D-Day's 70th Anniversary: Cherishing Memories of My Father, My Hero

June 6, 2014

Star-Ledger Op-Ed by Timothy L. Barnes

June is a month for fathers and Normandy heroes. My dad was the best of both. On June 6, 1944, William O. Barnes Jr. was a Naval officer on an LCI landing craft, stationed in Portsmouth, England, as part of the Allied invasion of Normandy, France.

He never discussed his war experiences with his four sons until 1999, when we took him back to Normandy to commemorate the 55th anniversary of D-Day. Only then did we learn from him firsthand about the horrors of war, the heroism of the Allied forces and the hurt he retained over all the years.

In 1998, Steven Spielberg's "Saving Private Ryan" inspired us again to ask our father about his Naval service at D-Day and his war experiences in France. We wanted to understand why, of all the events in his full life, this was the one he would never talk about.

Without hesitation, he accepted our invitation to share those experiences with his sons, on a tour of the landing sites, the museums and the cemeteries of Normandy. It was Father's Day, and our father's day to return to the scene of "The Longest Day," a day that changed history.

We knew he landed near Omaha Beach, and a good Stephen Ambrose book provided us a useful sense of the geography, the villages and landmarks of the Normandy coast.