

## D-Day - Vincent Ryan

06-06-2011 by Harry Zirkelbach

A group began having weekly breakfast together in the 1980s, continued well into the mid-first decade of the next century. It was not always the same cast, but the nucleus remained steadfast, until only one was left, and he had moved far away after his wife's death.

These breakfasts had began even earlier. Vincent Ryan and a friend began socializing at breakfast weekly; at a time when Vincent's world was changing; marriage, employment concerns.

At that onset, randomly, others were invited to discuss specific concerns.

Eventually a group coalesced upon retirement of a mutual friend, a Jesuit priest, whose vineyard had circled around his Mother House in St Louis. He was Jim. He and Vincent, Denver natives, had been together four years, and as classmate at Regis High School in north Denver. That all boy class, graduated the summer of 1942. Then military obligation.

Their military years, memorable times, considered squandered by most.

With the arrival of Jim, Ed, Bill, Joe S, Rod, classmates of Regis 1942, quickly followed. The group adopted that name, Regis Class of 1942, for these regular breakfasts. While all classmates of Regis 1942 living in Denver were invited, some came once or twice; others ignored the invite.

Vincent's friend, Harry from the first breakfasts had come to Denver after the war, became an "adopted" member of Regis Class of 1942. In these same early years, other adoptees appeared; Joe D, Tom, Frank, Howard, Stan, another Harry.

In the 30 years of togetherness, there were never more than nine at breakfast, usually six, in one booth.

The week-day switched a few times, settled on Monday, always mornings. The Restaurant location altered more often, as favorites closed, were overrun with smokers or noise, offensive wait staff, whatever, and occasionally, because Jim said so. Never with a formal leader, the group accepted Jim's gospel, though even he avoided a hint of dictation.

All had been raised as Catholics, most attending Catholic schools, Grade, High and College. Now, late in their lives, religion was more important, though the range of beliefs would frustrate Pope and Bishops.

Yes religion was a topic. But little was off the table those ninety minutes.

In years of banter, these boys/men,  
lawyers, businessmen, politicians, investment bankers, commoners,  
came to know one another, certainly better than did their children.  
It was that range of exchanges.

And it happened that on a Monday June 6 1994, the 50th Anniversary of D-Day,  
the Class of 1944 were eating at 7:30.

The TV at Zaidy's Restaurant, 1st and Adams Streets, Denver,  
was a background celebrating that first direct attack on fortress Europe.

Then someone suggested to all,  
tell what you were doing that very morning, fifty years earlier.

They had been boys then, each in the military. From around the clique, these narratives. All had been doing mundane things in 1944. Each told their story. Ed, the furthest away, a Navy yeoman in a God-forsaken South Pacific island; and Joe D, the one-eyed 4F, who had wiggled into the Army, the most interesting, assigning renown drafted musicians to Army Air Corps bands. Then others.

It happened the last to speak was Vincent. He was still a thin 5'6", 120 pounds.

He was slow to tell.

He had floundered in an LCT onto Omaha Beach  
in the second wave of that attack.

All he had to say, life was tenuous then, and for hundreds of days to come,  
and that he and his identical twin bother (also Regis 1942)  
who landed there too that day as part of another Division,  
sloughed in Europe for months, never met,  
returned unharmed, vowing to never discuss that day, nor the war.

Vincent had never discussed that day with any of our group before, nor again.

We were lucky to have Vincent as our friend.  
He was some kind of a man.

