

# *The Soldiers Wife*

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At the end of May the 2<sup>nd</sup> ID moved to staging areas at ports in the Bristol Channel. This move was done under strict security measures. On June 2, Arthur and Oscar boarded transports along with other soldiers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Their destination was the beaches of Normandy and the long awaited invasion of Fortress Europe which they had long been training for. The troops remained boarded on the ships waiting for final orders.



The invasion was planned to take place under certain conditions based on nature and was postponed 24 hours due to unfavorable weather. Conditions were predicted to improve on June 6 and the invasion force was in position and ready to cross the Channel. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, gave the order to proceed with the invasion; June 6, 1944 would be D-Day.

On D-Day the troop ships carrying the 2<sup>nd</sup> ID were headed out of the Bristol Channel and into the English Channel. Ahead of them were the troop ships loaded with the soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Divisions, who were to make the initial assault landing on Omaha Beach. The 2<sup>nd</sup> ID would follow these two Divisions ashore. Some members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ID were selected to be part of a special engineer assault force in the initial landings. Their job was to clear paths for the infantry through the steel and concrete obstacles constructed on the beach by the Nazis.



The tremendous thunder of heavy naval gunfire and aircraft bombing on the beaches ahead of them was frightening as the 2<sup>nd</sup> ID moved up for the landings on D-Day plus 1. The beach was just barely secured by the initial landing forces that faced heavier enemy resistance than expected; casualties were high. There was wreckage and debris strewn across the beach and enemy elements were not completely cleared as planned.



2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division on Omaha Beach, June 7, 1944



At about noon Arthur was on the beach with the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment which was one of the first units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ID ashore. Although most of the fighting had moved inland, they fought their way past an enemy bunker that housed an 88mm artillery gun which had not yet been knocked out. Many tracer bullets from enemy fire was also still whizzing around. Advancing up trails from the beach into steep coastal bluffs they encountered mine fields and sniper fire. By the end of the day the Division established a Command Post at St. Laurent-sur Mer. The operations of the day seemed like chaos to Arthur and he was thankful to be alive. Not knowing the whereabouts of Oscar, he hoped that his brother was safe.



Back home Pito was preparing to travel to Eagle Pass with Jimmy and Rose Lee to spend the summer with Nana. They hadn't received letters from Arthur or Oscar for a while and were hoping to hear something soon. Then the news was heard over the radio as the President lead the Nation in prayer.....

**Last night, when I spoke with you about the fall of Rome, I knew at that moment that troops of the United States and our Allies were crossing the Channel in another and greater operation. It has come to pass with success thus far.**

**And so, in this poignant hour, I ask you to join with me in prayer:**

**Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity.**

**Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith.**

**They will need Thy blessings. Their road will be long and hard. For the enemy is strong. He may hurl back our forces. Success may not come with rushing speed, but we shall return again and again; and we know that by Thy grace, and by the righteousness of our cause, our sons will triumph.**

**They will be sore tried, by night and by day, without rest -- until the victory is won. The darkness will be rent by noise and flame. Men's souls will be shaken with the violences of war.**

**For these men are lately drawn from the ways of peace. They fight not for the lust of conquest. They fight to end conquest. They fight to liberate. They fight to let justice arise, and tolerance and goodwill among all Thy people. They yearn but for the end of battle, for their return to the haven of home.**

**Some will never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom. And for us at home -- fathers, mothers, children, wives, sisters, and brothers of brave men overseas, whose**

thoughts and prayers are ever with them -- help us, Almighty God, to rededicate ourselves in renewed faith in Thee in this hour of great sacrifice.

Many people have urged that I call the nation into a single day of special prayer. But because the road is long and the desire is great, I ask that our people devote themselves in a continuance of prayer. As we rise to each new day, and again when each day is spent, let words of prayer be on our lips, invoking Thy help to our efforts.

Give us strength, too -- strength in our daily tasks, to redouble the contributions we make in the physical and the material support of our armed forces.

And let our hearts be stout, to wait out the long travail, to bear sorrows that may come, to impart our courage unto our sons wheresoever they may be.

And, O Lord, give us faith. Give us faith in Thee; faith in our sons; faith in each other; faith in our united crusade. Let not the keenness of our spirit ever be dulled. Let not the impacts of temporary events, of temporal matters of but fleeting moment -- let not these deter us in our unconquerable purpose.

With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy. Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogances. Lead us to the saving of our country, and with our sister nations into a world unity that will spell a sure peace -- a peace invulnerable to the schemings of unworthy men. And a peace that will let all of men live in freedom, reaping the just rewards of their honest toil.

Thy will be done, Almighty God.

Amen.

**President Franklin D. Roosevelt - June 6, 1944**

The news was somber to Pito as it was for many of those at home. Not knowing the role of Arthur's Division in the invasion she held back feelings of anxiety as best she could. All she could do was continue to pray and hope for a letter from Arthur. That night, after putting Jimmy and Rose Lee to bed, Pito laid down with her Rosary in hand and cried herself to sleep.



The first evening in Normandy was restless with sounds of gunfire and light artillery in the distance. Soldiers and equipment continued to disembark on the beaches. Casualties were being attended to as needed. Arthur and his comrades of K Company settled down in their assembly area and checked all their combat gear; M1 rifle, ammo, bayonet, shovel, first-aid pouch, blanket, rain poncho, canteen, C-Rations, chocolate bar, toiletries, spare socks and cigarettes. Sleep that night was difficult as the soldiers anticipated what was to come on the following days. Arthur received word that Oscar was well and he thanked God.

There were several small towns in the area that were occupied by German forces. The first field order given to the 2<sup>nd</sup> ID was to relieve soldiers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division in the vicinity of Trevieres, which was a well-fortified German headquarters. The attack began on June 9. The 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment advanced on the left flank towards the town of Rubercy. Machine guns and other heavy weapons had not yet been brought up to the front lines from the beaches. Arthur and Oscar saw their first combat with the enemy as they fought their way into the streets and buildings with fire from their M1 rifles; clearing the town of German soldiers until it was finally taken.

On the following morning Trevieres was taken by the 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment as the soldiers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment cleared the small towns of LeMolay and LaMine, advanced through the Cerisy Forrest, and cut off a main highway route. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had successfully accomplished their first task and there would be many more to come as fighting continued in small towns and into the hedgerow country, which was called the *bocage*.

The killing was difficult for Arthur, as it was for many other men, but he knew it had to be done or the enemy would kill him and his comrades. He was well trained and he knew what could be lost if he failed to do his job; this is what it meant to be a soldier.



The fighting continued in towns and villages through the end of June. The Americans had a strong hold on the front line with German soldiers just a hedgerow away at some areas. The whistling sound followed by intense explosions of the German 88mm artillery, machine gun fire, mortar fire, and strafing from FW-190 German fighter planes had become part of the reality of combat. The harsh realization of death and destruction was everywhere and a soldier had to become quickly seasoned if he hoped to survive.

It was in a small village where Arthur entered a bombed out building and came face to face with a German soldier. He instinctively knocked the German unconscious with the butt of his rifle. Then he heard gunfire coming from behind which luckily missed him. He quickly took shelter behind some debris, aimed his rifle and squeezed off two rounds that proved to be deadly accurate. Upon inspection of the one he just killed he saw that it was a young French girl; maybe 18 or 19 years old. As he kneeled by the lifeless body he was overcome with unforgettable

sorrow. Little did he know at the time that the young girl he had killed was affiliated with the Vichy French who were Nazi collaborators. He then walked over to the German soldier he had knocked out and noticed how young he also looked. Arthur removed the soldier's P.38 pistol and left him to live another day.

Arthur later witnessed one of his buddies being cut in two by German machine gun fire while advancing through an open field in the *bocage*. He could do nothing but keep moving forward, returning fire towards the enemy.

There were lulls in the fighting during which both sides would reinforce with men and supplies. The wounded and dead also had to be attended to. Soldiers on the front line could rest but were always kept alert. Arthur had time to visit with Oscar and he would tell his brother to stay safe and do not take any unnecessary chances. Some letters from home had caught up to Arthur and he finally had some time to write to Pito.



27 June, 1944  
Somewhere in France

Dearest Wife,

Hello honey; Received your letter in which you say that you, Jimmy, and Rose Lee are in good health, thank God. I also received some pictures; honey, you all look very nice. Sure makes me feel lonesome, and home sick to see you all in the pictures. I hope you all have a good time while you stay with Mother. Enjoy yourself as much as you can and please don't worry about me. I am alright, thank God. Glad to hear that your Brother is still in the states. Tell Cookie that she looks very pretty holding the baby in her arms. Well honey, this is all I can write. Hope to see you soon if God's Will. Please write when you have time. Miss you all very much. Give my love to all.

Lots of Love  
From Arthur