

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

D-Day 2000

The timing of this column may seem a week late for some readers, but giving thanks to those men and women who have given their lives for our freedom should be a daily occurrence. And Veterans' Day should be every day. I've always been emotional about both occasions but as I get older, I recognize more and more names on the list read aloud of veterans who have died — and the World War II veterans are leaving us quickly.

This column is a personal tribute to my husband, who thankfully is alive after totally unexpected heart surgery last Friday. He volunteered for service in World War II at the age of 19 and spent 36 months overseas in the European theater. He, like many veterans, doesn't like to talk about the war or watch movies or television about wars. Like many other veterans, he has medals for various battles, including the Purple Heart.

We did watch some of the excellent television specials that aired six years ago during the 50th anniversary of D-Day, the landing of Allied troops on the beaches of Normandy. My husband landed on Normandy 16 days later, chest high in water, loaded down with equipment, unable to swim and absolutely terrified. He really has never cared to describe the rest of the scene.

Watching the television specials was an emotional time for us and thousands upon thousands of other veterans and their families. We cried as the horror of it all was remembered by survivors of D-Day who revisited Normandy and talked about it on camera for the first time in 50 years.

My husband was part of a combat engineering group that built bridges and airfields and set up water purification units.

What he enjoys remembering is playing in an Army band and playing football with the Soissons All-Stars in Soissons, France.

Somehow his father picked up the game on a ham radio in Alexis, Illinois. I've also seen photos of a very pretty girl from Paris, so it's obvious and fortunate there are some breaks from the hell of war.

Most of our lives, ten or so years difference in age doesn't make much of a difference, but during WWII, I was in grade school, following my father around the countryside because he volunteered for the Army at the age of 35. Luckily, he was never sent overseas, and my mother, brother and I followed him for three years from Carolina Beach, N.C. to Portsmouth, Va. to Claxton, Ga. back for a brief time to my hometown of Kewanee, then to Tomah, Wisc.

When victory in Europe was declared, my husband was in Germany preparing to be sent to the Pacific Theater to fight the rest of the war. Instead, he and many other heroes we know, men and women we see every day, got to come home.

Out of respect for my husband and father, I am a member of the American Legion Auxiliary Ralph Noble Post #285. Unfortunately, the honor guard of that Legion Post is in constant demand at the funerals of our war veterans, especially those of World War II. If you don't think those experiences aren't always in the minds of our veterans, consider what my husband said when he was ready to go into life-threatening surgery last Friday. He was sedated and beginning to feel the effects of his medicine.

"Do you know what day this is?" he asked me. With great weariness, I answered, "No."

"It's D-Day," he said, as they wheeled him away. He was only four days early.

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