

H.S. American History Week 1 March 30 - April 3, 2020

Interview with Dr. Richard Borden, 6th Naval Beach Battalion, hospital corpsman present at Omaha Beach, 6 June 1944. TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW 28, 29, OCTOBER AND 1 NOVEMBER 1999 CONDUCTED BY JAN K. HERMAN, HISTORIAN, BUMED OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY WASHINGTON, DC.

Where were you on the beach at this point?

At the rock shale.

And you are taking care of patients.

And my friend Rick was with me at this point. One had one end of the stretcher and one the other. So, we were off the wet hard pack. We had cleared that area of those in distress that were under both incoming fire and the rising tide. They were all panicked that they were going to drown laying there in the wet sand.

And then as we got up, I remember specifically Eddie Johnson, who was from Lake Toxaway, NC. We had become buddies. He yelled at me, saying, "Junior, Junior, look they got a pattern to it. Move over there!" He had spotted a pattern of the '88's along the beach (being a mountain man) and he would move into an area after that pattern had passed because it was going to step either forward or back so many yards next round.

Rick and I were doing that. There was a burned out tank we were getting ready to get behind or had just left. It was very definitely in my field of view. We heard something coming in and just both took a dive from the stretcher, I to the right and Rick to the left. It was just unbelievable, absolutely the loudest noise I've ever heard in my life. It was a high pitched crack, which means that it probably was an '88. I remember raising my head and finding my whole head and face were numb, especially on the right side. I remember reaching up across my forehead with my right hand and bringing it down across my right ear and looking at my hand for blood. And there wasn't any. And it was completely numb. The right side of my face was numb and tingling, a burning kind of thing. I looked and the stretcher was between us and then maybe 10 feet to my left was Rick who had taken the dive spontaneously.

I screamed, "Rick, Rick, let's move it!" And he didn't move and I called again, "Rick, Rick, come on, let's move over there by that tank." And he didn't move and then I picked up one of the rocks and threw it and hit him between the shoulders and he didn't move. So, at that point, you know, I . . . and only at that point . . . that I thought, "Something is wrong here." So I scrambled over to him. I don't remember really looking him in the face, but as I turned him, his helmet went to the side and was full of maybe two handfuls of gray matter of brain. I just looked at it in horror and one of my impressions at that point was how clean it was. It was almost bloodless.

See, I've hunted, I've cooked pork brains . . . stuff like that . . . so I knew what brains looked like. But I was absolutely horrified. Again, this just wasn't reasonable thinking at all, but again, I said, "Oh my God, my friend." I started scrambling in my side pouch for that thing of serum albumin we had been told was a new life-saving tool that we had for an immediate super life-saving, super shock condition. I hooked it up

and put the tourniquet on and was getting ready to stick the needle in his veins, although it probably didn't come up to me very much. It was distended. (This is a doctor looking back on it now.)

At that point, with gray matter just laying there in his helmet, I slowly--I say slowly--wrapped the thing back up and put it in my pouch. I was still in a obvious state of shock and I literally looked up. Right now sitting here on my porch . . . I can look up and I can see the haze and the chaos, the dark green of the foliage on the hillside that the German trenches and gun emplacements and everything were in. I literally stood up trembling, which absolutely makes no sense. And it took me a long time to get this out of my conscience. I literally stood up and screamed at the hillside, "Goddamn you every one." At that point, I am looking now and you can argue and say, well, it was . . . what today the druggies would call a rush of the adrenalin in your system. But I don't accept it quite like that.

And then an absolute warmth and peacefulness came over me and I just stood there saying, "God, please let it be me. Let me trade places with him. Please, God. Oh, please." And there just were tears streaming down my face. I've described it a couple of times as, it was as though something holy had just descended around me and I was at peace. I was protected. Probably it was some of my Presbyterianism or something, I don't know... I started reasoning a little. If Rick's there and I'm here, maybe God has His purpose.

About that time, somebody called "Corpsman!" Being so many Army around there, it was probably "Medic." But my memory still says that it was corpsman they called. At that time, I sort of snapped to. I was there for a purpose. I did not do anything heroic, no heroic actions of any kind, but I really went to work in a controlled frenzy, like my 13-year-old does when he's getting ready to go duck hunting. I was all over the field, running from one to another getting them out to these unloading craft primarily. [End of session]

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Answer the following questions after reading the Interview with Dr. Richard Borden

What were the patients laying down on the wet sand worried about?

What happened to Rick?

Does this event still bother Borden over 50 years later? How do you know? Why?

Why do you think the interview ended? Did they run out of time or did they decide to stop because of what Borden just described? What do you think?

Why are these interviews important to understanding what happened during the D-Day invasion?