

KINS COMMUNITY COMMENT (442-5744)

This is Ron Pierre for Community Comment.

Many of my community comments begin with a historic reference. I like to use historical references because these references ground me in who I am and what I have learned over the years. Today's comment takes me back to June 6th, 1944. Sixty nine years ago today, Allied Forces mounted the invasion of Europe on the coast of Normandy France. Once a foothold was regained in Europe, the Allies went on to win an unconditional surrender over the Nazi regime governing Germany. As the years go by, the events of that June day get further and further removed from most people's minds. People don't think about the significance of this date because they can't relate to how the invasion of Europe impacts the world of 2013. Not me! I see the D-Day invasion date as the date that shaped our world today perhaps more than any other date during the last century.

On a sunny afternoon some years back, I walked the bluffs above Normandy Beach through the rows upon rows of headstones of dead American servicemen who were killed on Omaha and Utah beaches. As I would stop and look at a headstone names and I would think about families who lost fathers, brothers, husbands, and friends. In my mind's eye I can still see the markers and I always will. In 2013 the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren of those D-Day service members owe a debt that calls out to be honored and respected and not forgotten. As the time passes, the number of those who participated in D-Day gets smaller and smaller. Soon all the participants will be gone, and we will only have the documented accounts of what that horrific day was like. I have visited American cemeteries all over the world, and the scene is always the same, but nowhere else do the rows of graves mean more to our country than those graves above Normandy Beaches. American's most precious treasure in the quiet stillness, lying in rest with fallen comrades in arms. We will still have those crosses above the beachheads for years and years to come, but like many of our National War memorials around the world they too may fall into neglect and disrepair because many others have forgotten.

This past week our family bid farewell to my wife's uncle Paul Coe. Paul arrived in Normandy just after D-Day, and served until the end of the war in Europe. When my wife and I were stationed in Europe, Paul and his wife Margaret visited us and together we toured some of the places Paul had seen in 1944. What a privilege it was during that visit to have Paul reflect with us the memories he had in being an 18 year old paratrooper. Paul was always most proud of his military service. At the Rosary the night before Paul's funeral, his family proudly displayed the uniform of a young Army private. On the left breast pocket was pinned the combat infantry badge. The mark of an American combat warrior. The next day as the firing squad volleys echoed across the veteran's cemetery in Grand Junction Colorado, and taps sounded, I raised my hand in military salute to a fallen member of that group called American veterans--a generation of veterans who served our nation well and the beginning of the end started June 6, 1944.

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