

D-Day, June 6

by Lynne Belluscio

I've been watching the progress of the Whiskey 7, the restored Douglas C-47 transport plane from the National War Plane Museum in Geneseo on its way back to Normandy for the 70th Anniversary of D-Day on June 6.

Whiskey 7 left Geneseo on May 15 and flew to Maine. During the next several days it flew to Newfoundland, Iceland and Greenland and finally to Scotland. It spent a few days

in England before heading to the Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany. The plane will leave Sunday for Cherbourg, France where it will pick up the Liberty Jump Team that will parachute into several of the original landing zones at Normandy. Although other planes will be participating in the event, Whiskey 7 is the only plane that has been flown from the United States to France, a truly remarkable feat. In 1944, the Whiskey 7 was the lead ship of the 37th Troop Carrier Squadron, which dropped the 82nd Airborne Division near St. Mere Eglise, France.

A couple of days ago, I ran into Mike Welsh and he said that I should give Dick Ladd a call. As far as he knew, he was the only D-Day veteran still living in LeRoy. So I called Dick yesterday. "Have you ever written about D-Day?" I asked. "No. I have talked to family and friends who were interested, but most folks don't care too much." "Well, tell me a little about it. I'd like to write about it in the *Pennysaver*." So Dick spent a little time telling me about what happened.

He was 19 and this was his first combat mission. He parachuted beyond German lines on D-Day with the 502 Regiment of the 101st Airborne, the "Screaming Eagles." The 101st Airborne was joined by the 82nd Airborne unit and they were the first units to parachute behind German lines before the main amphibious invasion at 6:30 am.

There were approximately 13,100 American paratroopers on that mission and 4,000 more were shuttled in by glider after daylight. It was officially called Operation Neptune. Dick said that

unofficially the men described it as "snooping and pooping" intelligence and reconnaissance. Dick remembers that their mission began exactly at 10 minutes after one in the morning. He remembers vividly the challenges of jumping behind enemy lines in the dark. Later, military historians would say that the decision to drop paratroopers in the dark was one of the few missteps of the Allied D-Day mission. Casualties were heavy. Dick survived the jump and continued fighting his way with his unit into German-held territory.

He fought in the infamous Battle of the Bulge in the winter of 1944 and 1945 in the Ardennes. He was wounded in both hands at Bastone, while he was riding in the gun turret of a tank. The wounds were not serious and he returned to his unit six weeks later. When he returned to England, he spent some time in Scotland, where he met his future wife. They were married in September 1945. He was discharged two months later on November 30. His wife joined him in the United States on April 1, 1946.

There were thousands of casualties on D-Day. Genesee County lost four men on that day. Frederick Fenneran from LeRoy, was only 19 when he stormed the beaches at Normandy and lost his life. Martin Brown graduated from the South Byron High School and attended the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. He enlisted in the 101st Screaming Eagles 506th Brigade. He took his training at Fort Benning in Georgia and was shipped to England in August 1943. On June 6, 1944, he was another casualty of the

war. George Gouinlock was born in Warsaw, but graduated from Batavia High School and received his engineering degree from Syracuse University. At the time that the war broke out, he was working at the Tennessee Valley Authority. In May 1943 he entered the service with the 138th Demolition Unit. According to the **Gold Star Book of Genesee County**, he lost his life "presumably in the invasion of France" on D-Day.

Alvin Hettrick of Pavilion, was a member of the 299th Engineer Combat Battalion. Before enlisting he worked as a clerk at Lapp Insulator Company. He was reported missing in action on June 6, D-Day. Four days later, his death was confirmed by his commanding officer. Alvin was the first World War II fatality from Pavilion.

D-Day has been called the "Longest Day." Military historians have written books, movies have been made. Diaries have been published. It remains as one of the most critical and pivotal days in the annals of World War II. The question has always been, what would have happened if the D-Day invasion had failed? While on a museum conference trip to the Netherlands and Belgium a few years ago, I happened to be in Arnhem on the weekend that they commemorate the liberation of their city by Canadian troops. The first Allied liberation attempt was thwarted by the Germans, as recorded in the movie "The Bridge Too Far." But eventually, the Allied forces prevailed and the Germans retreated. Each year, Arnhem invites the Canadian veterans to join them for a homecoming but

each year the numbers become fewer as those brave men pass on.

I asked Dick Ladd if he had ever been back to Normandy, and he said he had been back a couple of times. He had visited with some of his family quite a while ago, and again just three years ago he had gone back, but he wouldn't be going for the 70th Anniversary commemoration.

A few of my European friends have asked, why does it seem that the Americans and the English want to commemorate every battle and invasion of World War II. Isn't it time to move on? I've mulled that question around in my mind quite a bit, and I'm not sure I have the right answer.

I don't remember the war. I was born in November of 1944. My father, after being rejected for medical reasons, finally enlisted in the Army, only to be discharged for medical reasons a few months later. His cousin, was killed in action in September 1944. Three of my mother's four brothers enlisted during World War II. Perhaps we commemorate the events, to assure ourselves that it was worth the sacrifices made.

I wonder what it would mean if we didn't commemorate these events. I do know, that on June 6, I will be thinking of Dick Ladd because through his eyes, D-Day takes on a personal meaning. I also want to remember, that when I talked with Dick, it was not so much his war experiences that he wanted to share with me, but that it was during this time, that fate interceded and he met his wonderful wife. Truly a war story with a happy ending.



Visit the National Warplane Museum website: www.rtn2014.org for more information on how you can help support this effort.

