

COVER STORY

The trials, triumphs of D-day

U.S. soldier: 'We were part of something big'

Up to his neck in ocean. His feet weighted by water-filled leggings. Holding his carbine high, a condom taped over the barrel to keep it dry. Frantic men around him afraid of drowning, clinging to comrades who struggled toward the beach, the one called Omaha.



RON DZWONKOWSKI TELLS STORY OF A MICHIGANDER WHO STORMED NORMANDY

following spring.

A turn in the tide

It is no exaggeration to say the massive invasion changed the course of history, hastening the downfall of a fascist regime that sought to rule the world.

"The eyes of the world are upon you," Allied Commander Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower said in a message to the troops on D-day. "The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies ... you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe and security for ourselves in a free world."

And indeed, they did. Crum's unit, Company C of the 26th Regiment of the 1st Infantry Division, the storied Big Red One, reached the beach by early evening, drawing no fire.

"It was not until I had passed an abandoned beach house that the 'incoming mail,' as we called it, finally arrived, falling on the wounded waiting to be evacuated."

The company made it up to a field by dark, only to be pinned down by machine-gun fire "for what seemed like forever," Crum said.

When the shooting stopped, they moved forward to the intersection of two farm lanes, where the company began to set up camp for the night.

"Suddenly, to my rear, tracer bullets were flying. ...



Richard Crum

Richard Crum of Williamston, now 85, was in the third wave of the largest seaborne invasion in military history as a private in the army.

Two Germans had apparently been following us."

The company returned fire, but several of its men were killed and others wounded in the skirmish.

World War II combat

But not Crum, who made it through three years of war without a scratch — a remarkable accomplishment considering his involvement in some of the biggest battles in Europe.

"There was a time I dug a slit trench ... and one of our replacements, a guy I never met, was in my trench while I was not far away doing something and a German rocket landed right on him," Crum said. "I can't explain it. ... I've never even had nightmares, although I have had some crazy dreams."

"The fighting scenes in 'Saving Private Ryan' I think were pretty realistic," Crum said, matter-of-factly. "Not the story, but the fighting. ...

"World War II combat, I would say, was five minutes of sheer terror, of being deathly afraid, for every 60 minutes of sheer boredom, waiting to know what to do next."

Born on a farm in Ohio, Crum enlisted in the Army after high school.

"I looked on it as a great adventure," he said. "I had never been further from

home than 20 miles inside Pennsylvania. I figured this was how I was going to see the world."

He saw north Africa, Sicily, France, England and Germany before ending up in Czechoslovakia when the war ended.

Life after the war

Crum returned home to attend Ohio State University on the GI Bill and then settled into a long career as a technician at Michigan State University's agricultural experiment station, retiring in 1991.

He has been back to Normandy twice since he retired and attended several reunions of his old unit. But Crum is not sure he will go to the annual convention of the Big Red One Society, scheduled for Aug. 5-9 at the Hyatt Regency in Dearborn.

There aren't too many World War II veterans at such gatherings any more, he said.

But Crum doesn't need to see them to remember them.

"We were part of something big," he said. "We had that feeling of esprit de corps. We didn't want the Germans to beat us."

THE SOCIETY OF THE 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION COUNTS 272 MEMBERS IN MICHIGAN. FOR INFORMATION ABOUT ACTIVITIES OR THE DEARBORN CONVENTION, CALL 888-324-4733 ANYTIME OR GO TO WWW.1STID.ORG.

Choice D-day flicks

- "D-Day: The Sixth of June" (1956)
- "The Longest Day" (1962)
- "The Americanization of Emily" (1964)
- "Up From the Beach" (1965)
- "The Big Red One" (1980)
- "Saving Private Ryan" (1998)



Tom Hanks in "Saving Private Ryan"

DreamWorks SKG

MICHIGAN AT D-DAY

A soldier from Saginaw meets General Ike

This famous picture of the evening before D-day shows Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower talking with paratroopers with the 101st Airborne Division — the Screaming Eagles — hours before they were dropped behind Nazi lines near Normandy. The lieutenant that Eisenhower is facing — with the 23 sign around his neck — is Wallace Strobel, who grew up in Saginaw.

"He asked my name and which state I was from. I gave him my name and that I was from Michigan. He then said, 'Oh yes, Michigan ... great fishing there ... been there several times and like it,'" Strobel recalled years later. Strobel came through the invasion uninjured. But several of the men in this picture were killed or wounded.

"While I think the general thought his visit would boost the morale of our men, I honestly think it was his morale that was improved," Strobel recalled.

Strobel, who turned 22 the day he met Eisenhower, returned to Saginaw after the war. He died in 1999.



U.S. Army Signal Corps via the Associated Press

When Detroit stood at attention

There's no disputing the city's major role in helping the United States become victorious in World War II. Here's what people and the news media said back then:

■ "The hottest town in America," crowed a 1943 article in Variety, the show business trade paper.

■ "A miraculous city, a city forging thunderbolts," wrote the New York Times, soon after the United States entered World War II.

■ "The wonder city of America," said novelist Erskine Caldwell in 1942, while talking about how much Germany and Japan wanted to bomb Detroit.

■ "Detroit is winning the war," Soviet dictator Josef Stalin reportedly told President Franklin D. Roosevelt three months before the Germans surrendered.

And Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who commanded 3 million soldiers in Europe, said the weapons he valued most were the jeep, 2½-ton truck, bulldozer and transport plane — all partly or fully made in Detroit.

PETER GAVRILOVICH/Detroit Free Press

'Every man who set foot on Omaha Beach was a hero'

— Gen. Omar Bradley, World War II commander of the U.S. First Army, speaking after the war

D-day, June 6, 1944, was three generations ago — ancient history to many younger Americans.

But for 16 million U.S. veterans of World War II — some 2.5 million alive today — and millions of other Americans of that generation, it was the crucial point in the war against Nazi Germany. The successful invasion of France speeded the destruction of Adolf Hitler's armies and led to Germany's unconditional surrender in May 1945.

- **THE GI:** Male; single; 25 years old; 5 feet, 8 inches tall; 150 pounds, ninth-grade education. (Today, soldiers as old as 77 have served in Afghanistan. Nearly 83% have high school diplomas and about 14% are female; 56% of all soldiers are married.)
- **WAGES:** As a private, \$60 a month. (Today, \$1,400.)
- **MINORITIES:** Military was segregated. Black troops made up 10.6% of the total force. (Today, 35% of troops are minorities.)
- **WOMEN:** Battlefield nurses or behind the front lines in hospital and administrative jobs. Women ferried bombers across the ocean. (Today, women still aren't in combat but can work in 161 of 181 military jobs.)
- **THE RIFLE:** Standard issue: M1 rifle, a .30-caliber semiautomatic. A rifleman could empty an eight-round clip as quickly as he could squeeze the trigger. An experienced GI could fire several clips a minute. (Today, the M16, which fires semiautomatic or automatic.)
- **FOOD:** The C ration provided 3,700 calories a day. (Today, it's MRE —

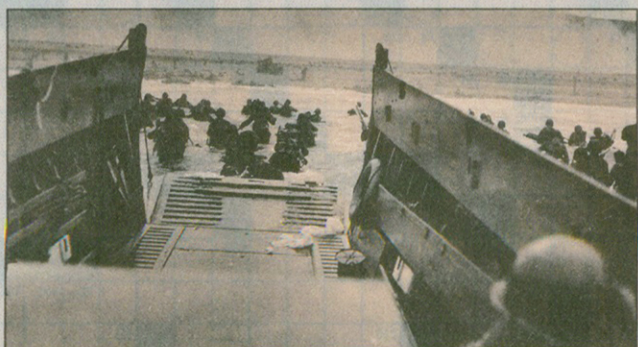
meals ready to eat — packets of carbs, protein and calories. There are well-catered spreads in Iraq, too. Some GIs return a lot heavier than when they left.)

■ **GETTING TO WAR:** Huge transport ships. (Today, huge transport planes.)

■ **TRAINING:** Many of the soldiers were draftees and their training was ongoing. After boot camp, during which most learned how to carry and shoot a rifle, the soldiers spent months in Britain honing special skills for D-day. (Today, complex military skills demand technical-school-like training for many troops.)

■ **ENTERTAINMENT:** USO shows brought stateside entertainers. The big draws: Bob Hope and the Andrews Sisters. (Today, USO shows. The big draws: Kid Rock, Robin Williams.)

■ **NEWS MEDIA:** The big names: Broadcaster Edward R. Murrow and newspaper reporter Ernie Pyle. War correspondents hit the Normandy beaches with troops. Because their reports were censored, dispatches were delayed by several hours, sometimes days.



Soldiers make their way to the beaches in France on D-day. Free Press file photo. MARTHA THIERRY/Detroit Free Press

D-DAY JUNE 6, 1944 Invasion to free Europe

On June 6, 1944, the largest amphibious invasion ever was launched to free Europe from Nazi Germany. Thousands of U.S., British and Canadian troops stormed beaches on the Normandy coast of France, which was then occupied by the Germans. U.S. troops landed on two beaches, code-named Utah and Omaha. The British and Canadians landed on Gold, Sword and Juno beaches. German defenses included metal poles beneath the water, land mines and barbed wire, and heavy guns that strafed soldiers coming on shore. U.S. casualties were especially heavy at Omaha Beach. Eleven months later, Germany surrendered.

GERMAN GUN EMPLACEMENTS Utah BEACH CODE NAMES

MULBERRY HARBORS: Prefabricated concrete harbors that were towed across the English Channel

TROOPS: First-day force: Nearly 160,000, including 23,000 paratroopers and support forces. Total troops who passed through Normandy after D-day: 2 million.

TIME: Attack began with paratroopers dropping into France shortly after midnight. An invasion force of 50,000 soldiers hit the beaches shortly after 6 a.m.

CASUALTIES: About 3,000 Allied soldiers died, including 1,465 Americans. At least 4,000 German soldiers were killed.

AIRCRAFT: 2,000 bombers; up to 11,000 aircraft for transport, reconnaissance and deception

SHIPS: 4,400 transports and 600 warships

TANKS: 1,500

COMMANDING GENERAL: Dwight D. Eisenhower

Sources: Royal Naval Museum; The Times Atlas of the Second World War; "World War II" by C.L. Sulzberger; "Decision in Normandy" by Carlo D'Este; "World War II: America at War 1942-1945" by Norman Polmar and Thomas B. Allen; "The Atlas of the 20th Century"; "World War Two Chronological Atlas" PAT CARR/McClatchy-Tribune, PETER GAVRILOVICH, MARTHA THIERRY/Detroit Free Press