

D-Day and a Silver-Star medal

EDITOR'S NOTE: In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, The Lawrence Township Memorial Committee, in cooperation with The Ledger, will feature a column each week during the anniversary year profiling a Lawrence resident.

D-Day—the long-awaited day when the combined military might of the United States and its allies would launch the largest invasion force the world had ever known against Hitler's Fortress Europe.

At the conclusion of a three-day conference on Dec. 1, 1943 in Teheran, Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin agreed that the invasion would take place in Normandy early in June, 1944. The exact date depended on weather, tides, intelligence reports and awesome logistical planning.

VETERAN PROFILE

Nicholas Loveless

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, fresh from victories in Africa and Italy, was delegated as Supreme Commander of the expeditionary force that would become known as Operation Overlord for the airborne and amphibious invasion.

June 6, 1995 will mark the 51st anniversary of that historic 'Longest Day,' and one of the first combat infantrymen to wade ashore with the 4th Infantry Division at Utah Beach was Arthur Robinson of Lawrence.

Arthur F. 'Robbie' Robinson was born in Kingston, N.Y., on Feb. 7, 1918. He attended Kingston schools and enlisted in the U.S. Army



Staff photo by Mark Czajkowski

Arthur Robinson remembers vividly "The Longest Day" and those that followed as he used his skills as a demolition expert.

1918. He attended Kingston schools and enlisted in the U.S. Army on March 3, 1940. He was assigned to the 4th 'Ivy Leaf' Infantry Division at Fort Benning, Ga., and later to Ft. Dix and Camp Gordon. He received special training in demolition and eventually became a demolition expert. The division was sent to England in 1943 and trained there in preparation for what they knew they would sooner or later be called upon to do.

'We were based at Torquay, England,' Arthur recalls, 'and I was in Company I, 22nd Infantry, 3rd Battalion, of the 4th Division. We had been in England for a long time when it appeared we were gearing up for

the invasion. Early in June we boarded landing craft and knew that this was it. We were aboard the boats on the water for several days in full combat gear, and during the night of June 5 started across the English Channel for France. We had all been issued a pocket bible and a letter from General Eisenhower about our mission. Our unit was in the first wave to land at Utah Beach.

"The Navy and Air Corps had opened up on the beaches and rear areas with everything they had before we landed hoping to open the way for us. The 82nd Airborne made parachute landings further inland during the night. We jumped off the landing craft into the surf which was waist deep, and waded for shore, all the while we were under fire from machine guns, mortars and artillery. We learned later that the landings at Omaha Beach caught hell, more so than us. We kept pushing forward and by the end of the day we were near Caen.'

Approximately 176,000 men took part in the initial landings at Normandy, and General Eisenhower, wishing to convey a personal message to all the troops, issued a letter which was given to each man prior to departure



Arthur Robinson
...wartime valor

from England:

'Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force! You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven for many months. Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well

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Veteran

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trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

And the letter continues on to encourage the men on their mission.

After five days, 16 divisions had landed at Normandy, and by the end of June a million troops were ashore and firmly entrenched on the beachhead. The breakout took longer than expected and did not take place until late in July when the armor and infantry swept through St. Lo.

'On D-Day plus three,' Arthur continues, 'as we were advancing, our company came across a German pillbox. There were a lot of snipers in the area, but the pillbox was in our path and had to be destroyed. I was with a five-man demolition team and our job was to blow it up. We fought our way to get close, but the other four men on the team never made it, the snipers got them. I was able to make my way close and put an 18-pound C-2 high explosive charge against the side of the pillbox, pulled the primer cord, and was only able to get about 25 feet away when it detonated. That was the last thing I remembered. When I came to some time later, the pillbox and everyone in it was gone. I was sent back to England the next day and spent the next three weeks in a hospital for shellshock. On July 5, I was sent back to my company in France.'

For his actions on D-Day plus three, Arthur was awarded the Silver Star Medal for gallantry in action. His company, commander originally recommended him for the Medal of Honor, but the military review board felt it fell short of the criteria for the nation's highest award.

After his return to his company, there were only a few men left of the original company, and most of them were now replacements. They were fighting on the front lines at St. Lo, Percy and Domfront. At St. Lo the civilians had been warned to vacate the town in advance, and when Arthur's company entered it, it was still burning from the shelling and bombing and they were fighting street to street and building to building. By the middle of August they were southwest of Paris and battling SS troops of the 9th Panzer Division. On Aug. 16, after six straight weeks in combat, plus his earlier ordeal, Arthur was relieved of combat duty and reassigned to the Army's Criminal Investigation School.

As an investigator attached to the

386th Military Police Battalion, he was then assigned to search for German infiltrators behind the American lines and AWOLs and desertions among our own troops. Shortly after Paris was liberated he was pursuing a German paratrooper through the city and fell down a stairway, severely breaking his right arm. He still carries the screws used to set his arm over 50 years ago. In January, 1946, Arthur returned from Europe and after a furlough at home was assigned to the army hospital at Ft. Dix for convalescence until his discharge in March, 1946.

In addition to the silver star award, Arthur's other citations include the Bronze Star, European Campaign Medal with two battle stars, Victory Medal, American Defense Medal and the Combat Infantry Badge.

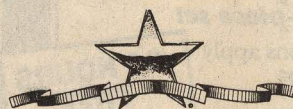
While stationed at Ft. Dix, Arthur met his wife, Mary, originally from Raritan, and they were married the same year. In 1947, Mary and Arthur purchased a home on Helen Avenue in Lawrence, where they lived for eight years before moving to their present home at 2331 Princeton Pike. After a stint at Stroukoff Aircraft, Arthur began work with the U.S. Post Office in Trenton and eventually worked his way upward, retiring from the Security Department in 1982. He also served as a Special Police Officer for the Lawrence Police Department for 14 years. Over the years he has enjoyed hunting and fishing in the Kingston area or his native New York, and still makes periodic visits to see his relatives still living there.

One of Arthur's most prized possessions is the small pocket bible that was given to him prior to the D-Day invasion. It has been said that 'there are no atheists in foxholes,' and his religious upbringing and that Bible which he carried through the war, served as a positive influence to him in surviving the ordeals he encountered in Normandy. The notes and entries he made of his experiences bring flashbacks of those difficult times, and yet the words of General Eisenhower in the closing of his message to his men prior to D-Day overshadow all else:

'I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory! Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.'

The Veterans Memorial Committee is

asking veterans from World War II and other conflicts to provide a photograph in uniform, along with their name, present address, branch of service and unit, where and when they served, their principal assignment and summary of their service. Their individual experiences or unusual stories are also welcomed. All photographs will be returned. Families of deceased veterans are also encouraged to submit articles. All materials should be sent to The Lawrence Township Veterans Memorial Committee, P.O. Box 55966, Trenton, N.J. 08638. Inquires may be made by calling 882-9108.



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