overcast, our route over the English Channel had numerous clear areas and we were able to see parts of that gigantic Allied armada. . . . Our plane was the designated camera ship and we took pictures from "Bombs Away" until the presumed strike time, at which time we broke formation and returned as soon as possible to our base. We had no idea how accurate the bombing results were but followed our orders and thus were the first fortress to return to our base on that memorable day.

Robert F. Hearn, Rockport

On Nov. 17, 1943, the aircraft carrier Independence, been bombed. Many aboard lost their lives, and the ship afloat it did, and it was able to limp back to dry dock in Alameda, Calif. This is why my husband, John Wentworth Sullivan, who the Independence, and many of the officers from the ship on June 6, 1944, awaiting a TV showing of the actual landing. . . . There was a silence in the room. . . a tension that was visible. The men were aware that any day they would be undoubtedly hell for them. They had been there. They knew the wives, all sitting as close as possible to their husbands faces wore the lines of concern and fear. Would their men When the last picture faded from the screen, nothing but through the tiny, crowded room. Fear was the guest in our knew. . . . all the wives knew, that what we had seen on land repeated on the sea. . . . Who could ever forget June 6, 1944? The day, and what the hearts of wives and mothers. . . and the men who lived The Independence sailed back to the Pacific on June 14, years before we were together again.



Lt. Cmdr. J.W. Sullivan (right) of Corpus Christi served on the Independence. He was in Alameda, Calif., on D-Day when the ship had been damaged in

Diary from the front

What a Day. What a Mission.

Tuesday, June 6
Mission #19
D-Day has started and I am getting ready to take off and help the boys! I made it OK. Most of them landed about 25 miles south of Le Havre. We bombed a gun or guns just in front of the invasion.

I have never seen so many boats and troops. I will never forget this day as long as I live. Sure am glad I got to take part in it!
The sky was black with planes. One blew up and went down.
Time - 2:50, Total - 57:20

Wednesday, June 7

We bombed a marshalling yard just south of Le Havre in front of the advancing infantry and tanks. We went in at 3,500 feet. Saw lots of action, both in air and on the ground - hit target. No flak. I flew 5 in B flight of second box. We flew through a lot of bad weather. Things are going as planned. The invasion is really something to see - ships everywhere.
Time - 3:10
Total time - 60:30

Thursday, June 8

We went out late this afternoon, but the weather was so bad we had to turn back. Cordell had engine trouble and crashed and the plane burned. I think most everyone got out OK. We will know in the morning. It sure gives you a grand feeling to realize that you have taken part in one of the greatest battles in history. Believe me, it is really big! I hope for the best.

Friday, June 9

Dear Diary: When Cordell's plane crashed, his co-pilot, Lt. Forey, was killed. The rest of them got out OK - just small burns. We did not go out today as it rained most nearly all day. I am to fly tomorrow on a mission in advance of our infantry on the Normandy coast. I sure wish this weather would break. I know they need our help down there.

Saturday, June 10

Dear Diary: We went out this morning but the weather was so bad that we had to turn around and come back before we got the enemy coast. Cordell will be OK in a few days. So will the rest of his crew - except Forey. If Son is on the beach below Le Havre, I hope he sees us when we go over to help him. The beachhead is coming along fine now.
Thank God!

Sunday, June 11

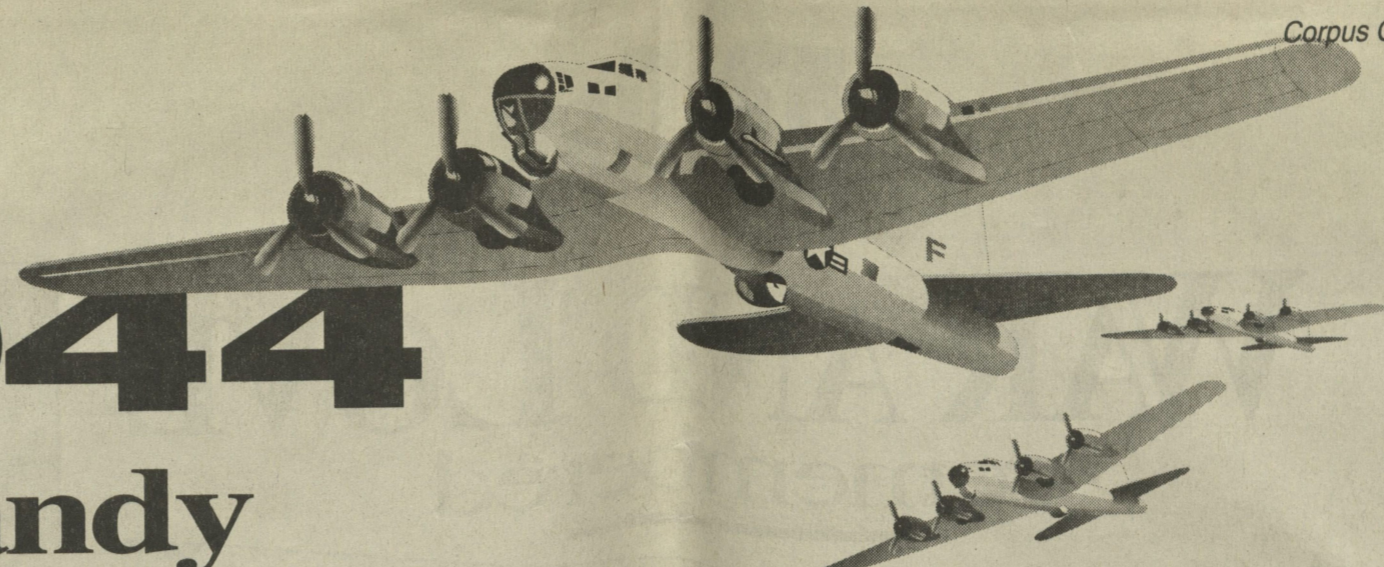
Dear Diary: It rained most of the day so we did not fly any. I went out and test fired my fixed guns today. I think we will be going in a low level real soon. I saw a show tonight, but it was no good. I am to fly twice tomorrow if the weather clears up.

Monday
Mission
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Time
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D-Day

JUNE 6, 1944

The invasion of Normandy



Letters

Fifty years ago on D-day, I was stationed in Norwich, England, at Horsham St. Faith U.S. Army Airbase. I was an engineer gunner on a B-24 bomber of the 458 Bombing Group. D-Day alert at our base really started at 0600 hours on June 5, 1944. The base P.A. was blaring out orders from the base security officer. We learned that the base status was condition red. That meant that flight crews wear their sidearms and ground crews carry their rifles at all times and everybody was restricted to the base. We really did not know what was happening!

With all the apprehensibility and conjecture we went on about our business expecting to hear from the operations officer what our flight schedules would be for that day. All the crew members had gone to their aircraft to check the equipment and wait. It was late in the evening when, at 2000 hours, the order finally came in to report immediately for a flight briefing. After the briefing we went to our aircraft as take-off time was 2200 hours. Since all our formation flight training had taken place during daylight hours, we all pondered how we would fly formation since this was our first night mission. However, to our surprise, after breaking above the cloud cover at 12,000 feet the moon was so bright that it seemed to be daylight.

The 458 Bombing Group, along with other groups of the 96th Combat Wing, was selected to be in the first wave to bomb the coast of France that night, with bombs-away at 2400 hours.

Dr. Orlando J. Sanchez, D.C.
Corpus Christi

On June 6, 1944, U.S. transport ships were crossing the English Channel like ants going to lunch, loaded with troops going to the Normandy Beach landing. We all knew the long-awaited invasion had begun. At the same time, the sky was full of planes towing gliders, plus thousands of bombers making a daylight raid on German factories. While watching the biggest show on earth from the deck of a Motor Torpedo Boat floating around the English Channel, I felt like I was not doing enough, like I should be up there helping out. I didn't have to wait very long; that afternoon all hell broke loose. We knew the German PT-boats were stationed in the Guernsey and Jersey Islands near the French Coast. Hitler thought he had an ace in the hole because their mission was to sink our troop transports going and coming from the Normandy Landings. They were successful in one daylight raid; we knew they would try it again and we were ready.

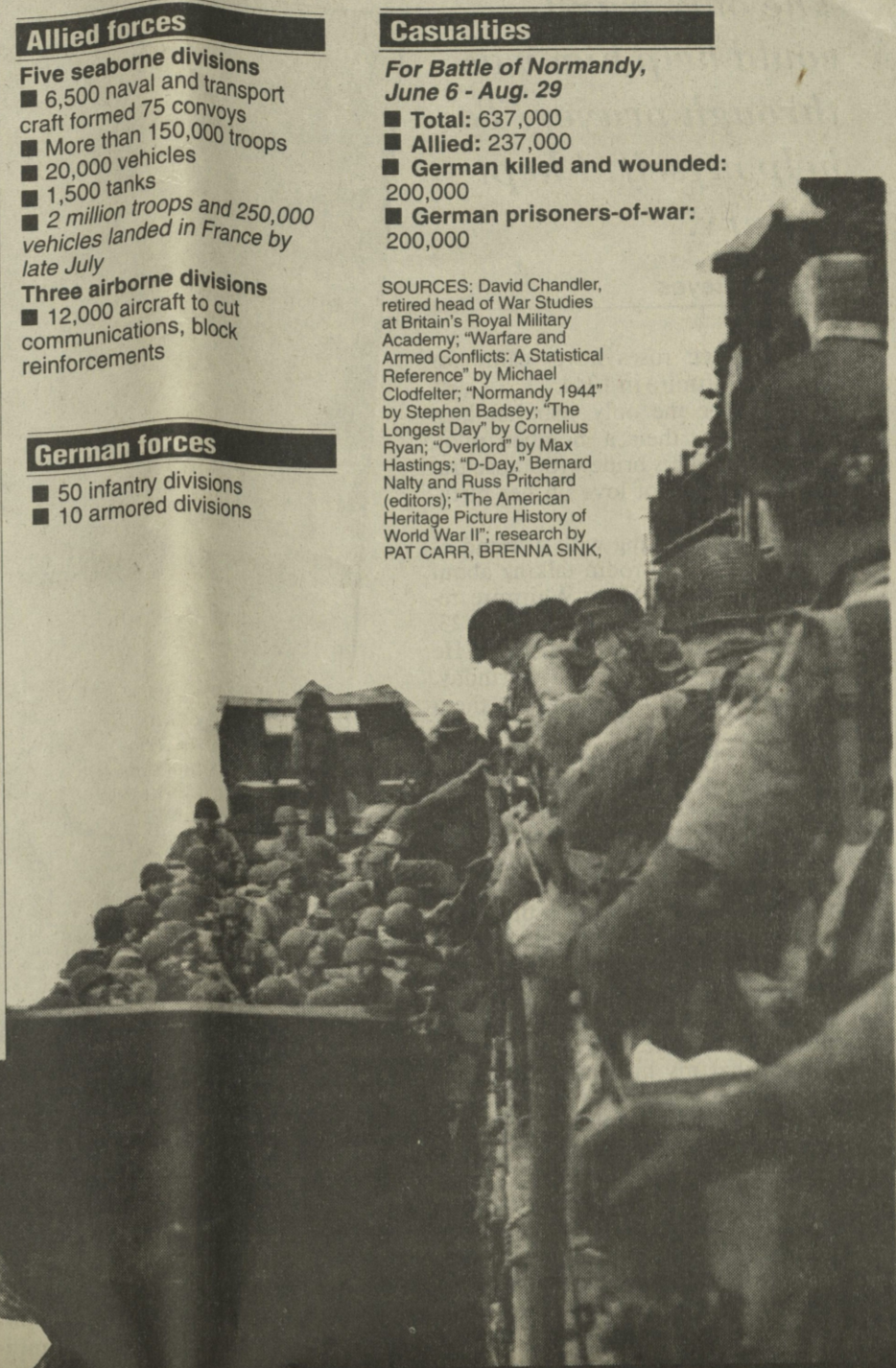
On the afternoon of June 6, 1944, they came out of their hiding places like gangbusters. Their mission was to sink our troop ships, which were traveling about 15 knots, 1,000 yards apart. If they had stayed in a group, some of them may have gotten through our line, but they made the mistake of scattering or spreading out. Our speed and defensive armament was far superior to theirs. We chased every German PT-boat until it sank or became disabled. We were not about to let even one get to our troop ships. The second wave of boats turned around and high-tailed it back to its base, but a daylight raid never was tried again.

W.B. Stanton, SKC, Ret., USN
Corpus Christi

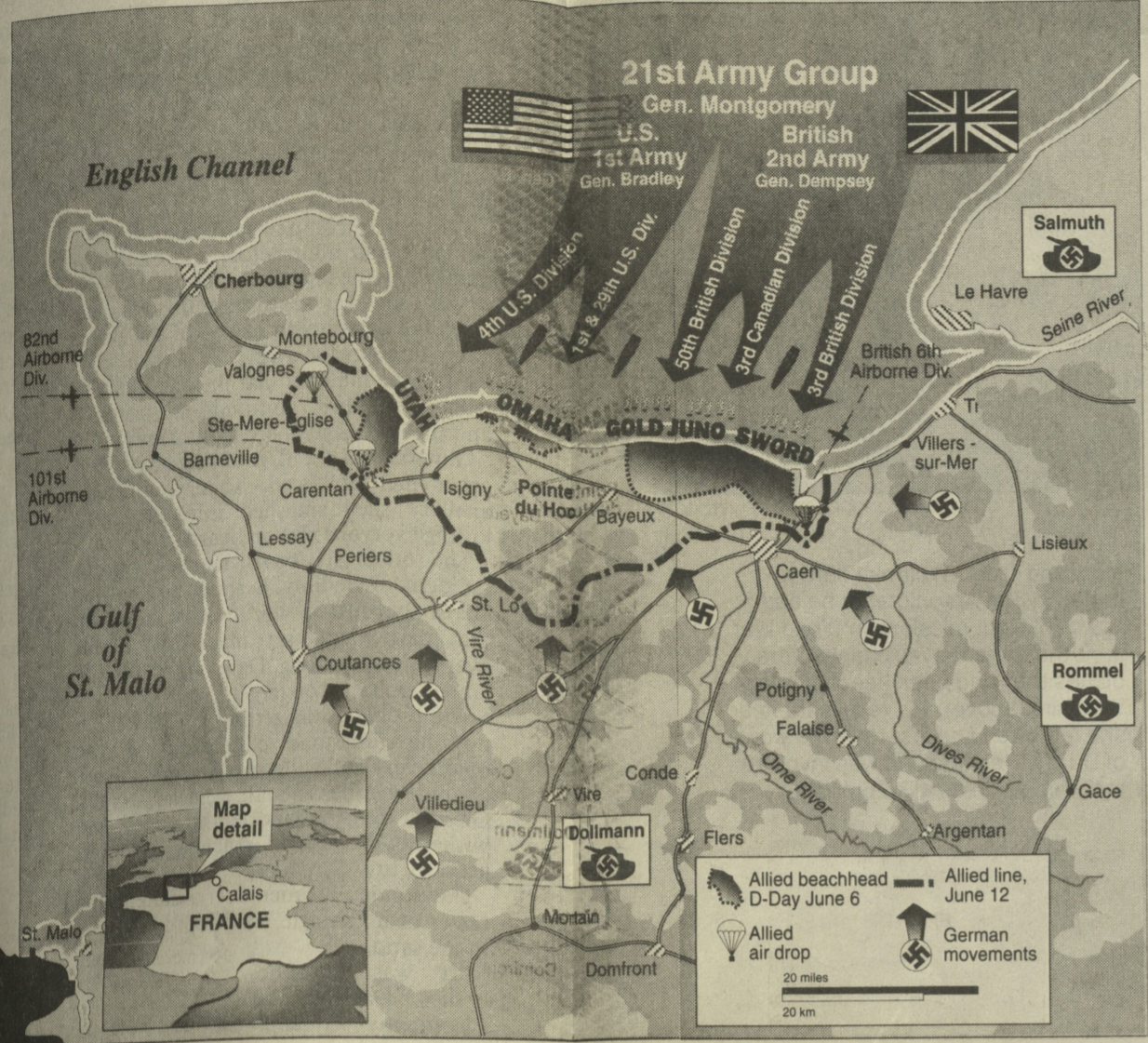
I was 14 years old and lived west of Five Points with my brother Raymond, sister and parents. As I recall June 6, 1944, was a weekday and people were driving to one neighbor and the other to go to church and offer prayers. We went to St. John's in Robstown. Church bells were ringing to summon all that this would be a day to remember. We know now that my oldest brother, Charlie, now 84 years old, was on Normandy Beach and landed on D + 3, near Cherbourg and Le Havre areas. He was with the Army Engineers cleaning the channels and rebuilding the port and highways into Paris. My brother Richard, now 73 years old, landed on D + 90, or 90 days later (on Normandy Beach). . . . He was a supply technician. My brother Adolph, now 71 years old, was still in the China-Burma-India Theater flying in C-46 air transport planes. He was a mechanic with a .45 pistol strapped to his side. . . . Thank God they made it safely home.

Bill Marek
Robstown

Thursday, June 15
Dear Diary: I was duty officer today and I did not fly.
We had a meeting this afternoon and we were told that we (the 397th B group) had the all-time Air Force record for combat flying - 51 missions and only one plane lost to enemy action. I guess Col. Cornell will be made a brigadier general soon for such a record.
We also have the best bombing record of any group.



GRAPHICS & PHOTOS/AP/KNIGHT-RIDDER TRIBUNE/CALLER-TIMES



- June**
- 5** Night-time Allied air raids disrupt German communications as convoy begins to cross
 - 6** Troops, equipment storm beach in morning, secure beachheads by evening
 - 10** Beachheads consolidated; U.S. troops move toward Cherbourg
 - 10-12** British fail to outflank Caen via Villers-Bocage
 - 24-1** Second British attempt to isolate Caen (Operation Epsom) halted
 - 18-20** Third attempt to capture Caen (Operation Goodwood) fails, but ties up German forces
 - 27** Germans surrender Cherbourg
- July**
- 25** Allies seize ground around St. Lo (Operation Cobra), begin to break out of Normandy
- August**
- 12** German retreat begins
 - 20** Allies surround 50,000 German troops, equipment near Falaise
 - 25** Paris liberated; Free French forces lead Allies into city

Allied forces

Five seaborne divisions

- 6,500 naval and transport craft formed 75 convoys
- More than 150,000 troops
- 20,000 vehicles
- 1,500 tanks
- 2 million troops and 250,000 vehicles landed in France by late July

Three airborne divisions

- 12,000 aircraft to cut communications, block reinforcements

Casualties

For Battle of Normandy, June 6 - Aug. 29

- Total: 637,000
- Allied: 237,000
- German killed and wounded: 200,000
- German prisoners-of-war: 200,000

SOURCES: David Chandler, retired head of War Studies at Britain's Royal Military Academy; "Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference" by Michael Clodfelter; "Normandy 1944" by Stephen Badsey; "The Longest Day" by Cornelius Ryan; "Overlord" by Max Hastings; "D-Day" by Bernard Nalty and Russ Pritchard (editors); "The American Heritage Picture History of World War II"; research by PAT CARR, BRENNAN SINK.

German forces

- 50 infantry divisions
- 10 armored divisions

Sources: West Point Atlas of American Wars 1900-1953, France Magazine, Atlas of World War II, Triumph and Tragedy

Small arms German soldiers carried high-quality small arms often as good as the Allies'

Grenades German M1943 "Potato masher": Long handle made it easy to throw far

U.S. Mkl "Pineapple": Noiseless, smokeless and flashless; could be easily concealed

Machine guns: German weapons were superior in weight and rate of fire

German MG 34 "Spandau": Fired 900 rounds per minute (RPM)

U.S. .30 Caliber machine gun: Fired 500-600 RPM



COURTESY OF ODA McMEANS

Oda McMeans (right), who grew up in Banquete, followed the invasion force as a medic. The Red Cross flag on his half track did not deter the enemy from shooting. McMeans, now 75, is a retired oilfield gauger who lives near Robstown. This photo was taken in Germany some time before the Battle of Bulge.

The night before D-Day we were awakened to board naval ships. Our tanks and our half tracks were already loaded. We crossed the English Channel during the night, listening to the bombs and watching the skies glow red with flames. As we landed at Le Havre, France, the beaches were on fire. . . . I was one of the brave infantrymen who went ahead of us to clear the way, many of us losing their lives so that we could pass and our great country could keep its freedom. . . . I was the driver of a half track and also a combat medic. . . . We flew the Red Cross flag on our half track, which was a sign not to shoot, because we were not armed, but we were shot at, many times.

Oda McMeans

The crew had taken part in many missions when we reported overcast, our route over the English Channel had numerous clear areas and we were able to see parts of that gigantic Allied armada. . . . Our plane was the designated camera ship and we took pictures from "Bombs Away" until the presumed strike time, at which time we broke formation and returned as soon as possible to our base. We had no idea how accurate the bombing results were but followed our orders and thus were the first fortress to return to our base on that memorable day.

Robert F. Hearn, Rockport

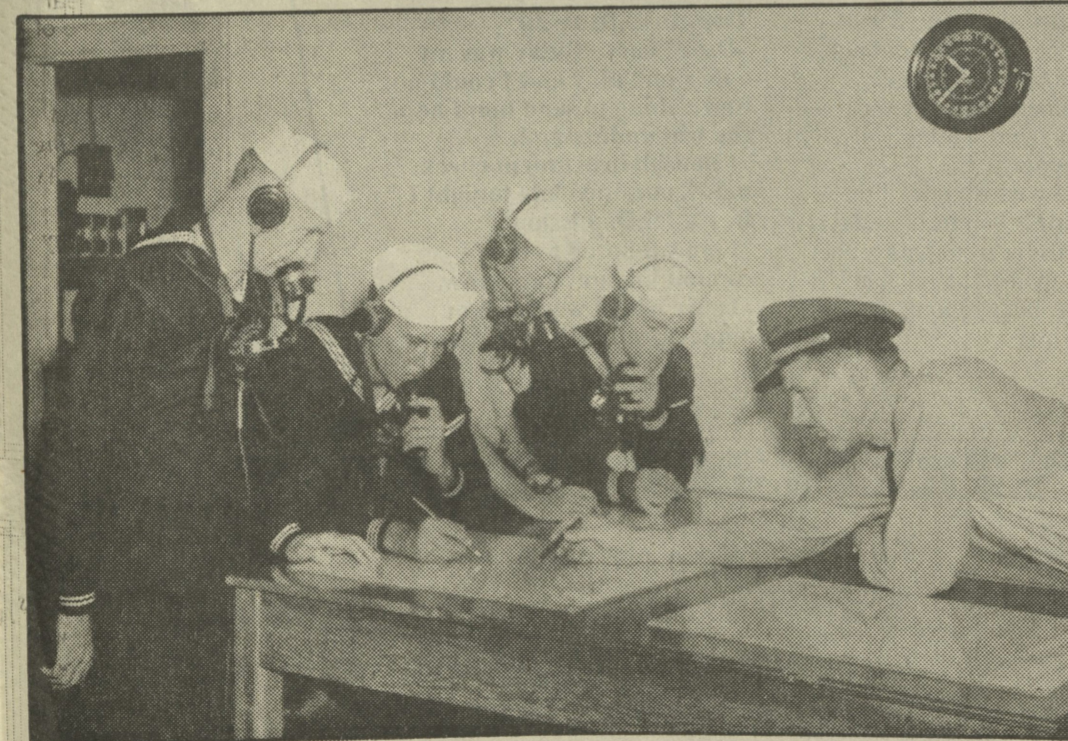
On Nov. 17, 1943, the aircraft carrier Independence, during a ferocious battle, had been bombed. Many aboard lost their lives, and the ship barely stayed afloat. But stay afloat it did, and it was able to limp back from the Pacific to the shipyard dry dock in Alameda, Calif.

This is why my husband, John Wentworth Sullivan, who was the fighter director of the Independence, and many of the officers from the ship were in our tiny living room on June 6, 1944, awaiting a TV showing of the actual landings on Omaha Beach. . . . There was a silence in the room. . . . a tension that was so thick that it was almost visible. The men were aware that any day they would be sailing back into what was undoubtedly hell for them. They had been there. They knew.

The wives, all sitting as close as possible to their husbands, kept the silence. Their faces wore the lines of concern and fear. Would their men come back? . . . When the last picture faded from the screen, nothing but a grim silence wafted through the tiny, crowded room. Fear was the guest in our home that day. All of us knew. . . . all the wives knew, that what we had seen on land could in some way be repeated on the sea. . . . Who could ever forget June 6, 1944? The day, and what it stood for, seems etched on the hearts of wives and mothers. . . . and the men who lived to tell about it.

The Independence sailed back to the Pacific on June 14, 1944, and it would be two years before we were together again.

Ruth Delmar Sullivan



Lt. Cmdr. J.W. Sullivan (right) of Corpus Christi served on the aircraft carrier USS Independence. He was in Alameda, Calif., on D-Day because the Independence had been damaged in a battle in November 1943.

COURTESY OF RUTH DELMAR SULLIVAN

Friday, June 9
Dear Diary: When Cordell's plane crashed, his co-pilot, Lt. Forey, was killed. The rest of them got out OK - just small burns.
We did not go out today as it rained most nearly all day.
I am to fly tomorrow on a mission in advance of our infantry on the Normandy coast.
I sure wish this weather would break. I know they need our help down there.

Saturday, June 10
Dear Diary: We went out this morning but the weather was so bad that we had to turn around and come back before we got the enemy coast. Cordell will be OK in a few days. So will the rest of his crew - except Forey.
If Son is on the beach below Le Havre, I hope he sees us when we go over to help him. The beachhead is coming along fine now.
Thank God!

Sunday, June 11
Dear Diary: It rained most of the day so we did not fly any.
I went out and test fired my fixed guns today. I think we will be going in a low level real soon.
I saw a show tonight, but it was no good.
I am to fly twice tomorrow if the weather clears up.

Monday, June 12
Mission #21
We bombed a bridge on the Cherbourg Peninsula. No flak. Hit target.
We went in at 3,000 feet. Saw tank battles and a lot of infantry soldiers fighting below. Sure hope we helped them out.
I flew #3 in B flight in first box. Still had weather very rough.
I got up at 3 a.m. and had three briefings before taking off.
Time - 2:50
Total time - 63:20

Tuesday, June 13
Dear Diary: I did not fly today although we were alerted.
It rained most of the day again.
I am to fly tomorrow.
The invasion is going along well. I believe we will be based in France before long.
I saw a show tonight. Am going to bed early.

Wednesday, June 14
Mission #22
We bombed a railroad bridge at Chartres, France.
Hit target. The flak was moderate intense and accurate.
I flew #2 in B flight of first box.
It sure was a long flight, and I got very tired without oxygen at 12,500 feet.
I am not to fly tomorrow, but I am duty officer so I won't get to rest much.
Time - 3:45, Total time - 67:05

Letters

I have special memories related to D-Day. As a private first class, I returned home from battle missions from the ETO (European Theater of Operations).

In 1943 my Army unit was camped in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

I served ground crew. Part of my job was to see that the airplanes, B-17s and B-24s, were equipped with fuel, K-rations, parachutes, headsets, throat mikes, radio equipment and bombs, etc.

Whenever I watched a group of our airplanes depart on a mission, I wished the crew all the luck in the world.

These men knew that they must continue to fly and fight or even die.

The sooner they knocked out the enemy, the quicker we would return home. But before coming home I was transferred to the Infantry Division and saw combat duty.

A week after D-Day was my first day in the front lines.

A Certificate of Merit was issued to me for helping to establish war camp and moving 20,000 prisoners of war and 12,000 displaced persons - moving them 15 miles to the rear.

So, folks, it's up to you and me and the rest of us to remember how much was given to bring peace to the world, so that future generations might be entitled to the right to freedom and happiness.

Manuel V. Gonzalez
Corpus Christi

Everyone knew it was coming. We just didn't know the hour or day. D-Day, the invasion of Europe by the Allies.

Our government leaders said it would be the beginning of the end.

The war had raged for 2½ years. Casualties were mounting higher every day. Telegrams were delivered to homes all across the nation with the dreaded words, "We regret to inform you . . ."

"We all prayed for the war to end.

Our small South Texas town made plans for D-Day. Everyone knew with certainty that many men would die on that day and felt special events were needed.

The Methodist Church stood at the west end of town on Main Street. It and the Catholic Church at the far Eastern end were the only churches that had bell towers with bells. When news of D-Day arrived, the bells would ring out every hour on the hour. All churches, Baptist, Lutheran, Church of Christ and Pentecostal, opened their doors for the public to come and go throughout the day, to kneel at the altar, pray, light candles, talk with pastors or cry silently for all the thousands of men going in harm's way.

I lived with my parents at their home in the country with my small son. My husband was in the South Pacific. I knew the sooner the war was over in Europe, the sooner he'd return to us. One mid-morn in June, Mother drove from town. "It's started," she exclaimed, "D-Day is here."

I walked into my church and knelt at the altar to add my prayers to the millions that were being lifted to God on that day, June 6, 1944.

Joy Campion Hines
Corpus Christi

D-Day Memories

WAR AND LOVE remembered

The only way I could help him was through prayer. To help myself, I kept a diary.

By Sylvia Reyes

OF THE CALLER-TIMES

A dozen red roses never came for Mary K. Whitmire in 1944.

It would be the only year her husband, Truett, then a bomber pilot, failed to lavish his bride with those traditional symbols of love on her birthday.

"I remember sitting with a friend of mine in the living room talking about the boys at war," Mary Whitmire recalled. "In two weeks I'd be turning 23. My husband and I were very close. He always gave me roses on my birthday. Somehow I knew I wouldn't get them that year."

As she confided to her friend how much she missed her husband and that she didn't want to celebrate her birthday without him, news came over the radio about D-Day.

"A neighbor came into our house and asked if we had a radio on," said Mary Whitmire, now 72. "He told us D-Day had started. Just then the church bells began ringing."

"I was desperate to turn the radio on louder. I became very emotional, knowing that my husband's squadron would be going into this terrible war, and yet I was very proud of them because they were defending our country."

D-Day was one of the scariest and loneliest days of the war for Mary Whitmire.

"My Irish grandmother and mother always said pray a rosary," she said. "After hearing news of D-Day, several of us ran over to the (Corpus Christi) cathedral. I prayed for his safety and his comfort and for all the other fellows. When I got home from the cathedral I put up a flag. I wanted to show that I loved my country and our men fighting overseas."

Truett Whitmire graduated in 1938 from Corpus Christi College Academy. A year later, his high school sweetheart, whom he affectionately nicknamed Butch, graduated from Incarnate Word Academy high school.

Mary Whitmire said her husband was the most patriotic man she had ever met. Her first glimpse of his patriotism came in 1941 as they rode in a car down Chaparral Street.

"We were on our way to a Sunday picnic when the news came on the radio that the (Japanese) had bombed Pearl Harbor," Mary Whitmire said. "Truett announced then he was joining



Tuesday, June 20, today was my wife's birthday and I could not find a thing to send her. I hope she will understand

the Air Force."

The following year the two were married. Truett Whitmire joined the military the same year and dubbed his plane Baby Butch.

Mary Whitmire said she somehow knew her husband would come back alive but she wasn't so sure he would come back in one piece.

The night of D-Day was one of the hardest to get through, she said. "I really didn't sleep that night because I was anxious to hear the news."

It wasn't until several weeks later that her husband's letter-writing resumed, which brought her great relief.

"Those have been the toughest days of my life," said Mary Whitmire, now a business and economics professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University at Naval Air Station-Corpus Christi.

"The only way I could help him was through prayer. To help myself, I kept a diary."

She wrote about his mother's health,

the repairs the couple's car needed, events in the lives of friends and acquaintances.

"It made me feel like I was contributing my two cents' worth," she said. "We had no children at the time."

The couple had five adult children by the time Truett Whitmire died in 1969 in a hunting accident.

Unbeknownst to her during the war, her husband also was keeping a diary. In it he jotted down military information.

Meanwhile, Mary Whitmire whittled away the lonesome days by immersing herself in work at Corpus Christi National Bank.

But the nights were harder. When insomnia took hold, Mary Whitmire took to the T-Heads, a spot where she and her husband had loved to stroll in the evenings to watch the sun set and the moon rise and cast its milky reflection over the waters. It was only there she was able to cry.

"I didn't want anybody to see me

crying. Those really were the toughest days of my life."

Mary Whitmire knew perfectly well why she found great comfort at that particular location. It was the spot she and her husband were at when the city experienced one of its earliest blackouts.

That blackout ended the day the couple reunited at San Antonio's Menger Hotel, 1½ years later.

The couple toured the city, got reacquainted and enjoyed a candlelight dinner before retiring to their hotel room.

It was there she pulled out her diary and presented it to him. He surprised her by doing the same.

"We sat down and looked at our diaries," she said. "We compared what we were doing on certain days and laughed about the stupid things we recorded in our diaries."

"We weren't able to be together during those days, but we found a way of expressing our love every day."



GEORGE GONGORA/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Mary and Truett Whitmire (left) reunited in San Antonio after he had flown 67 flight missions in World War II. At that time they exchanged the diaries they had been keeping. Mary Whitmire (above), 72, recalls the fear she felt when she first received word of D-Day. Her husband was involved in the invasion as a B-26 pilot.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY WHITMIRE

Diary from the front

Friday, June 16

Dear Diary: B-29s made the first land-based plane bombing mission on Japan yesterday. I hope

they just flatten the darn place.

I guess I will fly a mission tomorrow.

The weather is still bad and the group did not fly a mission today.

I hope we get to sleep lots tomorrow. I'm still tired.

Saturday, June 17

Dear Diary: I did not fly today but I was tower officer while the rest flew.

Three planes cracked up, but everybody got out OK.

The one that cracked up on landing nearly hit the tower where I was.

I am to fly the first mission early in the morning.

Sunday, June 18

Missions #23 and 24

On the first mission we had to abort due to bad weather. On the second mission we had a pathfinder and we bombed a no-ball over an overcast.

There was light flak and we got small piece in the nose near Conrad.

We were #5 in B flight of first box both times.

Very tired tonight.

Time - 5:10, Total time - 72:15

Monday, June 19

Dear Diary: We did not fly today due to bad weather, but I sure did need the rest after yesterday.

I saw where one of the pilotless bombs hit today - not so far from here, either.

There are rumors that we won't be here long. I hope it is true.

Tuesday, June 20

Dear Diary: Today was my wife's birthday and I could not find a thing to send her. I hope she will understand.

I flew an instrument check today, and then late tonight I flew a P.I.D. mission.

I am supposed to fly a combat mission tomorrow.

I sure wish I was back at home now. I am pretty tired tonight.

Mary Whitmire



Naval Air Station Corpus Christi and Naval Station Ingleside
SALUTES EVERY MAN AND WOMAN WHO
HAS PLEDGED HIS AND HER LIFE TO THE
SERVICE OF THIS GREAT NATION, AND TO
FREEDOM THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

The USO of South Texas, Inc.



Dear Veterans,
Your patriotism and service will not be forgotten. We owe our freedom to you and we are truly grateful. It is an honor and privilege to serve you.

TODD A. HUNTER
State Representative
District 32

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D-Day Memories

Remembrances

FROM PAGE E3

Hoc, where Germans had situated a group of the guns, and waited for a code word from another Ranger group before going in.

The word never came. "The code word was changed and nobody told us," said Edlin, now 72 and owner of Edlin's Auction House on North Alameda Street.

He ordered the landing craft to motor offshore, parallel to the beach, bucking enemy fire to look for another way in so the Rangers could accomplish their task.

"We started receiving a hail of machine gun fire, mortars, artillery, rockets - everything that had ever been invented, it seemed like, came down when we were a mile offshore," Edlin said. By that time, the ground troops began landing at Omaha Beach, where Edlin's group went in.

"We started passing their bodies maybe a half mile out in the channel," he said.

About 75 yards out, the landing craft got stranded on a sandbar. The British coxswain couldn't get it free.

"I told him to drop the ramp or we were going to die right here on the damn sandbar," Edlin said. "We had 75 yards of water, almost up to your shoulders, you had to wade through and it was mined with obstacles. When we got to the beach, I thought I had lost them all. Actually, I did lose all of them but five - the others were killed or wounded."

Edlin and his diminished force made a run up the beach toward the shelter of an embankment about 100 yards away. He was shot in the left calf and began to hobble and claw through the sand.

"Some sadistic German sniper was watching me up there," Edlin said. "He shot me in the other leg."

A sergeant helped Edlin reach cover. His five Rangers had made it to the base of the cliffs.

"I yelled at them to go up and get the guns," Edlin said. "And they were gone."

Back to the front, and to glory

Edlin went back to England to convalesce for four weeks, then rejoined his unit.

He was later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for leading three other Rangers into a fortified German bunker near Brest, France, and forcing the surrender of the bunker's more than 850 German occupants by holding an armed grenade to the stomach of the commandant.

News accounts of the time, which called Edlin the "fool lieutenant," described how he told the German commander he was going to count to three, then release the deadly munition if the commander didn't surrender.

According to Edlin, the surrender came at "two."

"I've been asked thousands of times what I would have done if he hadn't surrendered," Edlin said. "Who the hell knows?"

Harrel remembered seeing the invasion force during his flight over the English Channel on D-Day. His B-17 had been assigned to bomb a group of tanks in a wooded area in France to prevent the heavily armored unit from mobilizing against Allied ground invaders.

As he crossed the water, he was



COURTESY OF EDGAR MALONE

Edgar Malone, a Beeville native, (left photo) next to a building in Salzburg, Austria, where he helped guard political prisoners in June 1945. Malone (photo below, right) and another soldier as the Allied Forces pushed their way into Germany.



All I saw was the carnage that resulted from the destruction of two of the finest companies in the Army

astounded by what he saw below.

"All we could see were boats," Harrel said. "I had never seen as many damn boats in my life - the whole English Channel was full."

He said he also experienced a twinge of sorrow at the sight.

"We knew they would pay a heavy price," Harrel said.

Unlike the ground forces, Harrel said, his D-Day mission was memorable not for its difficulty, but for its ease.

"We were so accustomed to extremely heavy opposition, that that mission on D-Day was by far the shortest and easiest of my entire career," he said.

For Harrel, D-Day represented the end product of a long, bloody fight with the vaunted German Luftwaffe. Without the sacrifices of the men who fought the war in the skies, Operation Overlord would have failed, he said.

"It was not until June of 1944 that we managed to gain control of the sky," Harrel said. "If we had not, not a man would have made it. The D-Day invasion would have been one of the worst tragedies in military history."

Tragedies in the air

A B-17 tail gunner, Harrel saw his share of tragedy during the numerous bombing missions he flew, almost always deep into Germany.

"Our casualty rate was the highest of any military organization in the U.S. armed forces," Harrel said. "At war's end, one in every seven Americans killed in combat worldwide came from the 8th Air Force Bomber Command."

As a result, Harrel said, he lost a lot of friends in battle.

"Oh, my God, almost all of them," he said. "Almost all of them."

One man lost in the harrowing, relentless fight in the sky that set the stage for D-Day was Corpus Christi's only Congressional Medal of Honor recipient for World War II.

Air Force 2nd Lt. Lloyd H. Hughes was a graduate of Refugio High School who moved to Corpus Christi. He attended Texas A&M University and Del Mar College, where he played basketball in 1941.

He was posthumously awarded the country's highest military decoration for

bravery after he was killed in an air raid on the Ploesti oil fields in Romania in August 1943.

According to news accounts, Hughes' bomber was badly damaged by anti-aircraft fire during the raid.

Although the craft was leaking gasoline, Hughes piloted it directly over the burning oil fields to hit his target. The airplane then crashed in flames.

Sitting on explosives

Artilleryman Edgar Malone, a Beeville native, recalled a tense 12-hour wait on the beach inside a landing craft loaded with high explosives.

The artillery batteries had to wait for the bow of the vessel to open so they could drive their 155mm howitzers up the beach to a safer location.

"The tide was in and we couldn't open the bow because it would flood the boat," Malone, 75, said. Fortunately, he said, the Germans didn't spot them.

"If they had known we were coming, they would have had us like fish in a barrel."

Corpus Christi resident Nellis Verhey was a paratrooper and he said he recalled jumping out of his airplane behind enemy lines and being astounded at what looked like water all around.

"We were so loaded down with gear that they had to help us into the airplane," Verhey, 69, said. A water landing would have meant almost sure drowning. "When I got into the water, it was only three or four inches deep. The Germans had flooded all the land there."

Harsh lessons long remembered

Corpus Christi resident Esther Walker, who served as a nurse on a hospital ship in the English Channel, didn't want to relive her experiences.

"I don't want to talk about it. I couldn't stand seeing those boys that hadn't lived die," Walker said. "I was there - but that is one part in my life that I just want to push away. I want to forget it."

D-Day and the war as a whole had a profound effect on its participants - some positive, but much negative, Edlin said.

Veterans came back more mature and better able to handle life's adversities.

"I gained enough confidence to go from being a scared country boy to where I was able to stand up and talk to 300, 400, 500 people without choking up," he said. "And it made me realize that you don't win the battle in one day. You take it in chunks."

Verhey said his numerous brushes with death made him eager to settle down and raise a family. The ugliness he saw gave him pause to think about what was really important.

"You see lots of death during the war," Verhey said. "The first bodies I saw were of a woman and her two children. You see guys with their heads blown off. You see soldiers lying around there, their bodies all puffed up from the heat. And the smell."

Such negatives take a toll. Edlin said he was unable to draw close emotionally to his children for a time.

"Everyone I had gotten close to, something bad happened to them," Edlin said. "They were killed."

Letters

My father, Antonio Arredondo, was a private first class with the U.S. Army's VII Corp, Company "B," 237th Engineer Combat Battalion which went in on the first assault wave on Utah Beach according to a Unit Commendation date June 11, 1945, after cessation of hostilities in Europe. My father did not talk much about what he experienced on June 6, 1944.

One thing he did tell was of hitting the water and seeing men being cut down by German offensive fire. He remembered removing his pack, swimming underwater (like he learned in the Rio Grande at Laredo while playing hooky from school as a child) and continued to clear the beach of obstacles.

My cousin, Victoria Rocha, now living in San Antonio, was here in Corpus Christi that day. She told me she remembers my grandmother praying most of the night and all the church bells ringing when the landing was announced.

My father continued through the European Theater of War. Along the way he became a U.S. citizen in Paris, France, fought in the Battle of the Bulge, was on hand when a concentration camp with Polish prisoners was liberated and was hugged by Russian soldiers linking up with U.S. forces along the Elbe River.

Antonio Arredondo Jr.
Corpus Christi

D-Day June 6, 1944, on the Battleship Nevada. We had moved into our appointed place behind the mine sweeps at daylight. We anchored. All of us had been informed that our orders were not to move the ship however many hits we took or how much damage was done. Damage control was to keep the ship on an even keel so we could bring our main battery, which was 10 fourteen-inch guns, to bear on the enemy gun emplacements on Utah Beach, Normandy, France. I was fortunate, since my duty was helmsman and since we were at anchor and also had a lee helmsman. I had almost nothing to do, except enjoy the show (if enjoy is the proper word). I was in the pilot house and on the wings of the bridge all during our part of the action and was able to hear the radio communications to and from our airplanes and ground fire control. I could see and hear everything that Admiral Willie Bryant could. Admiral Bryant was in control of Utah Beach invasion. Our captain was Capt. P.M. Raeh. During the three days that we were at general quarters we fired 876 rounds of 14-inch shells and 3,591 rounds of five-inch shells. We completed all of our objectives.

We suffered no casualties or damage, although we had some near-misses and frightening moments. The most depressing part of our operation was the bodies of our invaders that floated out to our ship with their life jackets in place. They gave their lives for all of us. I hope that they will never be forgotten. Bill Coons (then, QM 1c USN)
Houston

Sent to Mrs. Mary Ethyl Coons
Corpus Christi

Local reverend tells of devastation in French town

Following are excerpts from an article written by the Rev. James Edward Doty in 1947 when he and his wife visited Normandy. The Dotys live in Corpus Christi.

We had visited six American cemeteries - all with their plain white crosses marking each American's grave. We had seen the destruction of Carentan, Lisieux and Caen. We saw numerous German and American tanks in fields beside the roads. We inspected Normandy landing beaches and German installations. Twisted airplane fuselages were strewn in

open fields; occasionally we passed rusted junk heaps piled high with tanks, half-tracks, shells, barbed wire, metal road-beds, bent gasoline tanks, indistinguishable metal rubble. We had passed the once serene Normandy countryside that recently had been ruptured by war's awful sword. But still we were not ready for what we saw at St. Lo.

The car stopped at the crest of the last hill and before us in the valley and on the rising slope beyond we saw St. Lo! (or perhaps what had once been a thriving city

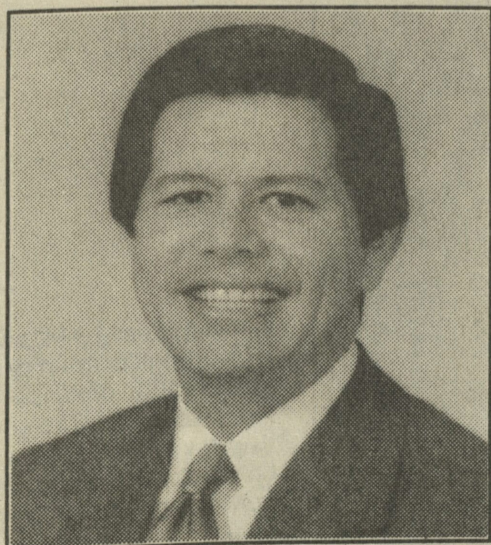
named St. Lo). As far as one could see - destruction. Here a semblance of a spire, there a standing sentinel of a wall. As we entered the leveled town and climbed the hill, we saw the people - some rebuilding, some still clearing away the debris. The unhappy silent faces bore a dazed look as they almost automatically went about the task that had to be done. There were no laughing youthful voices at play as we have heard in other war-devastated French towns; here instead there was only a ghastly ominous silence broken

only by an occasional chipping of a hammer or mortar and stone or the passing of a creaking wooden cart groaning under its load. As we walked about filled with awe and sympathy, we saw homes buried as they had fallen. The Gothic cathedral had most of its once beautiful architecture blasted away. As we silently walked about we were aware, too, that these people that we saw were only outer shells of a former life. Here was the St. Lo the GIs that swept through Normandy almost three years before never saw.

D-Day....Unforgettable



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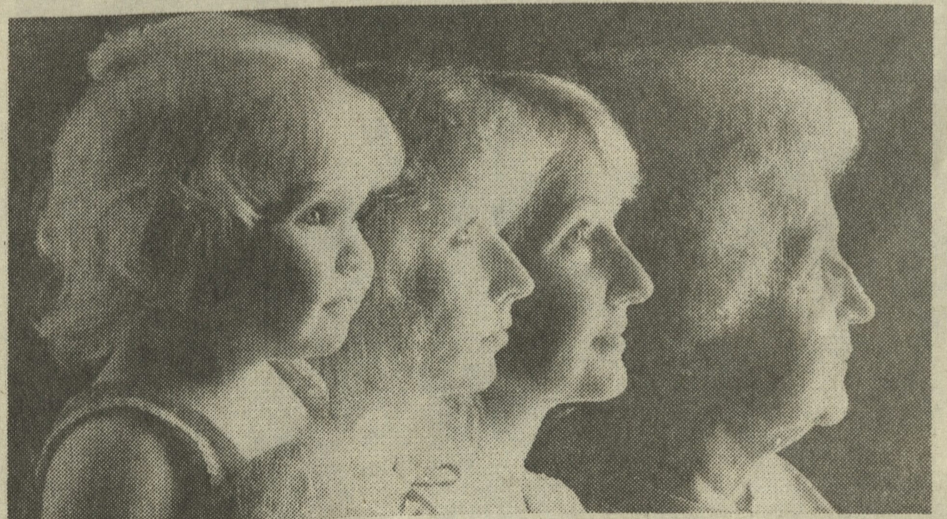


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A Texas salute to all those who honorably served our great country in the fight for freedom. We not only praise and honor those who gave their lives, but those who survived and continue to remain fine examples of courage.

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D-Day Memories

A TURNING POINT

D-Day changed WWII's course, and its impact is still being felt

By Charles Mitchell
KNIGHT-RIDDER NEWSPAPERS

It was a pivotal moment in history, the beginning of the end of an era that 50 years later continues to affect our lives - from the food we eat to the medicines we take to the clothes we wear and the tires we drive on. The D-Day landings - the invasion of France by the United States and its allies on June 6, 1944 - changed

the course of World War II and the future of generations to come, in more ways than you might think. Less than a year after D-Day, the Nazis surrendered and the world was left with a divided Europe. The United States was left with a cultural time bomb whose explosion is still felt today. Among the legacies of the war inherited by the United States:

- The seeds of the modern feminist movement.

- The beginnings of a new era in race relations.

- A new world leadership role for the United States - one that would later lead the country into the Korean and Vietnam wars and involvement in such world crises as the Middle East and Somalia.

- Astonishing medical advances, from blood banking to heart surgery to antibiotics such as penicillin used to treat infections and streptomycin for the treatment of tuberculosis.

- Technological advances - from the nuclear bomb to radar, the jet engine to the tubeless tire.

- The baby boom.
- Daylight Saving Time and instant mashed potatoes.

- Bebop, jazz combos and the roots of rock 'n' roll.

The D-Day invasion laid the groundwork for what would become the Cold War.

Had the D-Day landings failed or been delayed, the world would be a much different place today.

"It is impossible to overestimate the impact of D-Day," said retired Col. Jimmy Collins, former chief of military history for the Army.

"Europe and Asia would truly be continents apart from us. Our economy would never have achieved the heights it has," Collins said.

And, as Collins notes, the success of D-Day holds great importance for



KNIGHT-RIDDER TRIBUNE

Armored units pass through the bomb-scarred ruins of Valognes, France, en route to Cherbourg during the Normandy invasion.



KNIGHT-RIDDER TRIBUNE

American paratroopers, among the first to make successful landings during D-Day, display a captured Nazi flag on Utah Beach, St. Marcouf, France, on June 8, 1944. Thirteen thousand paratroopers dropped from more than 800 planes to land behind German lines.



KNIGHT-RIDDER TRIBUNE

American howitzers shell German forces retreating near Carentan, France, in the weeks following the D-Day invasion.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

In mid-August 1944, soldiers of an anti-tank platoon celebrate the liberation of Paris with French civilians. The soldiers' two-day pass in Paris was their only break in a bloody drive from Normandy into Germany.



today's generation. "If the D-Day landings had failed, they probably would be learning German."

Or perhaps Russian.

The Soviet Union, under Josef Stalin, had its eyes on Europe - not just the eastern half it would overrun in the race to Berlin, but all of it.

The tide of battle against invading German forces slowly was turning in the Red Army's favor. There were concerns that Germany might seek peace with the Russians. After all, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany had been allies back at the start of the war in 1939. They had signed a non-aggression pact and divided up Poland and the Baltic countries between them. Another pact, some historians believe, was not out of the question - nor was an all-out Soviet victory.

A delay in the Allied invasion of France could have meant a very different postwar world.

"The invasion of France happened at the very last moment that it could have in order to produce the situation in Western Europe that we had at the end of the war," said John Shy, a University of Michigan history professor.

"The 50-50 split of Europe would not have happened if D-Day had come any later than June 1944. If it had been delayed, the political consequences would have been

unimaginable," Shy said.

He believes the Soviet army could have overrun Europe. "It might have been at the English Channel before we could do much of anything."

Instead, Europe was divided into two camps: the capitalist, pro-U.S. west and the Communist, pro-Soviet east. This rivalry in Europe created the Cold War that ended only with the fall of Soviet Communism in 1991.

In between, virtually all U.S. foreign policy was based on one goal: containing the spread of Communism.

This post-World War II obsession led to later U.S. wars in Korea and Vietnam and the stationing of hundreds of thousands of U.S. soldiers in Europe.

Since three-quarters of the D-Day invasion force was American, the United States demanded that Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower be the supreme commander.

For the first time, the United States, which entered the war in 1941 only after great soul searching and the bombing of Pearl Harbor, was thrust into a world leadership role - one that it has yet to relinquish. That role continues concerning problems in places such as Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia, and in organizations such as the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

It is impossible to over-estimate the impact of D-Day.