

D-Day Recalled

*06-06-2016 Oby Harry Zirkelbach
Stars and Sun date 34434*

Every minute since the conclusion of the last week's reading in this room, is now a part of what we call yesterday. Ask to define what happened a segment of those 167 hours, memory might be challenged.

Twenty-six years ago this day a cadre of male friends from youth were having breakfast at Zaidys Restaurant, First and Adams Street, Denver. We had been doing this for more than ten years. That was a Monday also. In the background, television news cameras recorded events at the Omaha Beach area of Normandy France, the personages there celebrating the 50th Anniversary of D-Day, another step toward cementing all vestige of WW II into the lives of those who had any recall of that event.

The seven at that breakfast, now beginning their 70s, had some connection to D-Day. Most were friends before then, knew one another from school, mutual friends from Church, business and family. At their age, it would unusual to learn a new facet of their lives.

Late in those two hours of good food and chatter, one suggested that each relate where they were June 6 1944. Around the table we went. It was not so much where each was that hour, but the details of how they happened to be there, after they graduated from High School, most from Regis, June 1942.

The first supplicant appointed to West Point, skimmed through early months. Then decided this wasn't his vocation. He appealed to the Superintendent. He was released to join the Jesuit order toward Priesthood. Yes, he was our resident Chaplain, Father Jim, now semi-retired. And on it went, each entering the military as conscripts, two not still stateside that day, and one, a sailor on a Pacific Island hating every moment of boredom as Navy Yeoman.

Then the last to speak, Vincent, stopped everyone's heart.

Vincent had been in the second wave landing at Omaha Beach that morning, a Private in the United States Army. When we began breathing again we learned, in one sequence, that Vince squirmed through that day, the next 11 months to war's end, returned home, was discharged. And that his twin brother, also Regis 1942, had landed that day with a different Division; that they never meet in Europe; neither received a battle scratch. As remarked earlier, we knew each other well,

some since the ninth grade. But this day Vincent opened that Chapter of his life for the first time to six who were certain they new everything about one another.

After that one sentence, Vince would never speak of those years again, to anyone. Whatever he saw and did, seared in memory, silenced him.

For myself, an adoptee to the Class of Regis 1942, his news doubly cemented D-Day in my mind. When asked "What happened to you there?", the mild-mannered Vincent remarked,, "Those were days of uncertainty", never supplemented that remark.

And on this anniversary I wonder. Who else harbors memories of moments, or even years, too ugly or painful to ever mention, even to best friends?

++A final memento of that morning. ++

Vincent's family name was Ryan. He and his twin were Army Privates that morning.

Two years later, Spielberg would make "The Search for Private Ryan" an remarkable epic. The Regis Ryans might have been part of the list of Ryans that Captain Miller and his platoon had to talk to, make certain Private Ryan did not die in WWII.

Vincent now rests at Fort Logan National Cemetery, still Private First Class.

