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Values bind servicemembers together across span of time

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NORMANDY, France -- As I walked through the American cemetery at Omaha Beach here, I found it difficult to wrap my mind around a battle so large and so brutal. I imagine, as thousands of Soldiers poured onto these beaches 65 years ago, the magnitude of the conflict must have been overwhelming to them as well.

I suppose that for many people an invasion like D-Day is so far removed from reality it starts to become just a series of old photos or film footage, or a favorite scene in a movie.

But for others the connection to Normandy is as real as the blood flowing through their veins. For some of the Soldiers who have come to pay their respects to the veterans of D-Day, it is more than just a bond between Soldiers. It is a family bond.



SPC ADRIENNE KILLINGSWORTH
Rows of white crosses in the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial mark the graves of the thousands of U.S. servicemembers who gave their lives during the D-Day invasion of June 1944.

I have worked with Spc.

William Hubbard, a native of Richmond, Va., and command group driver for the 18th Military Police Brigade, for more than six months now, but until we spoke at the cemetery at Omaha Beach, I had never heard Hubbard recount the story of his great-uncle, "Chief" Chavis.

Chavis was among the men who stormed the beaches here 65 years ago. Hubbard said his uncle manned a landing craft on D-Day, transporting platoon-sized groups of Soldiers to the beach. For Chavis, Hubbard tells me, June 6, 1944 was "the hardest day of his life."

As I hear Hubbard talk about his uncle and how difficult that day was for him -- how difficult

I imagine it was for every Soldier that day -- I begin to wonder about Soldiers then and Soldiers now.

The generation of men who fought in World War II was undoubtedly different than the generation of men and women who fight today. American society 65 years ago was different than American society today.

But aside from society, what about the values of Soldiers? Surely they can't be much different, then or now, I thought to myself. We live the Army Values. We live Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity and Personal Courage. These values are timeless, I tell myself.

As Hubbard tells me more about his great-uncle, I try to imagine the scene in my head. I try to place myself in his boots.

"He would lower the ramp and have to watch as maybe one or two of the 20 Soldiers made it to sand," Hubbard said. And then he had to head back to the main ship, rinse off his boat, sweep away any evidence of what had just happened and bring back the next group of Soldiers.

I think about the job Chavis did that day. It was not glamorous and certainly not one to be envied, but he did it. As difficult as it must have been, it was essential.

Then Hubbard says aloud what I had been thinking myself. "It ... makes me wonder if I could suffer through something like that," he says.

As I mull this idea over in my head, I think to myself that perhaps what Hubbard and I have failed to consider is that our connection to D-Day is more even than just family or occupation. It is a connection of ideals.

We each raised our right hands and took the oath to serve our country. It takes rare individuals to be willing to sacrifice everything for their country. It takes courage when you know the risk you face.

As one of thousands of Soldiers volunteered to enter the Army during a time of war, I reached a point in my decision-making process where I had to ask myself how much I would be willing to sacrifice.

Not knowing if today's war would turn for better or for worse, I had to ask myself if I was willing to take the risk.

Like every other servicemember, I chose my values over everything else. I chose my country and my fellow Soldiers over myself.

Hearing Hubbard's story about his uncle, I have come to the conclusion that, while wars may be fought differently now than they were 65 years ago, the troops who fight in them have not. So, as we remember the men who fought so valiantly and the thousands who lost their lives 65 years ago, we cannot fail to remember those who follow in their footsteps and fight so bravely today in their honor.



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