War: Two Franklin County men shared D-Day, life as POWs

From Page A1

says, Kowalski had expected to return to the U.S. to train replacements. But the Supreme Allied Commander, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, had other plans for the 1st Division. He needed a division experienced in both amphibious landings and ground operations to spearhead the attack on Omaha Beach — so "the Big Red One" was chosen to lead the way.

Kowalski, who was serving as executive officer for Battery C of the 7th Battalion, landed in one of the first waves of soldiers assaulting the beach.

As he approached the beach in his landing craft, the first sign of trouble appeared. Most of the specially designed "dual drive" amphibious Sherman tanks that were to provide covering fire on the beach had foundered in the rough seas and sank before reaching the beach. The men passed several tank crews swimming for their lives in the cold Atlantic waters.

Of the 32 DD Shermans assigned to Kowalski's section of the beach, only five made it to shore.

Upon reaching the beach, more problems became apparent. Hundreds of Allied planes dispatched to bomb the German fortifications defending Omaha Beach had missed their targets. The Allied bombardiers, unable to see the beach due to heavy cloud cover, and fearing that they would hit the Allied troops below, held their bombs for an extra second or two.

The delay resulted in the bombs landing inland, killing only French civilians and livestock and completely missing the beach.

Not only were the German's well-designed



Recorder-Gazette clipping courtesy Stacia DeMeo

Alex Kowalski

emplacements of machine guns, artillery and mortars unharmed, but the beach also lacked bomb craters that had been promised to provide cover for the Allied infantrymen. Its waterline defenses — iron stakes protected by mines — were untouched.

Due to the confusion and congestion on the beach caused by the withering fire from the German defenders, the 7th's guns could not reach shore. Six of its 12 howitzers were lost when landing craft foundered.

So the artillerymen had to fight as infantrymen for several hours until replacement guns began arriving in early afternoon. The first howitzer reached Omaha Beach shortly after 1 p.m., and by 4 p.m. a battery had been assembled.

After a long, bloody day, Kowalski and his fellow gunners were recorded as firing the first Allied land-based artillery rounds from Omaha Beach at 4:15 p.m.



Photo courtesy Lt. Col. Irving T. Shanley, USA Ret.

Richard Kiley

Later that month, on June 18, Kowalski was wounded and captured near Cerisy Foret, and he and Kiley found themselves in Stalag 221 in Rennes, some 60 miles inland from the beaches.

Technical Sgt. John Wonning of Batesville, Ind., was also a POW at Stalag 221. He described the camp as "... an old, old, French Army Camp; there were no bathroom facilities of any kind (only an outside hole in a concrete slab). The food was even worse and less; we were tormented constantly with lice and bed bugs."

Wonning described the food as "... a piece of potato, sometimes a couple slices of carrots, a piece of moldy black bread and occasionally, a very small piece of green-tinged meat. It was so old and molded but we closed our eyes and ate it.

"When we finished our food, we wiped out the little tin pie pan so we could use it for a little weak tea which we received twice a day morning and late afternoon before dark."

On Aug. 1, 1944, Gen. George Patton's Third Army was approaching the outskirts of Rennes from the north, but a battery of German 88-mm guns was holding Patton's 4th Armored Division at bay. The POWs could hear the sounds of the approaching artillery and believed that liberation was only a few hours away.

On the train

Late in the evening of the following day, Kowalski, Kiley, and Wonning, along with approximately 1,300 other POWs and French civilian deportees, were marched through the streets of Rennes to a railroad siding where they waited for several hours to board cattle cars.

During the wait to board the train, Allied bombers hit a nearby bridge. The Germans forced the prisoners to wait in the open with no shelter from the air raid. Several POWs hid in a tunnel; when they were noted as missing following the raid, the Germans sent out a search party.

Upon finding the missing POWs, the Germans shot them all.

The train was not marked with red crosses or any other indication that the train was a prisoner of war train. The Germans camouflaged the train with tree limbs and stationed antiaircraft guns on flatbed wagons at each end of the train, giving it the appearance of a troop train.

At 4 a.m. on Aug. 3, the



Photo courtesy Jo Shipley

The Langeais train station and memorial.

■ As German POWs, the two men were also on a train that was attacked by Allied aircraft. Alex Kowalski of Greenfield was among those killed.

train finally pulled out of Rennes on one of the few remaining operational tracks and slipped through a hole in the Allied line. Thirty hours later, at 10 a.m. on Aug. 4, Patton's troops entered Rennes and liberated the city.

The jam-packed train slowly made its way through the French towns of Redon, Nantes, and Angers. A journey that would last three hours nowadays lasted over 3½ days that August, due to the delaying tactics of French rail workers and sabotage by the French Resistance.

Conditions on the train were unsanitary and overcrowded, and the passengers were forced to take turns sitting. Eighty to 120 people were crowded into cars designed to carry only 40. Food and water were not provided.

Throughout the journey, the prisoners could hear the distant sound of Allied artillery, and many felt there was no reason to try to escape the slow-moving train with liberation so near.

On Aug. 6, the train reached the small French village of Langeais, just outside Tours, and came to a halt — Allied bombers had destroyed the tracks ahead. It was an unseasonably hot Sunday afternoon and following church services, local villagers came to the train station with food and water for the prisoners.

Initially, the Germans denied the villagers' attempts to aid the prisoners, but the commandant of the train, a veteran of the Afrika Korps, eventually relented and allowed access to the prisoners.

At about 8 p.m., four American P-47 fighter planes, each equipped with eight .50 caliber machine guns, were spotted in the western sky.

Wonning recalls the panicked reaction: "... It was total bedlam on the whole train. The planes each made one strafing pass then turned and came back by for the second strafing. In between strafings, we had gotten the boards up and went out under the cattle car ... I leaned and then sat against a building and watched as many of the POWs tried to escape, but the guards shot anyone who moved, which probably included French civilians and innocents.

"That was when I discovered there must have been a thousand POWs on the train ..."

At 3 p.m. the following day, Allied aircraft returned and again attacked the train. The toll from the two attacks totaled 23 dead, including nine Americans, two Britons and a Canadian. There were 70 wounded.

Kowalski was among those killed.

The villagers carried the wounded and the dead to a makeshift hospital/morgue located in a wine cellar about a half mile from the train station. The French aided the escape of many prisoners by disguising them as wounded with bloody bandages and then slipping them out the back door of the cellar while the Germans weren't looking.

On Aug. 8, the villagers of Langeais buried the dead in the village cemetery.

That same day, Kiley, who had survived the strafing attacks, was force-marched along with the remaining survivors to a nearby village where they were herded onto a train bound for Germany. Kiley eventually was imprisoned at Stalag VIIA near Moosburg, Germany, where he remained until the war ended.

Upon his arrival home, Kiley visited the Kowalski family and recounted the story of the strafing attack and Alex Kowalski's death.

Kiley was medically discharged from the Army on May 31, 1946.

But the lack of adequate food, shelter, and medical care while being held as a POW had taken its toll on him. Just 12 days after his discharge, at the age of 22, he died suddenly of an undisclosed illness.

Kiley's survivors included his father, Timothy Kiley, three brothers, John, Wilford, and Richard, and one sister, Mrs. Victor Ward. His mother, Mabel Merritt Kiley, preceded him in death.

Cpl. Kiley was buried in Calvary Cemetery in Greenfield. His military awards included the Purple Heart and the Combat Infantry Badge.

Kowalski's remains were eventually moved from the village cemetery in Langeais to a final resting place in the Normandy American Cemetery at St. Laurent, France, which overlooks Omaha Beach. He was buried only a few hundred yards away from where he had landed and fired the first Allied land-based artillery rounds on D-Day.

He was survived by his sister, Sophie, and three brothers, Vincent, Joseph, and Edward. He was awarded the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star, and the Purple Heart.

Today, a monument honoring the victims of the strafing attacks of Aug. 6 and 7, 1944, stands at the Langeais train station. The monument consists of a plaque recognizing the link between the prisoners and the townspeople of Langeais and a boxcar of the sort used to transport prisoners to concentration camps and POW camps during World War II.

Jo Shipley lives in Louisville, Ky. Her uncle, Tech. Sgt. John Wonning of Batesville, Ind., was aboard the train at Langeais and left an account of the attack in his diary and memoirs. Shipley, intrigued by the story, has done extensive research on the story, interviewing soldiers who served with Kiley and Kowalski and members of the Kowalski family, finding newspaper articles from the era and getting information from the townspeople of Langeais and from the National Archives.

OBITUARIES

Edwin A. Love Sr.

GREENFIELD — Edwin A. Love Sr., 75, of Lovers Lane, died Friday (5-28-10) at the Baystate Franklin Medical Center.

He was born in Seattle, Wash., on June 12, 1934, the son of Albert and Cena (Rasmussen) Love.

He graduated from Bremerton High School and received his bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Washington and his master's degree from Drexel University. He had been a resident of Amherst prior to moving to Greenfield in 1997.

Ed was the financial director of United ARC of Greenfield for the past 10 years. Previously, he was the CEO of Sonoca Corp.

He served in the U.S. Navy and attained the rank of petty officer.

Ed was an avid golfer and gardener and was a member of the Hickory Ridge Country Club in Amherst and the American Rose Society. He loved playing fantasy baseball with his sons.

Survivors include his wife, Marsha L. Staples-Love; five sons, Scott, Matthew and Edwin A. Love Jr., all of the state of Washington, Benjamin Love of Guilford, Vt. and John Madden of Greenfield; four daughters, Deborah Narcisso of Washington, D.C., Lori Love of East Hartland, Conn., Marjorie Love of West Springfield and Shelley Kordana of Bernardston; a brother, Albert Love of Bremerton, Wash.; 16 grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren; and several nieces, nephews and cousins.

Funeral services will be held Wednesday at 10 a.m. in the First Congregational Church.

Burial will follow in Green River Cemetery.

Calling hours will be Tuesday from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Kostanski Funeral Home, 220 Federal St.

Memorial contributions may be made to the United ARC of Greenfield, 10 Summer St., Greenfield MA 01301.

Sympathy message available at www.kostanskifuneralhome.com.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING
To Place A Classified Ad
Call 772-0148 Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The Recorder
(USPS 228-780)
Published weekday and Saturday mornings
14 Hope St. (P.O. Box 1367)
Greenfield, Ma. 01302-1367
Telephone (413) 772-0261
(978) 544-2118
Newsroom Fax # (413) 774-5020
Advertising Fax # (413) 774-5511
www.recorder.com
E-mail:
News: news@recorder.com
Letters: letters @recorder.com
Arts and Entertainment Listings: features@recorder.com
Ads: ads@recorder.com
Legals: legalads@recorder.com
Obituaries: obituaries@recorder.com
Dennis Skoglund
publisher
Timothy A. Blagg, editor
Justin Abelson, editorial page editor
Richard W. Fahey, advertising dir.
Kevin LaMagdelaine, circulation director
George Forcier, managing editor

Subscription rates

	Home Del.	Mail
13 weeks	$39.00	$54.60
26 weeks	$78.00	$109.20
52 weeks	$156.00	$218.40

News
Samantha Wood.....night managing editor
Gary Sanderson .....sports editor
Bob York.....wire editor
Adam Orth .....feature editor

Advertising
Suzanne Hunter classified coordinator

Member: Associated Press, Audit Bureau of Circulation
Periodical postage paid at Greenfield, Massachusetts
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Recorder, PO Box 1367, Greenfield, MA 01302
3096985

THE RECORDER

OBITUARY POLICY

The Recorder offers two types of obituaries. One is a brief death notice that is published on the back page of the first section at no charge. The other is a paid obituary that allows families to publish additional discretionary information of their choice. These obituaries may include photographs and organization/club symbols or emblems.

All obituaries and death notices must be submitted through a funeral home. Exceptions will be made only when the family provides a certificate of death or a clipping from an out-of-town newspaper.

For further information on procedures, policies and pricing, call the classified advertising department at 772-0148 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday - Friday.

SUBSCRIBER SERVICES DIRECT LINE
413-774-2741 • 978-544-2118
circinfo@recorder.com • Fax 413-772-2906
Mon. through Fri. 6:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., Sat. 7:00 A.M. to 10:00 A.M.
Home Delivery deadline: 6:45 A.M. Mon.-Fri., 7:30 A.M. Sat.
Missed Deliveries
Call before 10:00 A.M. M-F, 10:00 A.M. Sat. for Prompt replacement.
Gift subscriptions, billing questions, address changes, credit card payments our representatives will be glad to help.
Vacation stops or to resume delivery, please call at least 2 days in advance. Ask about our free vacation pack service.
THE RECORDER
3101753



THE RECORDER
Need help advertising?
Call a Recorder advertising professional for a free consultation.
(413) 772-0261
(978) 544-2118
Montague Area
Mike Currie, ext. 216
Northfield, Vermont & New Hampshire
Marc Desrosiers, ext. 214
West County & Bernardston
Susan Maguire, ext. 218
Whately, Hampshire & Hampden Counties
Jon Stafford, ext. 227
North Quabbin, Sunderland & Deerfield
Paul Volungis, ext. 217
Valley Kids, Healthy Life
Risa Sudolsky, ext. 215
Classified Advertising (413) 772-0148
Suzanne Hunter
Classified Coordinator
Wendy Mackie
3079677