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BY Skip Vaughn, Redstone Rocket. -- On June 6, 1944 Harold McMurrin was in a landing ship tank with other American Soldiers about to go ashore to liberate France from Nazi occupation.

He was a 19-year-old Soldier just shy of his 20th birthday June 10. He recalled the scene from D-Day, June 6, 1944.

“I landed on Utah Beach,” the New Market resident said. “I went in behind the 4th Infantry. What wave it was, I don’t have no idea. They talk about waves; I don’t know if anybody knew. They just went in one after the other and they got mixed up going in.

“It was sometime around 7 o’clock in the morning. Well, it was a horrible day. I mean it’s hard to describe what went on, what you saw and how you felt. I had three modes that I went through. First, I was scared; then I was afraid; then I was numb. It didn’t make any difference.

“It was bullets flying all around, artillery shells bursting all around. And there were people lying in front of you. Some wounded, some dead. The next bullet may be for you. Have you ever seen the movie ‘The Longest Day’? In my estimation, that’s the most accurate.”

McMurrin is a native of Dora, which was mainly a coal mining town back then. He was the oldest and lone son of three children of William McMurrin, a railroad conductor who got coal from the coal mines.

He was a member of the 546th Ordnance Company, a 275-member unit which was supposed to retrieve damaged heavy equipment on D-Day. “I think it took three LSTs (landing ship tanks) to hold us. Mine was the first that went in,” he recalled. During the battlefield chaos, when the Germans would aim their weapons on those seeking damaged tanks and other heavy equipment, the unit’s mission shifted from Ordnance to infantry. “So we gave up as an Ordnance outfit, we became infantry,” McMurrin said.

That day, McMurrin recalled, the Soldiers barely got off the beach because the Germans had hedgerows as barriers. “It took us six weeks to fight through those hedgerows,” he said. He and his companions became part of Gen. George Patton’s Third Army.

During the worst winter he can remember, he fought in the Battle of the Bulge. From Dec. 16, 1944, to Jan. 25, 1945, this was a major German offensive campaign launched through the densely forested Ardennes region of Wallonia in Belgium, France and Luxembourg on the Western Front toward the end of World War II in Europe.

“And there was more men incapacitated from frozen feet in the Battle of the Bulge than was wounded by the Germans,” he said. He avoided this by keeping dry socks in the waist of his uniform; and when his feet got wet, he’d put on the dry socks.

After that fateful battle, his unit was shipped to Marseille, France, a staging point to go to the Pacific to fight the Japanese. But the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war.

“They loaded us on a victory ship 26 December ‘45,” McMurrin said, “and shipped us home.”

He has a battle star from two of WWII’s most important battles, D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge, and he recently received the Legion of Honor from the French government.