

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OTHER VIEWS



A U.S. Coast Guard landing barge, tightly packed with helmeted soldiers, approaches the shore at Normandy, France, during initial Allied landing operations, June 6, 1944.



President Ronald Reagan and first lady Nancy Reagan walk through the thousands of graves in the American Cemetery in Omaha Beach, Normandy in France on June 6, 1984.

Honoring D-Day, now 74 years ago

By JIM VAN NOSTRAND
EO Media Group

On June 7, 1984, I stood atop a low stone wall on a bluff overlooking the Normandy coast at Colleville-sur-Mer, France.

Behind me waited several dozen soldiers of Echo Company, 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division (Big Red One). They had served the day before as President Reagan's honor guard for international ceremonies commemorating the anniversary of the D-Day landings.

In front of me lay Omaha Beach at low tide, a vast expanse of sand where 40 years before, the regiment had stormed ashore in the first wave of Operation Overlord. That invasion was now 74 years ago.

I was a second lieutenant in Charlie Company, chosen to accompany the honor guard to Normandy because I was also the unofficial battalion historian. The men were worn out from several days of drilling and marching on parade. The battalion commander asked me to take them on a private tour of the American cemetery at Omaha Beach before heading back to our post near Stuttgart, Germany.

The men were all looking up at me on the wall, waiting. I was at a loss for words. Finally I pointed at the ocean and swung my arm in a wide arc.

"Try to imagine yourself as a German soldier that morning, looking out there and seeing the largest invasion fleet in the history of the world — almost 7,000 ships," I said. "And many of them were headed this way."

Then, reaching into my pocket, I pulled a copy of the Presidential Unit Citation the regiment had earned that day, and began to read it aloud.

Indescribable carnage

The landing was utter chaos. The landing craft began to take artillery, mortar and machine gun fire 300 yards offshore.

They landed far from their assigned sectors, and scores of men were killed or wounded as the landing craft dropped their ramps. Others were hit as they slogged through the surf or tried to run across the sand.

I had been researching the battle for several days. I was able to point to approximately where each company landed, and describe the number of casualties each suffered. All of us tried to envision, without much success, how much courage it must

have taken to cross that beach.

The breakout came when Echo Company men managed to cross a minefield and breach the enemy wire, allowing the regiment to fight its way up the bluff.

The regimental commander, Col. George Taylor, famously exhorted his soldiers through the gap, yelling "The only men who remain on this beach are the dead and those who are about to die! Let's get moving!"

The moment has been immortalized in many movies, most notably "The Longest Day."

Awe-inspiring experience

My little speech lasted only about 10 minutes. The men scattered afterwards to explore the beach and the cemetery, which contains the graves of 9,385 soldiers killed in the D-Day landings and ensuing operations.

The Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial covers 172 acres and is technically American soil, granted in perpetuity to the United States by the French government as a small thank you for the liberation of their nation.

It is an imposing and awe-inspiring experience. Many of the crosses bear the inscription "Here rests in honored glory a comrade in arms, known but to God."

Two days before on June 5, while reconnoitering the memorial grounds in uniform in advance of President Reagan's visit, I found myself suddenly ambushed by a phalanx of television cameras.

One reporter was particularly aggressive, asking me the difference between fighting in a popular war, such as World War II, and an unpopular war, such as Vietnam.

I considered my response carefully, fearing the end of my nascent military career if I screwed this up.

"The American soldier of today is no different than soldiers of any other war, including World War II and Vietnam," I said. "They will do what it takes to survive on the battlefield. The tactics you use when you're being shot at haven't changed much in 40 years."

The battalion commander and sergeant major quickly sought me out after the television cameras departed, wondering what in the world their foolish young lieutenant was talking to the media about.

"That was a very good answer," the sergeant major said, with a knowing nod.

Jim Van Nostrand is editor of *The Daily Astorian*, sister paper of the *East Oregonian*.

YOUR VIEWS

Congress can ease cancer patients' pain

While Congress works to address opioid abuse, it's important they consider patients with daily pain. Congress can reduce opioid abuse and help ensure people with pain have access to care they need by passing a popular, bipartisan bill to increase access to and awareness of palliative care.

This bill would complement numerous legislation on opioid abuse in Congress by expanding pain and symptom management training for doctors, nurses, pharmacists and others who treat serious illnesses, like cancer, that cause chronic or acute pain. It would boost the National Institutes of Health's pain research funding. Less than one percent of NIH funding goes to pain.

More pain research could improve pain management best practices — helping ease suffering of cancer patients while curbing opioid misuse.

Palliative care provides patients and families with extra support during a serious disease like cancer. As an American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network volunteer, I'm urging Representative Greg Walden to seize this opportunity to move this bill. Passing this legislation alongside numerous bills

in Congress to address opioid abuse will help appropriately ease pain and suffering.

Karen Malcolm
Pendleton

Gun restrictions leave victims vulnerable

You may be voting in November to lose some of your rights to defend yourself, family and community, because of what I have heard a rabbi and two Christian ministers are doing. All due to boys who were (are) possibly on drugs, mentally off, "abused," and then we must all pay for it — becoming guilty before proved innocent.

If you think mass murder cannot happen here, then think again. We in the U.S. are made up of peoples from the whole world. Mass murder has happened in Germany, Russia, Rwanda, China, Cambodia, some of our Native population, etc. The ones targeted for death were disarmed so they could not resist, as sheep to the slaughter.

When the Second Amendment is lessened or destroyed, then for sure the First [Amendment] is next. It seems that our men and women who fought and died for our freedoms did it for nothing.

Raymond Reeder
Pendleton

What does it mean to 'approve' of Trump?

Donald Trump is riding a wave of popularity, at least by Trump standards.

The president's job approval rating hit 44.6 percent this week in the RealClearPolitics average of polls. That is the highest it has been since March 2017. And while that is not high by any measure, it is good for Trump, who has never been higher than 46 percent in the poll average. (That was in early February 2017, his third week in office.)

The question is what effect Trump's improved ratings — should they last until November — will have on the midterm elections.

There is a traditional relationship between presidential job approval and midterm results. But it's not clear whether that relationship will hold up when Trump is involved.

"When a president has job approval ratings of 50 percent or higher, his party tends to keep its losses fairly low," political analyst Charlie Cook wrote last year. "But in six of the seven midterm elections since 1966, when presidential approval ratings hovered below 50 percent, his party has lost two dozen or more seats in the House, giving the opposition party a majority the next year."

If that holds, and Trump remains below 50 percent, it's a reasonable guess the GOP will lose enough seats to give Democrats control of the House.

The last dozen years have seen extremes in midterms. In 2006, with George W. Bush at 39 percent job approval, Republicans got clobbered, losing 30 seats.

In 2010, with Barack Obama at

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45.4 percent job approval, the damage was even worse: Democrats lost a devastating 63 seats in the House.

But then, in 2014, with Obama at 42 percent job approval — below where Trump is today — House Democrats, already in the minority, lost a modest 13 seats.

Does any of that experience help predict what will happen under Trump? On the one hand, it's easy just to say a president at his level of popularity will lose a bunch of seats. On the other hand, remember that Trump's personal approval rating was 37.5 percent, with a disapproval rating near 60, on the day he won the presidency.

"These are certainly different times," says Curt Anderson, a GOP strategist whose firm is involved in a lot of House races this year. One reason for Republican caution, Anderson explains, is that this year it will be easier for moderates to cast an anti-Trump vote than it was in 2016.

"In 2016, people who for whatever reason didn't like Trump had to swallow hard and vote for Hillary to show their displeasure," Anderson explains. "That's some nasty castor oil right there, and many refused to take it. The fear in 2018 for Republicans is that voters who don't like Trump can send him a message — by voting against his party — and this time they don't have to vote for Hillary in order to punish Trump."

Given that, Anderson says, "I do think Trump's approval numbers will matter this fall ... [and] already this year we have seen small shifts that have pretty dramatic consequences."

On the other hand, another GOP

strategist working on multiple races, who asked to remain anonymous, takes a more nuanced, and ultimately more optimistic, position.

"Of course there's a correlation," he says. "The more popular [Trump] is, the easier it is to keep the House." Right now, things are going reasonably well, because there has been "an undeniable positive change" since December in Trump's standing in many key districts.

But the strategist notes that with Trump, not everything can be measured by job approval. "What does it mean to approve of Trump?" he asks. "You can love everything that is happening and not approve of him."

For the midterms, the strategist suggests, a better predictor might be the traditional polling question of whether the country is on the right track or the wrong track. "In our data, we have right track at 40 percent," the strategist notes, meaning that 40 percent of those surveyed say the country is going in the right direction. "If you look back, there's never been a wave election with right track at 40."

Indeed, back in November 2010 the right track number was 31 percent. In November 2006, it was around 30.

None of that tells what will happen in November 2018. But it's simply not enough to say that Trump is unpopular, and therefore Republicans will lose. Given the nation's experience in 2016, the presence of Trump, even though he is not on the ballot, makes the coming midterms more complex than midterms in the past, and extremely hard to predict.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.