

WORLD WAR



16 MILLION MEN AND WOMEN

400,000 LIVES LOST

FREEDOM'S PRICE

R II

Four voices of bravery

By Kirk Noonan and Ken Horn

Though America was victorious in World War II, the country was reminded that freedom's price includes hardship, bloodshed, sacrifice and commitment. More than 16 million men and women served in the U.S. Armed Forces during the war. Of those, more than 400,000 lost their lives.

Most World War II veterans are now in their 80s, but many can recall with vivid detail the days they spent fighting tyranny.

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CREW MEMBERS
ONLY FIVE,
INCLUDING
SPICER, SURVIVED
THE CRASH.**

DOWNED IN THE PACIFIC

“We’re going down,” the captain radioed his crew. “Prepare for a crash landing.”

Sheldon Spicer, an 18-year-old gunner wedged in the belly turret of the PB4Y-1 (converted B-24), eyed the departing enemy planes as black smoke billowed from two of his aircraft’s four engines.

With the plane plummeting, Spicer tried to sit upright so he could climb out of the turret, only to discover that the turret was jammed. Not one to panic, Spicer radioed fellow crew members asking for assistance. Within seconds, another airman — who was wounded — dislodged an ammunition clip that had jammed the turret. Spicer climbed out and braced himself as the plane slammed into the Pacific Ocean.

On impact, the plane snapped in half and water gushed into the fuselage. Spicer struggled to the surface where a life raft had deployed. Of the 11 crew members only five, including Spicer, survived the crash. It was the first of many miracles, says Spicer, that God would perform in his life.

That night as the little raft bobbed on the choppy sea, a Japanese battleship passed nearby. Spicer’s commanding officer ordered him to flash recognition signals.

“I was certain they’d kill us,” recalls Spicer, now 79 and living in San Luis Obispo, Calif. “But they either didn’t see

us or they figured they’d let us die a slow death.”

The ship passed without incident, but one of the airmen who sustained injuries during the crash died. A few hours later a rescue plane flew directly over the raft but did not stop. Spicer’s hope turned to fear. He began to wonder if he, too, was going to die.

That night the crew got little if any sleep, but early the next morning the rescue plane, an amphibious craft, returned. This time it spotted the raft and fetched the crew from the water. “Back then I didn’t know,” says Spicer, “but now I know the Lord had a future for me.”

Part of that future included surviving the war, marrying Vivian Murphy, starting a family and — even more importantly — accepting Christ as Savior. “My wife’s entire family were Assemblies of

God people,” says Spicer. “But they never pushed religion on me.”

One night, Spicer attended a men’s Christian fellowship dinner at his wife’s request. He didn’t want to go, but for reasons he can’t explain he felt convicted and decided to attend. “At the end of the dinner they asked if anyone wanted to accept the Lord as Savior,” recalls Spicer. “My hand went up in the air and a flood of emotion came over me as I accepted Christ. It was wonderful.”

That decision, says Spicer, emboldened him to share his faith with others. Eventually, it helped him cope with Vivian’s death after 52 years of marriage. “I wouldn’t have been able to handle her death if I hadn’t known the ways of the Lord,” says Spicer. “The hour she died I looked at her and said, ‘Thank You, Jesus.’ I knew she was with the Lord.



Sheldon Spicer

One day I will be, too.”

Spicer’s fight for freedom almost cost him his life off the coast of Japan in 1944. Yet, he says, the freedom he helped preserve allowed him to find eternal freedom in Christ.

D-DAY SURVIVOR

Chester Morton stormed the beaches at Normandy and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Going behind enemy lines, dodging bullets and narrowly escaping mortar rounds became standard operat-

ing procedure for Morton and his men.

His duties, he says, were dictated more by need than by the training he received.

“We were supposed to be able to do anything the Army needed us to do,” says Morton, 89, who served as a staff sergeant in the Army’s combat engineers. The engineers’ main objective was to support the infantry by maintaining and servicing vehicles and equipment and building runways, bridges and roads. “But we hardly got to do anything we were trained to do — we mostly

did infantry work.”

That meant charging up the beach at Normandy, scouring the front lines in search of injured soldiers and going behind enemy lines to fight. It was deadly work.

“The hottest days were the first two on the beach,” recalls Morton. “The Germans were piling shells on us and there was nowhere to go. I saw three or four of my men killed when mortars hit right where they were standing.”

Remarkably, Morton was never seriously injured though he had several close calls. Once, as he ran across a railroad trestle, his boot heel was shot off. After battles he sometimes found bullet holes in his clothing. At Normandy, 39 men from

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his platoon went ashore; 19 were killed. Equally painful for Morton was seeing fellow soldiers on the front lines who had been so severely injured that their lives and bodies would never be the same.

"I'd get to them and see that they were tore all to pieces," says Morton. "That got to me."

Some 60 years later the memories of War World II still get to Morton. Though humble about any of his own wartime achievements, Morton is proud of what his fellow soldiers accomplished.

"You could see where the Germans had been and what they had done and we didn't want them over us [the United States]," he says. "Was the price we paid worth it? It has to be."

KAMIKAZES AND THE COWELL

Deep within the *USS Cowell's* combat information center, Reuben Stark could hear the *Cowell's* 5-inch cannons gunning for the Japanese suicide plane. The cannons' long-range capabilities gave Stark a degree of comfort. But when

he heard the ship's mid-range 40 mm cannons blasting away and then the ship's 20 mm machine guns being fired he knew the kamikaze was closing in.

"The suicide planes carried bombs between their wheel wells and they would dive straight into our ships' smokestacks," says Stark, who was a radarman first class, known by his peers as a sailor who would trade Navy-issued beer coupons for ice cream and candy. "The plane's fuel, combined with the bomb going off, would break a ship in half, sinking it in about 10 minutes."

In April 1945 the *Cowell* was one of 32 ships south of Japan near Okinawa on radar picket duty. One of their mission's objectives was to intercept

suicide planes so U.S. troops could safely disembark at Okinawa. Stark's crew shot down

17 kamikazes — two of which exploded in midair only 50 feet off the *Cowell's* deck. It was dangerous work. Of the 32 ships in the division only the *Cowell* and her sister ship, the *USS Brown*, were not sunk or seriously damaged.

"I thought I might not come home at times, but I had faith and believed that we would be protected," says Stark, who was 19 at the time. "Plus, I had a praying mom and dad."

The *Cowell* was awarded 11 battle stars and a Presidential Unit Citation for service in World War II. But according to Stark, now 80, more than 4,000 U.S. sailors were killed during the battle.

"Freedom isn't free is it?" asks Stark, who lives in Modesto, Calif. "But I am so thankful for the efforts and sacrifice of our troops. If we hadn't prevailed, the Japanese would have overcome us. Sixty years later we're still free and God's hand is on this country."

ANZIO POW

Pfc. Cor Longiotti splashed into the Mediterranean surf in full combat gear, along with the rest of the U.S. Army's 179th Infantry Division. Operation Avalanche, the Allied invasion of Salerno, Italy, in 1943, was underway.

Longiotti was getting his first taste of battle. He had been pressed into duty as an assistant gunner, replacing a recent casualty. Slogging heavily through briny waters up to his neck, he labored under the burden of a .30-caliber machine gun, a carbine, and a backpack.

Soon after gaining the beach, the unit sustained heavy fire. The firefight raged along the Seve River and bridge. As they edged forward Longiotti was struck by the horror of passing dead U.S. soldiers.

After two weeks of gradual advance,



USS Cowell

the unit forded the Calore River, dodging a hail of enemy fire. Suddenly, their advance was halted. The entire regiment was surrounded by German troops. They were pummeled mercilessly for three days. With no sleep and

little food or water, the men were weak and exhausted when U.S. tanks smashed through to their rescue. One-fourth of their number — 524 men — were dead or missing. Longiotti thanked God for delivering him. "I know that someone was praying," he says.

A few hours later they renewed their advance, assaulted by driving rains and relentless German artillery barrages. When his gunner was wounded, Longiotti took his place. It was not a coveted post. Machine gunners usually didn't live long; they were prime targets.

Later in the year, Longiotti had his first brush with death. His outfit was on an offensive in the mountains of Abruzzi.

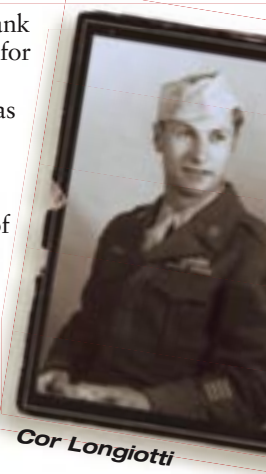
"During an enemy mortar barrage," Longiotti remembers, "a mortar landed just a few feet away, and the concussion literally lifted me up off the ground." Once a piece of shrapnel slammed into the back of his helmet, denting it. "Again, I thank God," Longiotti says, "for looking out for me."

The 45th Division was pulled back to participate in the invasion of Anzio, a beachhead that became the scene of bloody, nonstop battle. Enemy planes seemed to cover the sky. They strafed the troops and dropped deadly butterfly bombs, so-called "personal bombs" that exploded before impact to maximize the damage caused by shrapnel. Men were picked off by sniper fire.

Casualties mounted. One unit of Rangers lost 720 out of 726 men. Advance was painfully slow.




Reuben Stark



Cor Longiotti

JUNE 6, 1944: FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT'S D-DAY PRAYER



In the midst of one firefight, a German tank rolled up to the troops and unloaded a fierce salvo. Longiotti's machine gun was disabled by a blast. The imperiled group was flanked by the enemy and captured. Longiotti had fired his last shot of the war.

Back at home, Longiotti was reported missing in action by the State Department. It was six months before his family knew he was still alive, a prisoner of war.

Now it was a different ordeal Longiotti faced. He was moved from prison camp to prison camp in Germany. Prison barracks were lice-infested. The food was meager and water was rationed. Once they were served snail soup; no one ate it. Medical aid was virtually nonexistent. Longiotti's weight plunged to 90 pounds.

On April 26, 1945, the American 3rd Infantry Division freed the prisoners. Longiotti had been a POW for 14 months and 8 days.

What did freedom cost the veterans of Anzio?

Lives. According to the Government Printing Office of Military History: "Every square foot of the beachhead including field hospitals was within range of German artillery. During the four winter months at Anzio the Allies suffered 30,000 combat casualties and another 39,000 died from exhaustion, disease and stress."

Health. Most of the former POWs, including Longiotti, went on disability with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and/or serious physical conditions — most often caused by malnutrition and the unhygienic conditions of the prison camps.

"I am always thankful to God that I was able to make it this far," Longiotti, a resident of Ashland, Ore., says. "God helped me through it, though I never forget it." ■

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E-mail your comments to pe@ag.org.



Operation Overlord — code name D-Day — the Allied invasion of northern France, was the largest amphibious military operation in history. A number of improbable occurrences needed to take place or it could have easily resulted in a German victory. Instead, it was the beginning of the end for Germany, and of World War II in Europe. President Franklin D. Roosevelt made the following call to prayer while U.S., British and Canadian troops were landing in Normandy and the outcome of the battle was very much in question.

My fellow Americans: 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 good will 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 arrogancies. 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.*