

The Final Tribute

WWII vets recount their service

By JOHN BARNHART
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Last week's D-Day 75th anniversary was billed as the Final Tribute. It's the last major anniversary that any significant number of World War II veterans could be expected to be alive and well enough to attend.

There were about 100 World War II veterans there, many in wheelchairs. Each was escorted by an active duty soldier, sailor, airman or current member of the National Guard. They tried to pair veterans and escorts, as much as possible, according to service: Active duty Army soldiers escorting Army veterans; young Marines escorting former Marines; young sailors escorting old sailors. One Navy lieutenant, normally assigned to the Pentagon, made a special trip down here to escort a veteran.

Veterans had stories to



Susan Dula points out to her son, Tim, where his grandfather landed at Normandy during the D-Day invasion, June 6, 1944. His grandfather was wounded and would die the next day. (Below) Vice President Mike Pence applauds the veterans in attendance for their service. Photos by Tom Wilmoth

Honoring their sacrifice

By TOM WILMOTH

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Tim Dula lost both of his grandfathers in World War II.

Day Dula landed on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day and saved one of his fellow soldiers, pulling him out of some deep water as he was about to drown. That friend survived the war and lived to tell Dula's family about what Day Dula had done.

Day Dula, who served with M Company of the 116th Infantry Regiment, was wounded during the invasion June 6, 1944 and died the next day.

Tim Dula, and his mother, Susan



Dula, were at Thursday's Final Tribute ceremony at the National D-Day Memorial in Bedford. Susan had attended the dedication of the Memorial 18 years ago; this was Tim's first trip there. They live in Deerfield, Virginia.

"We just want to honor Day's memory," Susan said.

Her father, Tim's other grandfather, was part of the 179th Infantry Regiment serving under General George Patton in North Africa, Italy and Germany. He died just prior to the end of the war.

Noah Bandy's grandfather landed on Omaha Beach on D-Day+1. He

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tell.

Ralph Sigman was a Navy D-Day veteran. He was an engineman of LCTA 2229, a gunfire support craft. The LCTA was sunk and the 27-man crew ended up floating in the cold English Channel water.

"We spent four-and-a-half hours in the water," he said.

The long time immersed in cold water meant that some of the men died of hypothermia before they were rescued.

Bobbie Johnson served in the Army Airforce. He was a flight engineer on a B-29. These four-engine bombers were the largest bombers in World War II. They were used in the Pacific Theater because of their long range.

"I stayed up as much as 15 hours without landing on training flights," he said.

The length of actual combat flights varied according to where they were bombing and what island they were taking off from. Johnson said they were usually between eight and 10 hours long.

Laurence Glick was a bombardier on a B-24. He still has the pins from the bombs he dropped on D-Day. These were coter pins that prevented the bomb from accidentally detonating. Glick removed these when the plane was on its way to the target. Glick kept these because he knew he was on a historic mis-

sion.

Charles Kulp Sr. may have been saved by the atomic bombs the U. S. dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He was an aircraft mechanic assigned to the USS Siboney (CVE-112). He worked on F6F Hellcats. His ship left Pearl Harbor and was slated for the planned invasion of Japan's home islands, which was expected to be very bloody. Japan, however, surrendered and although Kulp's ship entered Tokyo Bay, it was not part of an invasion. He said they went on liberty in Tokyo as soon as their ship got there.

"Tokyo was gutted," he said.

Tokyo had been the target of massive incendiary bomb raids during the war. "The kids loved our shoes," he recalled. "They would sit down beside us and feel our shoes. Most of them were barefoot."

Hamlet Lee Piercy was a combat engineer with the 157th Engineer Battalion. He was captured by the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge on Jan. 1, 1945 and spent four months as a prisoner of war. He said how he was treated by his captors depended on their age. The older men were easy to get along with.

"The young ones wanted to fight more," he said.

Paul Coyne was saved by the bomb. He said he was in training at Camp Blanding, Florida. He was three-fourths of the way through

when the men got news that the atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima.

"The sergeant said 'You guys are the luckiest guys in the world,'" Coyne said. "I asked 'Why?'"

"The sergeant said, 'Because you were scheduled to be in the second wave'," Coyne said.

That was the second wave of the invasion of Japan's home islands.

"They were talking about somewhere between 75 and 80 percent casualties," he said.

"I was saved by the decision of the president."

William Austin, a former Marine, was an antiaircraft gunner. He was part of the crew of a 90mm antiaircraft gun which, according to Austin, could reach up to 27,000 feet.

"I was on Tinian when the Enola Gay left there," he said.

The Enola Gay was the B-29 that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

"We knew something big was going on," Austin said.

They didn't know what and when the bomb was in the bomb pit, waiting to be loaded in the bomber, it was covered so nobody could actually see it. It was really big and Austin said guys went over to see it. But they didn't know what it was. They found out after the Enola Gay came back.

Winfred Hart was a radio operator on a B-24 that was assigned to the 8th Air Force. He flew 24 bombing

missions over Germany.

He had a job you would not want. Just before the bombs were dropped, he had to go back, stand at the head of the bomb bay and watch the bombs fall to make sure none of them got hung up. The opening he had to go through was narrow, which means it took a skinny guy to do it. He also had to take off his parachute. If a bomb hung up, he would have had to go back on the catwalk over the bomb bay and kick it loose.

Don't slip! Actually, he did slip once and nearly fell out.

"At any rate, I made it," said Hart who is now 98.

Today, Hart is the only member of his crew still alive.

Missions varied a lot. "You don't know what's going to happen," he said.

Hart said the plane got shot up badly on their first mission and lost a mission. It couldn't keep up with the formation and dropped out. Fortunately, two fighters escorted it back to England.

"The crew got out and kissed the ground," he said. He said some crews came back without any damage. Other crews didn't come back.

"You hoped it wasn't you," he said.

After the war, Hart went to Virginia Tech under the GI bill and got a degree in electrical engineering, graduating in the class of 1950.



Clarence Hawkins was a Merchant Marine sailor. Photos by John Barnhart



William Woodall served in the Navy in an air/sea rescue craft pulling survivors out of the sea.



Charles Neighbor, escorted by a current active duty soldier, was an infantryman on Omaha Beach on D-Day.



William Austin, a former Marine, is escorted by a young Marine 2nd lieutenant.



Lieutenant Colonel Jean-Luc Lordon, a French Marine, came to lay a wreath at the French Legion d'Honneur plaque at the Homage Statute.



Laurence Gulick was a bombardier on a B-24. He saved the pins from the bombs he dropped on D-Day.



Charles Kulp Sr., was a Navy aircraft mechanic. He was stationed aboard the USS Siboney (CVE-112).



Hamlet Lee Piercy was a combat engineer. He was captured during the Battle of the the Bulge.



Winfield Hart was a radio operator on a B-24. During missions, he had to stand at the head of the open bomb bay.



People watch Vice President Mike Pence speaks via a large video screen. The Memorial's plaza could not accommodate the entire crowd that turned up for the event, but planners knew that would happen and made provisions for it.

Tribute:

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just recently passed away and Noah brought his children, Mason and Ethan, to Thursday's ceremony. "It's important that they remember," he said, adding that they need to know that their great-grandfather and other relatives "fought for their freedoms."

Thousands like the Dulas and Bandys showed up last week to honor and remember those who served and sacrificed during the D-Day invasion 75 years ago, and throughout World War II. In all, some 10,000 people attended Thursday's service at the National D-Day Memorial, labeled The Final Tribute: D-Day+75 years.

This is likely to be the final time that a large gathering of WWII veterans come together with most in their mid- to late-90s already. Of the 16 million who served in WWII, less than 500,000 are still living.

United States Senator Mark Warner welcomed those veterans attending the event as the crowd commended "the bravery of you and your brothers who never made it home."

"It's so important that

this Memorial is here in Bedford," stated Warner, noting the sacrifice made by the Bedford community in losing 20 of its own on the beaches during the invasion.

"This is a reminder of just how high the price of freedom can be," he said. "We must pass your stories to future generations."

The Honorable Robert Wilkie, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, also spoke, noting that "many of those who died (at D-Day) were just boys."

He said those men gave up the chance to be fathers, grandfathers and whatever future they hoped for "so that the rest of us could be free."

Vice President Mike Pence gave the keynote address and let the veterans there know that it is humbling to be with them.

He said their service led to not just the freedom of a country, but of the world.

"They knew the odds; they knew the enemy would fight savagely to protect their stronghold," Pence said of the men's valor who landed on the beaches of Normandy. "All of them

risked all to win a great victory."

"We see you not just as you are, but as you were," he told the veterans in attendance. "You stormed the beaches and faced death without fear. You are the pride of our nation and we thank you from the very bottom of our hearts."

He also made special note of the Bedford Boys and the community that lost so much that day. "That such a small town could make such a sacrifice seems almost beyond belief," he stated of the Bedford community, which lost more men per capita that day than any other community in the nation.

"On behalf of a grateful nation," he told the veterans, "we say one more time, thank you for your service."

Thursday's event included a D-Day Aerial Tribute, featuring many of the aircraft used during World War II along with a series of readings, most of which were taken from those who served at D-Day.

The day's observance ended with a Missing Man Flyover.



A member of a JROTC program salutes during Thursday's program.



Alex Stowe with the WWII Rangers and Descendants organization stands behind one of the wreaths at the Memorial.



World War II veteran Marshall Smith receives thanks for his service during Thursday's Final Tribute at the D-Day Memorial.



(Above) Noah Bandy with his children, Mason and Ethan, pose for a photo prior to Thursday's event. Noah's grandfather landed at Omaha Beach on D-Day+1.

(Above right) Lucille Boggess and son Carl Boggess are helped by Captain Mike Miller of the BCSO. Boggess lost her brothers Bedford and Raymond Hoback at D-Day.

(Right) Taps and a Missing Man Flyover completed Thursday's remembrance at the Memorial. All photos this page by Tom Wilmoth



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Naval Academy's contribution to D-Day now has a plaque

By JOHN BARNHART

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A plaque dedicated to the Naval Academy's contribution to D-Day is no longer missing.

The new plaque took its place beside a plaque dedicated to West Point. Naval Academy graduates dedicated the plaque in a ceremony the day before the D-Day 75th anniversary.

The ceremony was opened by CAPT James Ransom, a member of the National D-Day Memorial Foundation's board of

directors. CAPT Ransom is a 1980 Naval Academy graduate he said it always gave him a twinge to see the West Point plaque, but no Annapolis plaque. Now, thanks to an effort spearheaded by the class of 1969, the plaque was there. Roger Henderson, a member of that class served as chairman of the project. His classmates selected him for the role because he lives here.

John Long, the D-Day Memorial's education director, spoke. Long did extensive research into the Navy's role and, particular-

ly, the efforts of destroyers off Omaha Beach, that day.

Meticulous planning had gone into the assault, but nothing worked. Measures that were supposed to have eliminated most of the German gun positions on the beach failed and American troops coming ashore were taking heavy fire from those German gun positions that were supposed to have been knocked out, but weren't.

The skippers of the 33 destroyers operating just off shore were in a position to see what was going on. All of them Naval Academy

graduates from the late 1920s up through 1935, they decided to do something about it. Running your ship aground is normally a career-ending action for a ship commanding officer. Furthermore, a grounded destroyer would have been a sitting duck for German guns.

Nevertheless, these skippers did what they had to do in order to stop the German guns from wreaking havoc on the troops. They came in so close that they nearly ran aground taking German gun positions and German troops under direct fire with

their five-inch guns. He noted that no other Navy in the world has ever used a destroyer as an anti-personnel weapon.

RADM Rick Kirkland related memories of his father, William Kirkland, who was a 1943 Academy graduate and gunnery officer on the USS Dole (DD-494). The Doyle, a Gleaves class destroyer, was one of the destroyers at Omaha Beach on D-Day. He said his father didn't talk about it until he finally published a book about destroyers at Omaha Beach in 1994.

The plaque was unveiled

by the oldest and youngest Annapolis graduates there. Henderson did not know who they would be until a short time before the ceremony. The youngest turned out to be ENS Gil Wright, a 2019 graduate and Forest native. The oldest was CAPT Robert "Red" Tolbert who graduated exactly 70 years earlier in 1949.

Tolbert said he originally enlisted in the Navy in 1944 and was picked, under a program that identified promising young sailors, to attend the Academy. He started in 1945.

The Final Salute:



Veterans and Guests show respect for the Presentation of the Colors.



The Final Salute ceremony ended with a Missing Man maneuver symbolizing a fallen warrior's ascent to heaven by an aircraft leaving the formation. All photos on this page by Jean Wibbens



Curtus Van Cleve is raising his sons Austin and Thomas to be patriotic and learn about our history.



Fran and James Dorman enjoy watching the aerial tribute.



Hamet Lee Piercy is a survivor from the Normandy Beach Invasion.



Thousands came to Bedford to honor World War II Veterans on the 75th Anniversary of D-Day.



The crowd showed their patriotism by waving flags.



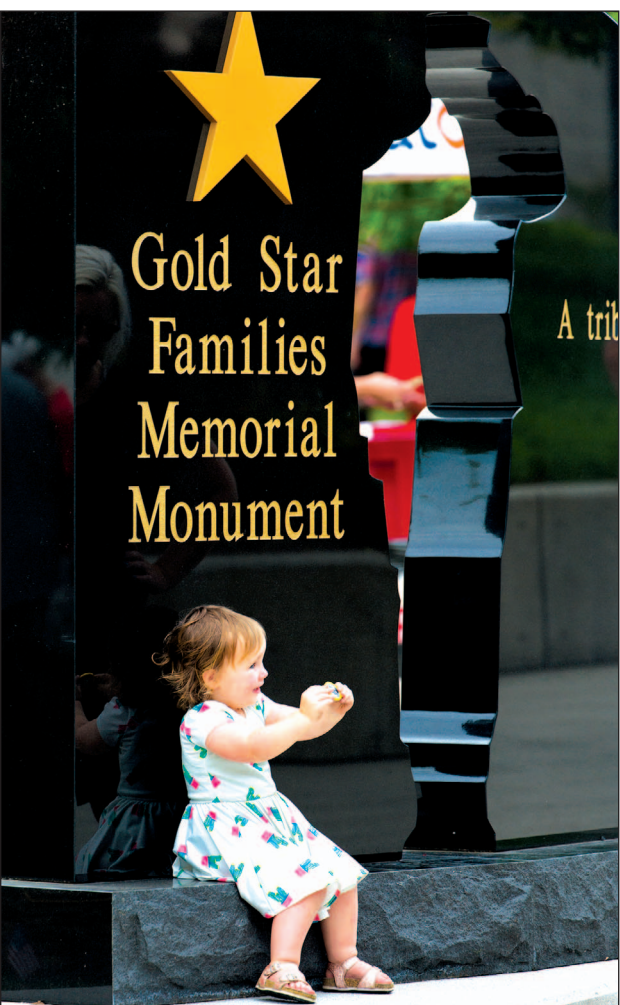
Janine Stang sang an impassioned Star Spangled Banner.



Mark Waitkus hands out sand in bottles to each Veteran which his daughter Riley collected from Omaha beach.



N2S Stearman-Kaydet Planes approach the arch for their Fly Over.



The D-Day Event was an early lesson in history for young Roisin Delaney.



Woodrow Casey, Jr. a Normandy Veteran, wounded in combat, was happy to be at the celebration at the D-Day Memorial.

June 6, 2019



An aerial tribute featured numerous planes from World War II during Thursday's events at the Memorial.



A salute to the flag during events going on at the D-Day Memorial in conjunction with the 75th Anniversary of the invasion. All photos this page by Chappy Merritt



Dan Villarial of Bedford greets another veteran during the ceremony Thursday.



The Tunstall High School JROTC Color Guard did their job of presenting the colors and marching in unison for the crowd.



Members of the newly named Desmond T. Doss VFW Post in Lynchburg were on hand Thursday for the 75th anniversary D-Day remembrance.



Bedford native Colonel Preston Scott, chief of staff of 29th Inf. Div., Virginia National Guard, delivers a message originated by veteran Sergeant Cecil Breedren.



12-year-old Lorenzo Chiaradia of Roanoke beams with pride as he accepts an autograph from D. Paul McGraw of the 8th infantry of WWII.



T-6 Texans fly in formation during Thursday's aerial salute during the anniversary remembrance at the National D-Day Memorial.



To all veterans present a commemorative coin was given to them for their service and remembrance of the day.



Autographs and messages of appreciation were abundant Thursday, June 6, 2019 as veterans were honored for their service in the 75th anniversary of D-Day.



All eyes, and cameras, looked up to the skies as everyone wanted a picture of the fly overs.



Bagpipes were present and played as the wreaths were laid to honor the various branches of service.