

D - Day

I know Christians who have gone to various wars and battles. Some went to the First and Second Gulf Wars, the jungles of Vietnam, and Korea. Many died in those places while others came back with scars. They all deserve our admiration and respect. However, I want to concentrate on those in World War II, June 6th marked the 78th Anniversary of D-Day.

D-Day was one of the greatest, if not the greatest invasions in history. Over 160,000 men landed on a fifty mile stretch of heavily fortified French Coastline. More than 5,000 ships and 13,000 aircraft were involved, more than 9,000 soldiers died that day. It allowed the Allied forces to get a foothold in Europe and start their way to Germany.

I used to ask my classmates if their fathers served during the war. Very few did as many of those who died were young and did not have children. Some who did serve said very little about their experiences to their sons and daughters. But in my years of preaching, I have met those who took an active part and spoke to me of their experiences.

Our brother Paul Parrot from Tuckerman, AR saw his first action in the Battle of Peleliu in the Pacific. On the Island of Palau, he landed as part of the invasion force. Paul found himself at a point where a grenade was at his feet. He said in basic training they told the men to not try and out run a grenade but pick it up and throw it back at the enemy. He did so but the grenade went off shortly after leaving his hand. He woke up on the beach, wounded, missing part of his right hand but alive. His concern was being run over by some of the heavy equipment coming ashore. Taken to a hospital he recovered and came back home as he was no longer able to serve in the army. He felt bad about getting wounded in his first battle after the government spent all that time and money training him to fight. Once home, he lived the rest of his days on a small farm around Tuckerman. I had the privilege of preaching his funeral.

One fascinating brother is Harold Allen from Truman, Arkansas. His whole life was one deserving of a book. He and Edith married when he was sixteen years old. Both were poor and moved up to Detroit to work. At the age of eighteen he received his draft notice. Congress had passed a law saying a person could not be deployed until they were nineteen. On his nineteenth birthday he was on a ship for Europe.

After landing they put his group in trucks and road for a day and a night. Eventually, they stopped and were told to hold the line. This was in the Ardennes Forest Region and the front line in what was the Battle of The Bulge. He said they almost froze to death as they were not properly equipped for the extreme cold. He suffered frost bite and afterward spent time in the hospital before rejoining his troop. But over two hundred men were in his group and he was one of 20 who survived. There is a scene in the "Band of Brothers" movie where the allied forces heard the Germans sing "Silent Night". Harold Allen was there. He served as the first scout and was in harm's way a number of times. He had a tank aim directly at him but it did not fire. A bullet hit his gun stock but not him. He had numerous medals in a small box at his house. He came back home to Edith and they had three girls.

Another unique person was Leon Stephens from Cache (pronounced Cash) Arkansas. Leon must have been a handful when growing up as he got into trouble a lot. His dad was the doctor in Cache and a stern man. When drafted his father drove him to the bus station in Jonesboro, AR. As Leon was getting out of the car his father said "I hope you have a nice war" and drove off. Leon went to fight in the Pacific where he went from Island invasion to Island Invasion. He was never specific but he wondered how God would judge him due to the killing. It was either kill or be killed in those battles and he survived. One time a pilot was shot down and was stranded between the U.S. and Japanese lines. Leon risked his life to save the pilot and received a medal. On another occasion he received a medal for good conduct only to have it taken away because of a fight the same day. He was ready to invade Japan but such an invasion never occurred after the U.S. dropped the Atomic Bomb on Japan twice. Leon was there when the Japanese Emperor surrendered to the Allied forces. He had a machine gun and was told to shoot any of those Japs who started anything.

H.T. Crawford went to the European Theater. He marched through that continent on his way to Germany. Wounded in one battle, he was sent back to the front line as they needed the men. He spoke of being cold and hungry, of going long periods of time without a hot meal or a bath. H.T was never specific with me about the war and I respected his silence. He came back home to marry Betty Joe, and have their family. In fact, he got home on a Friday and went to work that following Monday. H.T. was a worker and a good example of a Christian soldier.

I want to mention brother Lee Bannon Wilson from Neafus, Kentucky. He was one

of those who came home never talking about his war experiences. I knew he trained at the Airforce Base just outside of Newport Arkansas but nothing else. Only at his funeral did I heard of his medal for good conduct and those his acts of bravery during certain invasions.

As I listed these men, I thought of those who went some where they did not want to go, to do things they did not want to do, but they did it out of love. Love for their families, for freedom, and their fellow soldiers. I loved these men for their service, sacrifice, and example they provided me.

I think of Jesus as He left heaven to offer Himself as a sacrifice for you and me. Why? Because of love. He loved us enough to endure the cross, so we can go to heaven. Dennis Tucker