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Five Easily Remember June 6, 1944

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Thursday, June 6, was the 24th anniversary of one of the major military maneuvers in World War II, the invasion of Normandy. Five of those there reflect on D-Day in this story from Ft. Bragg).

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Specialist Fourth Class

"Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force — You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely. But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!"

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

At the very moment that General Eisenhower's invocation to battle was read to the one million Allied soldiers packed aboard the ships of the invasion fleet, the airborne troops were locked in bloody combat in occupied France.

Shaved Heads

Paratroopers of the 82nd "All-American" Airborne Division — their faces blackened and some with their heads shaved in the manner of Mohawk Indians — had been dropped right into Hitler's "Fortress Europe."

The mission of these elite troops was to spread confusion behind enemy lines and — at any cost — prevent German reinforcements from reaching the beach.

Today, the blood stains have faded from the cobblestoned streets of the little French villages where the paratroopers fought and fell. Two wars and 24 years later, another generation has matured. To them Normandy means nothing more than a few obscure pages in a high school text.

But five men at Ft. Bragg who were there still remember the horror and savagery, the folly and the humor, of D-Day, June 6, 1944. . .

Sergeant Major Charley C. Bryant, then private in Headquarters Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, remembers:

"In England we were briefed again and again and again, till I knew the area we were to drop into like the back of my hand.

"Going in toward France flack was all over, in all sorts of colors like reds and blues and ranging in size from that of a pea to a water bucket. When small-arms fire hit the aircraft, it sounded like rice on a tin roof."

Last Out Alive

Bryant's plane, crippled by antiaircraft fire, started to go down. "I scrambled up the now sloping floor of the airplane and hurled myself out. I think I was the last to make it out alive.

"When I hit the ground so much was going on I just didn't have time to be scared. I vividly recall seeing one paratrooper, hit by enemy fire in midair, explode in a big red flash. He was carrying a few of our anti-personnel mines."

Bryant dropped into a marsh where he was almost drowned. After pulling himself from the muck he joined about 20 other paratroopers. They began to make their way to the objective, the French village of Carentan. They had been dropped 20 miles off target.

"During that time we were in so much fighting I just forgot a lot of it. Things that happened, shellings, attacks, counter-attacks, deaths, all just got to be an everyday occurrence."

Some of those everyday occurrences were:

House-to-House Fighting — "We were in some house-to-house fighting in some village. I forget the name of the place. In that type of thing it paid to carry your knife at the end of your rifle. Going from one room to the next in a particular house, I bumped right into a German. We parried with our bayonets, his cutting me in the left hand. But a good vertical butt stroke and a few rounds

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