



## **The Commitment to Finish the Mission**

June is known for many things, but most importantly for members of The American Legion Family, it is a reason to pause and remember one of history's most significant events.

Eighty-two years ago, on June 6, 1944, the world saw one of the greatest demonstrations of courage, commitment, and sacrifice in human history. D-Day—the Allied invasion of Normandy—marking the beginning of the end of World War II in Europe. The outcome was far from certain. Thousands of young Americans stepped from landing craft into battle, knowing that many would never return home.

What carried them forward was not a guarantee of success. It was a commitment to a cause greater than themselves.

On the sands of Normandy's beaches, American and allied soldiers fought through seemingly impossible odds. Among them was Edward Hall, grandfather of Past National Commander JR Hall, who served as a rifleman with the 115th Infantry Regiment. Like thousands of others that day, he faced relentless enemy fire, uncertainty, and danger, yet pressed forward because the mission demanded it.

Also landing at Omaha Beach was Howard Schlitter, grandfather of National Commander candidate Mike Monserud. Serving with the 942nd Field Artillery Unit, he was part of the immense force that provided critical support to the assault on Nazi-occupied Europe. He was wounded in the hedge rows on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day and spent the rest of the war recovering from his wounds, but his service reminds us that victory was achieved not only by those at the front of the charge but also by those who faithfully performed their duties under extraordinary circumstances day after day.

My best friend's father, William "Bud" Beck, was the pilot of LST #1. He and his crew landed members of the British 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division on Gold beach in what he called a "Long Slow Target" (LST). He feared that they would be caught on the beach at low tide and become sitting ducks. LST 1 made many trips that day and I only knew him to be a conductor on the Illinois Central (AMTRAK) railroad. Another member of the Greatest (and quiet) Generation.

Just a few miles away, another remarkable story of determination unfolded at Pointe du Hoc. There, U.S. Army Rangers scaled 100-foot cliffs under enemy fire to silence German artillery positions threatening the invasion beaches below. They climbed ropes, ladders, and sheer rock faces while bullets and explosives rained down around them. Many fell. Many never reached the top. Yet those who survived pressed on and completed their mission. Their success helped secure the foothold that would eventually liberate Europe.

The lessons of D-Day remain as powerful today as they were in 1944.

Victory was not achieved by wishing for success. It was achieved through commitment, sacrifice, persistence, and follow-through. Every soldier had a role. Every unit had a responsibility. Every individual understood that the mission mattered.

The Sons of The American Legion face a different challenge today, but one rooted in the same spirit of commitment. Our mission is not fought on beaches or battlefields. It is fought through service, mentorship, patriotism, and the continued growth of our organization. Every membership card we secure strengthens our ability to support veterans, serve our communities, educate our youth, and preserve the legacy of those who served.

Our membership goal is more than a number. It is a promise.

It is a promise to honor men like Edward Hall and Howard Schlitter. It is a promise to remember Buddy Beck and the Rangers who climbed the cliffs at Pointe du Hoc. Most importantly, it is a promise to honor the thousands of Americans who never came home from Normandy and countless others who paid the ultimate price defending freedom throughout our nation's history.

Those heroes completed their mission despite enormous obstacles. The question before us is simple: Will we complete ours?

Every member who renews. Every member who recruits a new Son. Every squadron that reaches out to inactive members. Every volunteer who shares the story of the Sons of The American Legion helps move us closer to the goal.

The soldiers of D-Day understood that success required action. They climbed into landing craft, crossed the English Channel, stormed the beaches, and advanced inland because freedom depended upon it.

Today, our responsibility is to carry forward the legacy they entrusted to us.

As we work toward achieving our membership goal, let us remember the courage displayed on the beaches of Normandy 82 years ago. Let us match their determination with our own commitment. Let us honor their sacrifice through our service.

And let us finish the mission.

For God and Country.

Butch Ray, Chairman

SAL National Membership & Squadron Activities Committee