

5 Brief Accounts from D-Day Survivors

June 6th marks what would have been my grandparent's sixty-third wedding anniversary. Although I never took the opportunity to ask them, I always wondered if they chose the day in honor and recognition of the D-Day invasion on the beaches of Normandy. In all likelihood, the trials their generation endured during the war would have enshrined June 6th as an important day to be remembered.

Unfortunately, those of us descended from the generation which survived World War II often forget or overlook the horrors they endured.

Lest we fall further in our forgetfulness, the following quotes have been compiled from a few individuals who survived the horrors at Normandy nearly 80 years ago.

"Now for the roughest part of my life, the June 6th D-Day landing. ...

Airplanes started striking the target on the mountain ahead of us. The big ships started shooting their rockets into the beach. ...

As I said, the planes were bombing the gun nests on the hillside, explosion after explosion. The ships firing their rockets from their ports were lighting up the whole area. This was between 5 and 5:30 a.m., just at daybreak. It was foggy that morning. I thought if I live through this it would have been the biggest Fourth of July I have ever seen in my whole life." – [William D. Townsley](#)

"When my part of the Division landed, there were impressions made on my mind that will never leave it. Just before landing

we could see heavy artillery shells bursting all up and down the beach at the water's edge under well directed fire. As I stood in line waiting to get off the LCI to a smaller craft to go into shore, I was looking toward land and saw a large shell fall right on a landing craft full of men. I had been praying quite a bit through the night as we approached the French coast but now I began praying more earnestly than ever. Danger was everywhere; death was not far off. I knew that God alone is the maker and preserver of life, who loves to hear and answer prayer. We finally landed and our assault craft was miraculously spared, for we landed with no shells hitting our boat.

Ernie Pyle came ashore the morning after the assault and after seeing the results of what took place the day before he wrote, 'Now that it's all over, it seems to me a pure miracle we ever took the beach at all.'

The enemy had a long time to fix up the beach. The beach was covered with large pebbles to prevent tank movements, and mines were everywhere. The enemy was well dug in and had set up well prepared positions for machine guns and had well chosen places for sniping.

Everything was to their advantage and to our disadvantage, except one thing, the righteous cause for which we are fighting – liberation and freedom." – [John G. Burkhalter](#)

"Well, the first night we were there it was – we thought we'd get killed by our own anti-aircraft artillery, because at night – the Germans were afraid to get their airplanes out during the daylight hours, but they came out at night. And we fired at the Germans, and you had to seek cover, keep your helmet on, get in your slit tents and just snug up to your buddy, because all that metal kept coming down from up above. And this continued on until about 3:00 in the morning, and then we all decided to get one or two hours of sleep. But it

wasn't too tough. It was just – we just didn't think we'd make it.” – [William V. Loncaric](#)

“Then, without any warning, our battleships thundered with the big guns and in distance showed clouds of big smoke. D-Day was here, June 6. From that moment on it was a massive battle. Wave after wave of troops, explosions and the twilight zone of bodies all around in the water, the air, the explosions of mines on the beach. By the time we got to land it was difficult to move. The beach was lettered with thousands of dead and wounded. And if I recall, it seemed like the landing failed.

The big German guns continued to fire, plus their machine guns. I was numb that day, the dead were stacked like logs. There was no problem to replace a rifle or ammunition. The wounded and dead had no use for their supplies.

The night of D-Day on June 6, we all regrouped on the hill and that night all we heard was one lonely German plane droning over the beach. If the pilot had an idea of where we were he could have changed the course of the war.” – [Sarifino R. Visco](#)

“I was trying to get the mine detector out of the box but couldn't as the lid was jammed. There was no place to hide in the open and people in the house kept firing. As I got my rifle up to my shoulder to shoot, a tank came up out of the water. The gunner put a shell into the house. About the same time, a sniper shot at me. The bullet kicked sand in my face and passed under my left armpit, which caused me to flatten out.

At the same time a shell from a German 88 artillery piece exploded near my feet. Had I not been flattened out, the shrapnel from the artillery shell would have probably killed me. Instead the shrapnel hit my right shoulder and leg. The

explosion and concussion seemed to push me into the ground and knocked the breath out of me.

The force of the explosion blew my helmet off and cut the corner of my left eye. I soon lost sight in my eye because blood was running into it. I turned to look back of me and tried to yell to Corporal Lee to get a medic. He looked at me with astonishment and started screaming for the medic as though he were hit. Max Norris was the medic and as he tried to get the rifle from my shoulder; it hurt something awful. I found out later that the scapula and clavicle were broken besides the deep wounds in my shoulder and leg.” – [Roy Arnn](#)