D-Day Remeberences of Jim, Sr

Description

Jim, Sr. and I sat down at dinner last night and I asked him what he was doing on 6/5/1944. He pondered the question a moment, then said â€œWe had been on alert for almost 30 hours.â€• I didnâ€™t go into chasing that rabbit trail, but he then talked about how, on the eve of his (their) first combat, they were â€œrelieved.â€• Why, you ask? Well, he explained, they had had all this training and now they were finally getting the order to â€œGO!â€• He said the apprehension of the timing of the invasion had been â€œhorrible.â€•

They spent their time, packing up stuff, labeling their foot lockers and writing home, with â€œhints of goodbyeâ€• for they certainly couldnâ€™t divulge any more than they were heading into combat. He talked about living in quonset huts, heated by a pot bellied stove at each end of the building. How breakfast was a big bowl of corn flakes, that you scooped into your bowl, then you scooped your powdered milk on it and you also got a boiled potato. The bacon was thick and not well cooked, when you did get it. He remarked the rations got much better when they based in France, usually having a local French woman cook up their K rations.

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The gliders didnâ€™t fly at night, but the C-47s had been flying to deliver the 82nd All American and 101st Screaming Eagles Airborne Divisions. The CG-4A gliders flew after the landings had begun.

He discussed the visions of the shores of Normandy he will never forget, and then they went further inland.

They had only practiced with maybe 24-36 gliders approaching one landing zone before, and they had practiced with a set, planned landing pattern. Not this day. More gliders, no set pattern, toss in ground fire, land mines and hedge rows.

â€œI watched men sacrifice themselves so others could have a clear place to land.â€•

They would land and jam the control column forward to bury the nose of the gliders as a landing skid, and a way to plow up dust and dirt clods as camouflage from enemy gunners in the area. They would try to bounce down hard on the tires and hopefully leap back into the air to an altitude about 10 ft or so, to maybe clear the hedge rows while getting stopped.

Jim was one who was designated a flight leader, and also had been trained to determine the airworthiness of the gliders in the landing zone. He was responsible to select one, then get it set up for a snatch recovery by a C-47 with a tailhook. The passengers on his first return leg were not wounded, but other glider pilots, so they may get airborne again for more flights into the combat area. He said he prayed as he held tight to the steering column, awaiting the catapulting force when the snatch line went taught, that the glider he had picked was sound and that they would not have the wings fall off as they began to get airborne.

After all these years, he still wonders why he survived without injury, in combat or otherwise, from 4.5 years of service, and admits he still feels some guilt for having come home, when so many other great men did not.

He will have his American flags flying this day.

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