

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
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**Spring, 1994**

Volume 29, Number 1

**The 'Fighting Saint' —  
The *U.S.S. St. Paul* and Its Minnesota Connection** *Page 4*



*Women from the Yokosuka, Japan, Folk Dance Association perform Japanese folk dances for U. S. S. St. Paul crewmembers as the heavy cruiser prepares to leave Yokosuka for the United States on July 6, 1962. See article beginning on page 4.*

**D-Day Remembered By Seven Who Were There**

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## RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 29, Number 1

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

The Ramsey County Historical Society recently lost a loyal and long-time supporter when Lester B. LeVesconte, a grandson of Heman and Jane Gibbs, died in Illinois. In 1849 the Gibbs family established the pioneer farmstead that today we know as the Gibbs Farm Museum. Lester LeVesconte, whose mother was the Gibbs's daughter, Lillie, was instrumental in working out in 1949 the arrangements by which the Gibbs farm became a museum under the auspices of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

The Society's debt to Lester LeVesconte extends beyond the Gibbs Farm Museum because over many years Mr. LeVesconte actively promoted the publication of historical material about the Gibbs family and Ramsey County. Thus he helped support financially the Society's publication of his mother's book, *Little Bird That Was Caught*, about Jane Gibbs's experiences as a young pioneer in the wilderness that became Minnesota. His advocacy of the publication of Ram-



Lester LeVesconte

sey County history extended to the Society's broader plans, which included this quarterly magazine, *Ramsey County History*.

We honor Lester LeVesconte's memory and his many contributions to the Ramsey County Historical Society. We are inspired by his example and his vision for history.

—John M. Lindley, chairman,  
Editorial Board



# The Greatest Waterborne Invasion in History

## D-Day Remembered by Seven Who Were There

**F**ifty years ago in June, 1944, the great Armada of American, British and Allied forces landed in Normandy in the greatest waterborne invasion in history that opened the long-awaited "second front in Europe" and the beginning of the end of Hitler's Fortress Europe.

Seven men from the St. Paul area, who were among more than two million British and American troops massed for the attack, have shared their memories of D-Day with *Ramsey County History*.

Private William D. Bowell is now "Captain Bill," and owner of the Josiah Snelling, Jonathan Paddelford, Anson Northrup and the Betsy Northrup, excursion boats that ply the Mississippi out of St. Paul and Minneapolis. On the night of June 5-6, 1944, Bowell jumped into Normandy with the 507th Parachute Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division, commanded by General Matthew B. Ridgway. For the action in Normandy, Bowell was awarded a Purple Heart, Bronze Star and CIB and a Presidential Unit Citation.

Bowell kept a diary throughout the war, but because soldiers were not allowed to carry diaries into action, Bowell reconstructed his experiences in a long account written while hospitalized back in England. The following is excerpted and adapted from this narrative published in 1989 in *The Static Line*, a newsletter for the regiment's veterans.

It was 11 o'clock in the evening, June 5, 1944. Standing there in front of a mammoth hangar, somewhere in England, I felt a little on the weak side. I was anticipating the excitement of the next four or five hours. The bright moonlit sky enabled me to distinguish row upon row of army transport planes. Men were lying everywhere in front of me. Their faces had been darkened with burnt cork. Each man had grenades and ammunition attached or in bandoliers around his waist. With all their



Bill Bowell as a young paratrooper in London in 1944 and as he is today. All photographs used with this article have been loaned by the D-Day veterans themselves.



heavy equipment and the tightly strapped parachute, it was a difficult task to move or walk around.

Our battalion commander suddenly ap-

peared from nowhere. We formed a circle around him. He gave us last minute orders, stated the password again to make certain every man knew it, the chaplain said a prayer and we moved off to our assigned planes.

As the C-47s left the ground we were on our way to make history. Our "stick" of about thirteen men was silent. I was a battalion radio operator assigned to a crack demolition team. The silence in the plane was suddenly broken by German ack-ack guns. Flak was bursting all around us, small burning pieces piercing the fuselage of the plane. Underneath the plane, hanging from the bomb racks, were six bundles of explosives.

Abruptly the plane seemed to do a back flip; then it was steady, but we seemed to be losing altitude. "Stand up and hook up;" every man rose mechanically. This was the moment for which we had all waited and trained for two years. There was a funny sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. There were murmured prayers, "May God be with us." At that moment, we received a bad hit, the plane gave another lurch and began to vibrate. It was going down. We were very low.

"Go," the jump master gave the signal. I was the eleventh man in the stick. Number 7 slipped and fell, then 8; the rest of us fell on our knees. Somehow we managed to get out the door. We were all weighted down with ammunition and heavy equipment. Some of us crawled out.

The tortuous but welcome opening shock of the 'chute had no sooner come when I hit the ground with a thud. We must have jumped from 150 feet. It was 2 a.m., the early hours of D-Day. Looking around, I could see that the landscape was a mass of shadows. No one moved. I whispered the password. No answer. Again, only louder. Still no answer. I gave the password once more. What a welcome



relief as the countersign came back. It was one of the men in our stick. Two more figures came up. Again I challenged. This time I got an immediate reply.

The four of us moved out, slowly creeping and crawling. At any minute we expected the German anti-airborne squads to come upon us. A steady stream of tracers was coming over our heads. Periodically, the sky was lit with flack as more planes came over. One plane burst into flame and went down in a slow glide; it hit the ground and exploded. Because of our premature jump, we decided we were nowhere near our planned jump area. Somehow we had to orient ourselves and find our position on the map.

*It was the fate of some of the 82nd's regiments to be scattered about the Normandy countryside, miles from their drop zones and floundering in marshes flooded by the Germans.*

It wasn't long before day began to break and we could see quite clearly the terrain and objects about us. Nearby was a farm house. I knocked on the door. Suddenly the sound of a window above me being opened was heard. Looking up, I gazed into the scared eyes of a woman. Pointing to the patch on my arm, my American flag, I told her we were Americans. Soon an old man came to the door. With many signs and the use of our issued French translation sheet, we were able to tell him we were lost.

Flourishing our maps, the old gentleman showed us our position. We were twenty-five miles south of our division area, across the Douve River deep in German territory. We must head back to our lines. I had injured my leg and ankle in the jump and my ankle was bothering me, but I could hobble along on it. We had to get rid of most of our equipment.

The first day we found a hidden spot and stayed there until nightfall. As the sky darkened, we slowly headed north through orchards and a maze of hedgerows. Near dawn we ran into the Douve river, but we had no possible way to cross. The only bridge was heavily guarded by the Germans.

*Again, the French came to their aid. Bowell slipped through a field to a prosperous-looking farm with gray stone buildings.*



Robert T. Carr, his D-Day crew and their C-47 in June, 1944. With Carr (left) are Paul Ducharme, his co-pilot; crew chief Farkas and radio operator Kriser.

The family there all showed specific signs of being overjoyed at my presence. They said they were part of the French underground and showed me a printed leaflet of what the paratroopers would look like when we came. The mother brought out a huge loaf of dark, coarse bread. Cutting a thick slice and spreading it with fresh butter, she handed it to me along with a large cup of hard cider. I asked if we could sleep in their barn and they responded with a hearty "Oui, Oui."

I returned to where the rest of the men were hiding and led them back to the farm. Someone had brought us blankets and fixed a place for us to sleep in the hay. I woke to the sound of an English-speaking Frenchman talking to some of our men. Arrangements had been made to take us to a friend who had a boat. That night we would cross the river.

Much to our surprise, about forty more paratroopers led by a lieutenant colonel were waiting at the boat. The boat carried five men and each trip across took thirty minutes. By daylight a little more than half the men had reached the other side, so it was necessary again to wait for cover of night when the remaining paratroopers crossed the river.

We stayed in our position until five o'clock the next afternoon. Then it was decided to make a break through the German lines. It was our only choice. Rations were short and we were anxious to find our regiment. For four hours, with scouts out in front and men moving slowly in single file along the hedgerows, we made our way across the difficult French terrain. Suddenly we made contact with the Germans as a rapid burst of machine gun fire let loose. The rear of our column of forty-five men moved up and we faced the enemy fire. For something like two hours we kept up a continuous fire. We suffered casualties. Night began to fall. We knocked out a German horse-drawn artillery wagon, and the colonel gave orders to set fire to the wagon.

We moved forward along a narrow cart trail and across a wide dirt road where the artillery wagon and its dead horses lay sprawled in a bloody heap. On either side there were high banks thickly covered with foliage that gave excellent protection.

Abruptly we were halted by the sputter of a machine gun ahead of us. We were blocked at that end of the trail, pinned to our position by the machine gun. At our rear, the ammunition that had been set on fire



was exploding. We had no way out. As far as I was concerned, our position was hopeless.

At daybreak, one of the men came running up the trail with the news that a battalion of our infantry was a few hundred yards off. Dirty, ragged, unshaven and shaking from the cold and wet of the night before, those of us who remained—twelve out of forty-five—came out into the road and met the troops who had saved our necks. For the moment, at least, our part of the battle was over. We were thankful to be alive as we trudged toward the rear. German dead were strewn along either side of the road. Some of the men picked souvenirs off the bodies. The remains of American paratroopers were there, too. The dead who lay around us had little effect on us. It was necessary to steel ourselves against any softening. At times, it was a very difficult thing to do.

*Several days later, Bowell and the other survivors of their disastrous jump and long trek through the German lines to link-up with American forces went back into battle again. In the fierce fighting that followed, Bowell was wounded in the arm by shrapnel fire. He was sent to the rear, taken in a truck to Omaha beach, placed on a hospital ship and taken back to England. Hospitalized there, he recorded his memories of D-Day and its aftermath in his diary. He returned to action and fought through the last months of the war. He was promoted to staff sergeant during the Battle of the Bulge.*

\*\*\*

*Robert T. Carr of Roseville is retired after more than forty-one years as an industrial chemist at 3M in St. Paul. On D-Day he was one of the pilots who flew the paratroopers to their drop zones in Normandy. He was awarded the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters. His memories of that day begin with the flight to France.*

I was the pilot of a C-47 cargo plane filled with twenty men ready to jump into Normandy when I switched on the ready light. We were all psyched up, adrenaline pumping, prepared for action.

We had been confined to a mobilization base near Redding, England, for several days, waiting for the weather to clear and for Eisenhower's decision to move out.

While we were being briefed, the plane was loaded with gasoline and paratroopers. My crew included Paul Ducharme, co-pilot; Crew Chief Farkas and Radio Operator Kriser. Each of us had been issued a life vest, a pistol, a parachute and a pocket pack of survival information in case we were shot down. A submachine gun was on board to provide cover if we had to ditch.



Lieutenant Robert T. Carr in uniform and today.



We took off about 10:30 p.m. in the long summer twilight. Like geese, we flew in tight V's of three planes each, with each three planes part of a larger V of forty-five

planes. There were three hooded blue lights on each wing and three more along the top of the plane's fuselage, visible only at close range, as we flew with wing tips almost overlapping.

Our orders were to fly at 1,500 feet to a check point at Southampton, then to turn to the southwest to pass between France and the Isle of Guernsey, where flak filled the air like Fourth of July fireworks. We turned northeast to fly over the Cherbourg peninsula at 500 feet, as we had been doing in England, scaring farmers off their tractors as we came over the hedges. Here we ran into heavy cloud cover that obscured our vision. It was nearly impossible to see the lead plane and the lights that indicated the drop zone for our troops.

On signal, I pressed the button and the men dropped down to solid ground, I prayed, and not into the ocean. We dropped down to one to 200 feet over the ocean and headed back to England, each silently praising God that we had not been hit.

We climbed wearily out of the plane, went to debriefing and then to breakfast where we exchanged stories with other returned crews. Only one plane was missing from my squadron.

Then it hit us; we had been part of a major military attack that would go down in history, and we were the fortunate survivors who would tell the story. Some of us were elated and others were shaking from fatigue and fear. We were prevented from writing home about our experiences for many days, which puzzled and confused our families who had heard the good news of the invasion but were worried about our safety.

Some weeks later, the public relations officers from the Ninth Air Force brought us the news that we had been awarded the Air Medal for our action on D-Day. They then interviewed us for our hometown newspapers. By that time my comments had lost their passion and I uttered the forgettable statement: "It was just another job. We knew it was something that had to be done."

The next day, June 7, we were ordered back to our home base near Fulbeck, Lincolnshire, to await the orders that would lead us to participate in the invasions of The Netherlands and southern France and



service in central Italy. In addition, there were flights to take the wounded to hospitals, to fly supplies to forward troops, and sometimes to take VIPs on inspection trips and to conferences. Paul Ducharme, my co-pilot and later a prisoner of war, and I—two farm boys from Minnesota—have remained friends to this day.

\*\*\*

*Russell W. Anderson of St. Paul worked for the post office for almost thirty years, and then for 3M until he retired. During World War II he fought as an infantryman through the invasions of North Africa and Sicily before landing on Omaha Beach with the 1st Infantry Division, the "Big Red 1." He was among the vanguard of 3,000 men, fighting in combat teams, who led the assault. The gunfire these men encountered that day was particularly murderous. Bombing of German defenses had not been accurate. Bombs had been laid down too far inland to be effective. Moreover, Allied intelligence had learned too late that the men faced a battle-hardened German division manning the defenses above the beaches. Anderson remembers "bloody Omaha:"*

After Sicily we were sent back to England for more training. On the eve of D-Day, we were locked in an enclosure and shown our invasion area in France. General [Sir Bernard L.] Montgomery met with us and said General Eisenhower had given him his choice of divisions to invade France. The 1st Division was given that honor.

Then we were loaded on ships for the invasion of Normandy. On the deck of our ship was the author, Ernest Hemingway. Heading for France was sad for everyone, as our chances for surviving were not that great. Our division was made up of three regiments, the 16th, 18th and 26th. I was in the 18th Regiment and we were the second to land.

Climbing down the ladders, which were made of rope, was a chore, but we made it. The 16th Regiment was to have landed at 5 a.m. and they were having a hell of a time. They headed for shore, got too close, hit the land mines and were blown up. Or they would be hit by mortar shells or even rifle fire.

When the 18th Regiment's turn came to land, they decided to drop us farther out in



Russell W. Anderson in uniform and today. For a souvenir of his service, see the back cover of the magazine.

the water. We had gas masks, besides life preservers, but we never could have used them with all the other equipment we were carrying. When we reached the beach, we would run and fall down, get up and run again. A piece of shrapnel hit me but ended up in my mess kit.

Making it to a cement wall on shore was a miracle for those of us who had made it. I thanked God for that. We lay behind the wall for a short time. The Rangers trying to scale the cliffs were something to see. As they started up, the Germans would roll hand grenades down at them. Many were killed. A truck loaded with our ammunition landed but was blown to pieces.

Our air support was great all day, but toward evening we never had a plane in the sky. Two German planes sneaked in and bombed and strafed us. It was the Luftwaffe's only attack during the invasion.

The beach was littered with the bodies of men who never made it, but we chased the enemy inland. Then we were told to dig in and prepare for an attack. After a few days, I was knocked out of my foxhole near St.-Lo. That ended my war. I was sent back to England where I spent nine months in the hospital and was given an honorable discharge.

*Anderson has five battle stars, including the Bronze Star and the Silver Star, and the Croix de Guerre, the French military decoration for bravery.*

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*Arlo H. Knowles of Northfield, Minnesota, is a retired industrial engineer and plant manager who served with the 344 Field Artillery of the 90th Infantry Division in Normandy and on through France into the Battle of the Bulge. He remembers approaching Utah Beach in a landing craft buffeted by the tail end of the gale that swept through England and western Europe two days before D-Day. The storm caused the postponement for a day of the landings which originally had been set for June 5. None of the Allied planners had anticipated the extent to which seasickness would incapacitate so many of the men crossing the Channel. Wounded eight days after the Normandy landings and later in France, Knowles was awarded the Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts.*

We had been enduring the storm for several days, and a landing craft isn't my favorite choice for a pleasure cruise. We came aboard in the quiet harbor of Swansea, Wales, and moved out as quickly as possible. We found ourselves bouncing on the huge waves of the English Channel. The wind was vicious wherever it got a sweep at us and the boat danced like a leaf on the water whenever the wind hit us. We soon found ourselves doing a "shore patrol," primarily to keep out of the direct consequences of the blow.

I was one of the few stupid enough to eat

*D-Day to page 23*



Morrow, daughter of Dwight Morrow, the American ambassador to Mexico, or the famous kidnapping of their two-year-old son in 1932, or Lindbergh's isolationist views of the late 1930s. None of this is part of *The Spirit of St. Louis*; yet few readers today can totally disassociate the twenty-five-year-old Army captain of 1927 from the celebrity he became after his trans-Atlantic crossing.

Lindbergh was no Horatio Alger whose hard work in combination with the good chance of being in the right place at the right time inevitably won him success, wealth and fame. In this sense, Charles Lindbergh was a true descendant of those Midwestern pioneers who carved out their futures in a new land by dint of their inner drive and self-confidence in their ability to endure hardship while gaining success in the world.

*John M. Lindley is chairman of the Editorial Board for Ramsey County History and has written and published in the field of aviation. He is manager of the College and General Publications Department at West Publishing Company, St. Paul.*

#### *Harlem Renaissance from page 13*

"it was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire" that, in the wake of the failed politics that had produced World War I, echoed in the youthful spirit of the Big Party, the Carnival and the Orgy.

Looking to New York as eagerly as fellow Midwesterner Langston Hughes, a cadre of young black Minnesotans found themselves caught up at various levels in the social and creative whirl of the time. Anna Arnold Hedgeman, reared in Anoka but ultimately Harlem-bound herself, had graduated from high school in 1918 and become Hamline University's first African American student when she heard W. E. B. DuBois, on an NAACP speaking tour, lecture at a St. Paul church. She was enthralled with his account of international black leaders at the first Pan-African Congress he had helped orchestrate recently in Paris.

Homer Smith, a journalism graduate of the University of Minnesota, would find himself drawn East and then abroad with Langston Hughes, Dorothy West, Henry

## D-Day Remembered By Seven Who Were There

#### *D-Day from page 12*

some of the split pea soup being served from a big round black iron pot located in the center of the very little open space on the deck. I'm not sure I should blame the cooks, but not many of us were willing to try the open-pot menu after the first hour of pitching around on the choppy Channel.

We had started out in good faith, planning to land in Normandy on June 5, after joining other landing craft, when suddenly new instructions came that the landings had been postponed and our boat would be held in the pattern for an extra day. Ours not to question why. Ours to follow orders. There were planes overhead, but so high that we could only tell that they were, not

Moon, Taylor Gordon and other young renaissance exponents on a 1932 film-making venture to Soviet Russia. Smith would subsequently live an expatriate life there for fourteen years.

Ethel Ray Nance, born in Duluth and matured by jobs for the Minnesota State Relief Commission and the Minnesota House of Representatives, went to work for the National Urban League in the mid-1920s and became one of *Opportunity* magazine editor Charles S. Johnson's closest aides. She helped him develop the literary contests and social gatherings that provided the central facets of the Harlem Renaissance milieu.

And Taylor Gordon, a Montana-born concert singer and gadfly who had spent some of his early years as a St. Paul chauffeur and railroad car attendant, went on to tour internationally with J. Rosamund Johnson. Gordon published in 1929—before going on the Russian journey with Hughes and Company—one of the most colorful autobiographies of the renaissance era, *Born to Be*.

*Dr. John S. Wright is a professor in the University of Minnesota's Department of Afro-American & African Studies and in the University's English Department.*

whose they were. We were surprised that no bombs were on the day's program.

About 6:30 p.m. we found out what the words "ready reserve" meant in Army jargon. These "ready reserves" (including us) were to be available to be thrown in at any point of the action where it was felt we could move things along faster. We were all to go ashore as quickly as possible and



*Arlo H. Knowles in uniform and recently.*





to gather in a specified bivouac area. Since we knew nothing of the land positions, we could only follow instructions.

Each landing boat was moved into its specified position and its ramp let down. Down the ramp went the jeeps, the trailers, the artillery pieces needed for early use. Our jeep had been especially prepared as an "air breather." For this, an intake extension had been positioned about 18 inches above the jeep's hood so that, if submerged, we could still get air. The electrical connections also had been prepared to withstand seawater.

We carried our side arms and radio equipment in our hands to try to keep them above water. As we drove off the ramp and dropped to the bottom of the bay, the water rose quickly to our necks. The identification on our bumpers had been carefully painted over so we could remain unknown, but I don't recall anyone seeing us land at that time of night. Besides, the view of hundreds of other boats just like ours in the bay was more interesting. That span of water was one of the longest half-miles I have ever negotiated, but we got safely to shore with no shells landing among us. All of the equipment worked nicely when we got it dried out, including the radio vehicle for communication. (Incidentally, it is almost impossible to silence a radio operator when his equipment works well.)

It was a beautiful, clear night, cloudless and at body temperature. The stars were where they should be. Once on the ground we felt much better, and foxholes, if we dug them, could offer some protection, at least.

We got the troops into bivouac and bedded down by 11 p.m. and had until 3 a.m. to rest before morning light let us see what else needed to be done. And to get our orders. My landing was over.

\* \* \*

*William A. Davies, who retired in 1976 after twenty-two years as principal of Sunrise Park Junior High School, White Bear Lake, spent his first two years of the war on convoy duty in the Atlantic. He was aboard the U. S. S. Texas, a World War I vintage battleship. As D-Day approached, the Texas was anchored in Belfast Lough, off the coast of Northern Ireland.*

On the morning of June 3, our commanding officer, Captain Baker, an-



*William A. Davies as a young sailor in 1942 and today.*

nounced to the crew that we were going to get underway immediately for participation in the Allied invasion of Normandy. As we sailed south toward the English Channel, we were continuously joined by more and more ships of every description.

After approximately a day-and-a-half on this course, the *Texas* received the following message: "The invasion has been postponed for twenty-four hours." As a result, all ships were ordered to immediately reverse course, and then to reverse course again twelve hours later. This meant that "H-Hour" was now scheduled for June 6, instead of June 5, as originally planned. In the late afternoon of June 5, all crew members were sent to their general quarters stations where they would remain until after the initial landings.

*On D-Day the Texas was one of two battleships stationed off Omaha Beach and assigned to shell Pointe du Hoc in order to prepare the way for Ranger battalions that would assault the 100-foot cliff. Davies was a quartermaster assigned to an area known as "steering aft," an auxiliary steering station in the bowels of the ship near the propellers and rudder.*

Although those of us assigned to "steering aft" (or "after steering") could not see the massive invasion armada of which our ship was a part, we did get a play-by-play account both by telephone and from the

public address system. The ship's chaplain, from his vantage point on the navigation bridge, described in detail the dramatic developments as they occurred. We also listened to the British radio broadcasts of the progress of the invasion.

The function of the steering aft crew was simply to stand by and shift the ship's steering controls in the event that the ship could no longer be steered from the bridge, the conning tower or the engine room. Except for that, we had little to do, so we decided to keep a minute-by-minute log of what was being reported from the bridge. Beginning at 1800 on June 5 and continuing until 2100 on June 6, we kept a complete record.

At dawn on June 6, the chaplain reported hundreds of landing craft slowly moving toward the coast of Normandy as the big guns of the British and American ships bombarded Omaha Beach. The chaplain also reported when the *Texas* trained her main battery on Pointe du Hoc. Soon we all felt the ship shudder as the big guns were fired for the first time against an enemy. At 6:30 a.m. the naval bombardment of the shore stopped as men and equipment streamed ashore from the landing craft. At this time, the Allies seemed to have complete control of the air.

Soon we received a report that our Pointe du Hoc target had been destroyed.



We were then assigned a new target, a church steeple which was being used by the enemy to direct gunfire against our troops. This target also was destroyed. Although the *Texas* stayed well off shore, some of our destroyers ranged up and down the beach firing at targets of opportunity.

As the day wore on and more and more troops and equipment poured ashore, it became evident that the invasion was going to succeed. During the day we heard the king of England address all of the Allied forces by radio congratulating them on their successful landings. We also heard a radio address by General Eisenhower.

When the *Texas* finally returned to England to refuel and to replenish her supply of ammunition, it was obvious that her crew members were proud of their old "fighting ship." My copy of our D-Day log is a prized possession.

Later commissioned a communications officer in the Navy, Davies was transferred to the Philippines where he served until the end of the war. He was awarded the European-African-Middle Eastern, Asian-Pacific and American campaign medals.

\* \* \*

For Edward Berg of Inver Grove Heights, owner for many years of Lee's Village Inn and Lee's Kitchen in Highland Park, June 6 was his "longest day."

It was 12:30 a.m. We had just left Plymouth harbor on the southwest coast of England. The date was June 6, 1944. Our ship was the destroyer, *U.S.S. Harding*. The crew of 265 sailors waited to hear of our destination. Commander George G. Palmer, our skipper, had volunteered to spearhead the American sector for the invasion of Normandy. The *Harding* would lead the fleet to the coast of France and patrol the perimeter along with the other destroyers in Division 18. We would attempt to protect the troop ships as they streamed in for the invasion. It was doubtful that many of us realized the importance of this momentous day of World War II.

At 0600 the invasion began. The ship's crew members were at their battle stations where we would remain for seventy-two hours and twelve minutes. My job aboard was yeoman, which was office work, and



Edward Berg (left) "at ease," and recently.



I also was singularly responsible for serving extra duty as operator of the ultra secret International Code Machine. My duties during battle were primarily to be the captain's "talker," relaying his instructions to the crew from our station on the bridge. From here, the top deck of the destroyer, we could view the entire area top-side from fore to aft.

Our ship carried four 5-inch guns of caliber 38, two forward and two aft. We also had a few 40 mm guns and several 20 mm guns on the lower deck. Several depth charges also were in evidence, as were the torpedoes amidship between the smokestacks. We were a proud crew in our "tin can" navy. We were leading the convoy into what would become one of the greatest battles in U. S. history.

Among our many duties was support for the Second Ranger Battalion numbering 2,000 soldiers. The vast majority of this great military unit gave their lives on the beaches of Normandy.

During the seventy-two hours on general quarters—our battlestations—my experiences were compelling and unforgettable. Much of what happened there and for the next many days is something that I am, to this day, reluctant to discuss. However, much cannot be put aside. The most vivid memories for me, a nineteen-year-old sailor, was seeing our soldiers being killed on the beaches or while trying to land their craft. For many days their bodies would float by our ship and we could not stop to pick them up.



I will forever remember repeating the order from our captain to fire on a church in this French village. The church tower was harboring an enemy machine gun nest. The crew manning the 5-inch gun fired four salvos and hit the tower three times, blowing it away. Even God's house was not immune to attack against the German forces.

Saddened and stunned as I was to realize that if we and our ships with its guns on the coast of Normandy could do this to a machine gun nest in a church, then what of the women and children and other innocents in that French village? Yes, war is hell. That is all I wish to say about the matter at this time. My "longest day" is still one of my worst memories of World War II.

\* \* \*

*Retired since 1981 from First Bank St. Paul where he was assistant vice president and manager of the International Banking Division, Herbert T. Alberg was twenty years old on June 5, when he left Cardiff, Wales, aboard the U. S. S. Susan B. Anthony. It was a troop ship deemed unfit for service but every available vessel was needed for Operation Overlord, code for the Normandy landings. Carrying 3,800 troops, the Anthony hit a mine as she neared the beaches. Albert, who was down in the third hold, made his way to the top deck. He later was awarded the Purple Heart. His account is adapted from an article which appeared in 1985 in Ace, the St. Paul Athletic Club's publication.*

On deck I ran into a good friend, a young Navy lieutenant, and he was our salvation on that day. (Sadly, he would die later in France.) He told us that this was the third ship knocked out from under him. By the time the abandon ship order came, the *Anthony* was on fire.

Destroyers came along both sides of the sinking ship to take on the troops. The seas were rough and as the men climbed down the sides the ships would be thrown together, crushing the men clinging there.

"We're not gonna do that," the lieutenant said. "Follow me." We raced forward to the highest part of the sinking ship and slid down the bow into the water. Everything had happened so fast that all I had on were trousers and a T-shirt.

It seemed like an hour, but I think we were only in the water for about ten



*Herbert T. Alberg before landing on Utah Beach, and today.*



minutes before we were picked up by an LCI (Landing Craft Infantry) headed for the beach. It was cold. The English Channel is no place to swim in June. It's funny, but when the ship went down, at no moment did we ever consider that we weren't going to make it. I never knew how many of the men aboard didn't survive.

The LCI was headed for Utah Beach, the western-most of the two American beachheads. The first wave had just gone through and was heading inland when the ramp on the LCI dropped open. A G. I. in full gear stepped off in front of me and disappeared into the water. Frantic moments

later the search had to be given up. A shell crater under the water may have claimed him; carrying the weight of full combat gear, he didn't have a chance.

Once on the beach, I lay down in the sand to get warm. Actually, it was a beautiful day. I looked up and saw an amphibious truck, known as a "duck" from its code designation DUKW, roaring down the beach right at me. I thought he was going to run me over. About fifty yards from me, the vehicle hit a mine.

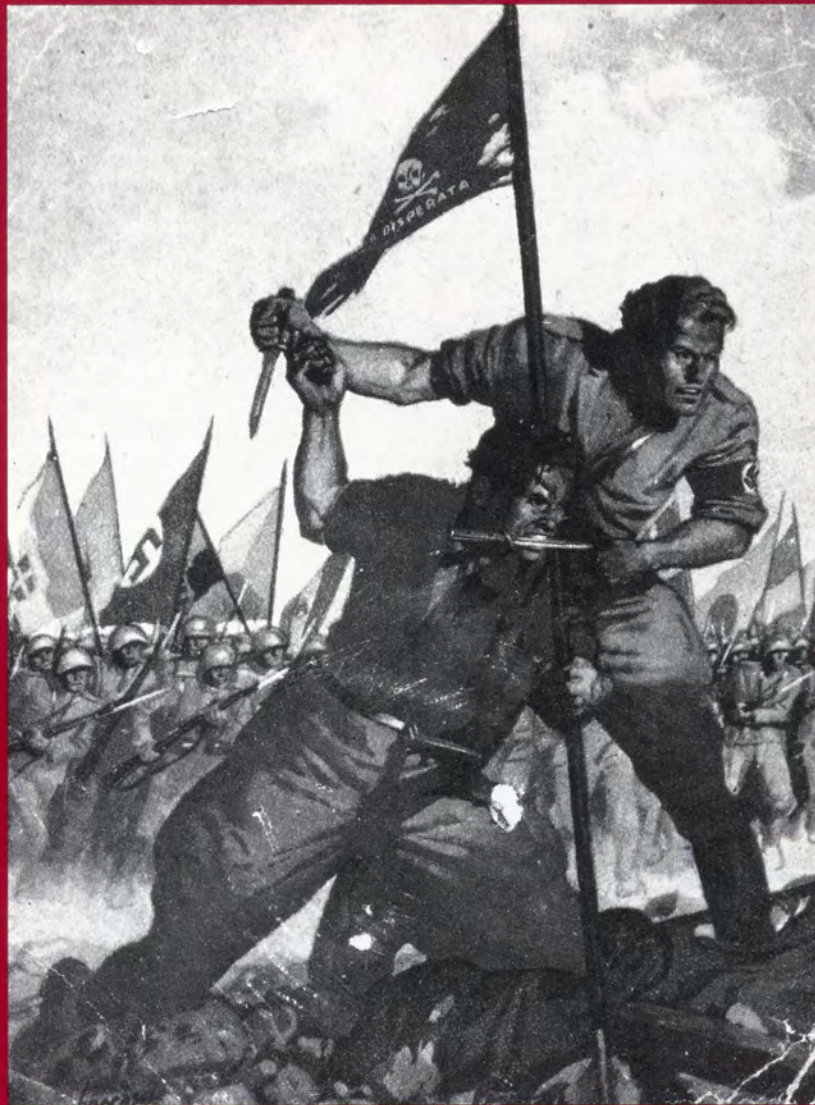
We found someone who seemed to know what was going on and asked where we could get some equipment. He said—and this is where you really grow up in a hurry—"We got a lot of equipment." And he took us to where dead G. I.'s were strung out as far as you could see. He said, "Take your pick." We picked up several rifles to get one good one from interchangeable parts, and found shoes that fit and jackets.

We found what was left of our company and began to move inland. The first village we entered was Ste. Mere Eglise. We were surprised that it hadn't yet been taken. Earlier in the day some of the paratroopers had landed almost in the town square and many of their bodies had been left hanging in the trees to discourage advancing troops. The remaining Germans were using the church spire as a lookout, taking potshots at the Americans.

I remember a peculiar incident there. I saw a paratrooper approaching on horseback with nine or ten German prisoners. He was keeping them in line with a machine gun. He looked at us and said, "Don't worry about it. France is ours. You're gonna find some trouble up ahead, but they'll be gone by the time you get there." France was liberated within several months, but for me "the trouble up ahead" lasted for another eleven months, until the German surrender on May 8, 1945.

Looking back I see that as a soldier you risked your life for fellows that you didn't even know their names, you knew nothing about them, you never saw them before in your life. It's amazing. The old saying which every soldier has heard is true: "I wouldn't take \$100,000 to be without the experience, but I wouldn't take \$100,000 to do it again."





*A German propaganda card given to Russell W. Anderson by a German soldier taken prisoner during the Normandy landings. "He was a nice guy," Anderson remembers. See the article beginning on Page 9: "D-Day Remembered by Seven Who Were There."*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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