

— THE SIXTH OF JUNE, 1944 —

Ranger Landing Tough But Courageous

Note — Ranger units hit the beach in Normandy at H-Hour on D-Day, 15 years ago Saturday. With them was G. K. Hodenfield, a combat correspondent for Stars and Stripes, now the AP's education writer. Hodenfield recalls the incredible feats of four Ranger companies in this last of four articles on D-Day.

By G. K. HODENFIELD
Associated Press Staff Writer

The story of four companies of the U. S. 2nd Ranger Battalion and their assault on a heavily fortified position in Normandy on June 6, 7 and 8, 1944, is not the big picture of D-Day. That's for generals and historians.

It's not even the little picture of an isolated action.

Maybe it's not even a story at all — just the things that one man who was with them remember best from the greatest experience of his life.

The story of D-Day has to be a story of courage. Maybe that is why, whenever I think of D-Day, I remember Sgt. Bob Youso and Pvt. Alvin White.

The Ranger assignment on D-Day was to land precisely at H-Hour (6:30 a.m.) on a rocky shelf of beach barely 15 feet wide, scramble up sheer cliffs more than 100 feet high, and destroy six 150mm guns protected by crack German troops and tons of concrete.

But somebody goofed. The guns went off along with the Royal Navy bombardment for the wrong beach. By the time we reached our landing area — 40 we were 30 minutes late.

(2) The naval barrage that was supposed to drive the enemy to cover had long since lifted, and (3) German soldiers lined the cliffs tops, peppering us with rifle fire and hand grenades.

UP THE CLIFF

As the assault craft crunched to a stop, the Rangers fired a series of rockets that went up and over the cliffs with a loud "whoosh." Attached to the rockets were six 150mm guns. The Rangers were surprised grapple down every time they showed their heads.

pulling on the ropes until the grappling hooks hit into the dirt, then scrambled up the ladders.

The rockets drove the Germans back, but only momentarily. They had returned by the time Youso and White were clambering to the cliff top. How those two men made it, I'll never know. But they did, and when they got there they tossed the Germans back and made it possible for other Rangers to follow them.

The big guns were spiked with hermit grenades, then the Rangers dug in for the fight of their lives. There were Germans in front of them, the cliffs and the English channel behind them, no supplies or reinforcements available. We were going to hang on or get killed trying. It appeared pretty obvious we were all going to get killed.

Which brings me back to Youso and White. They were out on the left flank, anchoring one end of a very thin line. About 200 yards away was a German machinegun nest which was cutting our men down every time they showed their heads.

Youso and White, armed only with rifles and grenades, went after the machinegunner. To get him they had to snake along in the weeds through a German mine field. One false move and they'd be shot dead or blown to kingdom come.

Maybe 30 minutes later they were back. Youso had been shot through the elbow. White through the knee. But the machinegunner had been wiped out.

BRANDS OF COURAGE

Going up the cliffs, Youso and White had shown one kind of courage—the kind born of desperation and excitement. Here they had shown another kind—the cool, calculated courage that overcomes fear of overwhelming odds.

But there's still another kind of courage, I remember. Capt. Walter Block, our medic.

Doc set up a sort of base hospital in a concrete dugout. There was room for about 15 or 16 patients, and that wasn't nearly enough. At times there were so many wounded men that most had to be left outside until someone could take them in.

D-Day was a terribly personal thing to the men who were there. You fought with a group, but the excitement that was like intoxication, and the fear that was like a clammy chill—those were yours alone. You couldn't share them. You couldn't talk about them, you couldn't even acknowledge them. And what you remember best are not people, and places, and things.

FINDING SELF

You remember how you felt: The amazement, on D-Day when you suddenly realized that although you had always considered yourself a coward, at this particular time and place you weren't a coward. Scared stiff, yes, but not a coward.

The resignation on D plus one to death at any moment; and pride that you could accept it without panic.

The anger, outraged and insane, on D plus two, at the men of the U.S. 29th Division who broke through on the left flank and fired first and fought later. They killed two Rangers, wounded 12.

Most of all, when it was all over, the terrible, unshakable loneliness—the sense of deep and personal loss. Of the landing force of 230 Rangers, only 52 were able to walk away.

These things you'll never forget.

body inside died or was patched up enough to return to battle.

In the afternoon on the first day, Doc was called outside to look at a badly wounded officer. The officer was unconscious, barely breathing.

Doc took a quick look. "You'll have to leave him out here," he walked back into the dugout. The man he left to die intended the alone was a man who for years had been Doc's closest and dearest friend.

ANOTHER KIND

I think it took courage, too, for Ranger Robin to do what he did. Ranger Robin was a platoon leader, and the last I heard he was still in the Army. I hope so; he's a good guy to have on our side. Anyway, on the second day of the invasion, Ranger Robin led a patrol behind German lines to get prisoners for questioning.

He was on his way back with a dozen of them when the Germans counterattacked and threatened to chase the Rangers right off the cliffs.

Ranger Robin and five or six of his men, plus the prisoners, were crouched in a huge shell hole, with German troops all around them. Ranger Robin told his men to take off, one at a time, and get back to our lines as best they could. His sergeant, the last to leave, asked Robin what he was going to do about the prisoners.

"Don't you worry about that, I'll handle it," he replied.

When he was alone with the prisoners, Ranger Robin turned his Tommy gun on them and killed them all. Then he made his way back to our command post.

MORALITY OF DEATH

You could say his act was that of a coward, more than of a hero. But I'll argue with you on that. Ranger Robin was tough, but he was no murderer. He shot down 12 defenseless men in cold blood because he was a Ranger, and the Rangers were fighting for their lives. I got to know him well enough to know that those 12 German prisoners will haunt him as long as he lives.

If you were there on D-Day you know a dozen stories like this. If you weren't, you've heard about them.

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Press Finds
Debbie Coy

HOLLYWOOD (AP) — Debbie Reynolds says she can't understand the fuss over a diamond brooch given her by a wealthy Texan.

"All this excitement is completely unnecessary," the actress told newsmen Thursday. "I'm not engaged or in love with anyone."

The actress returned Thursday from a 10-day trip to New York where she plugged three movies and a new record album. She said Bob Neal, heir to a coffee fortune and a family friend for eight years, escorted her to plays while she was in New York.

In New York, Neal confirmed that the brooch was just a friendship token. He said he and Debbie never discussed an engagement or marriage.

Two Prisoners
Fail In Break

SAN QUENTIN, Calif. (AP) — Two convicts were foiled in their plot to escape from San Quentin Prison in the tank of a Napa State Hospital fire truck which was repaired here.

Associate Warden Louis Nelson said the plot was discovered Wednesday, just as the truck was to return to Napa. Tank cover bolts had been filed smooth, then replaced but held only by tape.

Inside the tank, 6 feet long, 4 wide and 2 deep, were clothing, a knife and two oranges. Nelson said Robert Logan, 26, Los Angeles robber, and Stan Kearney, 22, Riverside forger, admitted the plot.

Taughannock Falls in New York State are 50 feet higher than Niagara.

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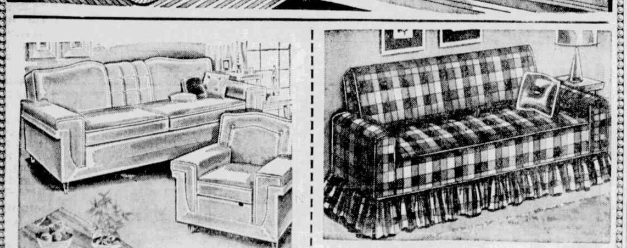
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