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FAYETTE COUNTY NATIVE SHARES D-DAY REFLECTIONS

Uniontown, PA – While serving with the U.S. Navy last week, Ryne Rhodes found himself on the beaches of Normandy - just in time for D-Day.

Rhodes, 28, of Uniontown is currently stationed in Naples, Italy. He was on a public relations assignment covering Memorial Day observances when the significance and timing of his visit struck a chord.

“I’ve spent the last two days on this beach - a beach that now seems like any other beach with houses lined upon the shore and children splashing in the waves,” Rhodes wrote in a social media post. “...It is on this third day on the beach, just nine days shy of the 74th anniversary of D-Day and the landings that happened here on Omaha Beach, that I’m truly overwhelmed by where I find myself.”

Normandy was the site of landing operations carried out Tuesday, June 6, 1944, by the United States and its allies as part of Operation Overlord during World War II. Most commonly known as D-Day, it was the largest seaborne invasion in history.

D-Day ultimately sparked the liberation of German-occupied northwestern Europe from Nazi control and paved the way for Allied victory on the western front.

Rhodes spent time reflecting at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial in Colleville-sur-Mer, Normandy, France, which honors American troops who died serving in Europe during World War II. More than 9,000 Americans are buried there.

“Looking to the cliffs of Pointe Du Hoc in the west that the Army Rangers scaled with rope ladders and fought for two days against all odds to capture; walking amongst the thousands of graves at the American Cemetery; both are sights to behold,” Rhodes said. “But this beach is something unto itself.”

Rhodes said that while standing on the shore, he thought of the thousands who died there, the ones who survived only to die later in the war, the families they left behind and the stories of so many that were never told.



“I think about how they’ll be finding shrapnel, particles of glass and iron from munitions for centuries to come due to how intense the fighting was,” he wrote. “I imagine the ships on the horizon, soldiers fighting through the surf, Nazi gunfire raining from the cliffs - and still my imagining pales compared to what this shoreline saw.”

Rhodes said “overwhelming” could not even begin to explain his experience at Normandy or the “plethora of thoughts and feelings” it inspired.

“Here I sit, 74 years later, watching dogs running and families having picnics,” he said. “I suppose that at the heart of it all that’s what they fought for - so that Omaha Beach could one day be just a normal beach.”

But it will never be just a normal beach, Rhodes said, because people still remember the great sacrifices made on that shore and all over the world to preserve freedom.

In honor of D-Day, Rhodes encouraged everyone, back home and abroad, to think about how much men and women in the U.S. military sacrifice every day.

“So I ask you ... from the site of one of the bloodiest battles in history, to not thank someone for their service,” he said. “But instead to thank someone who’s lost a brother, sister, father, mother, lover, aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent, child or friend in the name of the greatest calling there is: the defense of freedom.”

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