

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

CHRISTOPHER RUSH
PublisherKATHRYN B. BROWN
OwnerANDREW CUTLER
EditorWYATT HAUPJT JR.
News EditorJADE McDOWELL
Hermiston Editor

Founded October 16, 1875

OTHER VIEWS

Remembering D-Day: A pure miracle

Editor's note: When correspondent Ernie Pyle was killed by a Japanese machine gun bullet in 1945, his columns were being delivered to more than 14 million homes. He wrote about war from a soldier's perspective. This is his first dispatch after the D-Day landings of June 6, 1944.

NORMANDY BEACHHEAD, June 12, 1944 — Due to a last-minute alteration in the arrangements, I didn't arrive on the beachhead until the morning after D-day, after our first wave of assault troops had hit the shore.

By the time we got here the beaches had been taken and the fighting had moved a couple of miles inland. All that remained on the beach was some sniping and artillery fire, and the occasional startling blast of a mine geysering brown sand into the air. That plus a gigantic and pitiful litter of wreckage along miles of shoreline.

Submerged tanks and overturned boats and burned trucks and shell-shattered jeeps and sad little personal belongings were strewn all over these bitter sands. That plus the bodies of soldiers lying in rows covered with blankets, the toes of their shoes sticking up in a line as though on drill. And other bodies, uncollected, still sprawling grotesquely in the sand or half hidden by the high grass beyond the beach.

That plus an intense, grim determination of work-weary men to get this chaotic beach organized and get all the vital supplies and the reinforcements moving more rapidly over it from the stacked-up ships standing in droves out to sea.

Now that it is over it seems to me a pure miracle that we ever took the beach at all. For some of our units it was easy, but in this special sector where I am now our troops faced such odds that our getting ashore was like my whipping Joe Louis down to a pulp.

In this column I want to tell you what the opening of the second front in this one sector entailed, so that you can know and appreciate and forever be humbly grateful to those both dead and alive who did it for you.

Ashore, facing us, were more enemy troops than we had in our assault waves. The advantages were all theirs, the disadvantages all ours. The Germans were dug into positions that they had been working on for months, although these were not yet all complete. A one-hundred-foot bluff a couple of hundred yards back from the beach had great concrete gun emplacements built right into the hilltop. These opened to the sides instead of to the front, thus making it very hard for naval fire



Pool Photo via AP/Louis Weintraub, File

Members of an American landing unit help their comrades ashore during the Normandy invasion. The men reached the zone code-named Utah Beach, near Sainte-Mere-Eglise, on a life raft after their landing craft was hit and sunk by German coastal defenses.

from the sea to reach them. They could shoot parallel with the beach and cover every foot of it for miles with artillery fire.

Then they had hidden machine-gun nests on the forward slopes, with cross-fire taking in every inch of the beach. These nests were connected by networks of trenches, so that the German gunners could move about without exposing themselves.

Throughout the length of the beach, running zigzag a couple of hundred yards back from the shoreline, was an immense V-shaped ditch fifteen feet deep. Nothing could cross it, not even men on foot, until fills had been made. And in other places at the far end of the beach, where the ground is flatter, they had great concrete walls. These were blasted by our naval gunfire or by explosives set by hand after we got ashore.

Our only exits from the beach were several swales or valleys, each about one hundred yards wide. The Germans made the most of these funnel-like traps, sowing them with buried mines. They contained, also, barbed-wire entanglements with mines attached, hidden ditches, and machine guns firing from the slopes.

This is what was on the shore. But our men had to go through a maze nearly as deadly as this before they even got ashore. Underwater obstacles were terrific. The Germans had whole fields of evil devices under the water to catch our boats. Even now, several days after the landing, we have cleared only channels through them and cannot yet approach the whole length of the beach with our ships. Even now some ship or boat hits one of these mines every day and is knocked out of commission.

The Germans had masses of those great

six-pronged spiders, made of railroad iron and standing shoulder-high, just beneath the surface of the water for our landing craft to run into. They also had huge logs buried in the sand, pointing upward and outward, their tops just below the water. Attached to these logs were mines.

In addition to these obstacles they had floating mines offshore, land mines buried in the sand of the beach, and more mines in checkerboard rows in the tall grass beyond the sand. And the enemy had four men on shore for every three men we had approaching the shore.

And yet we got on.

...

Beach landings are planned to a schedule that is set far ahead of time. They all have to be timed, in order for everything to mesh and for the following waves of troops to be standing off the beach and ready to land at the right moment.

As the landings are planned, some elements of the assault force are to break through quickly, push on inland, and attack the most obvious enemy strong points. It is usually the plan for units to be inland, attacking gun positions from behind, within a matter of minutes after the first men hit the beach.

I have always been amazed at the speed called for in these plans. You'll have schedules calling for engineers to land at H-hour plus two minutes, and service troops at H-hour plus thirty minutes, and even for press censors to land at H-hour plus seventy-five minutes. But in the attack on this special portion of the beach where I am — the worst we had, incidentally — the schedule didn't hold.

Our men simply could not get past the beach. They were pinned down right on the water's edge by an inhuman wall of

MORE INFO

To learn more about the Ernie Pyle World War II Museum, go to erniepile.org

fire from the bluff. Our first waves were on that beach for hours, instead of a few minutes, before they could begin working inland.

You can still see the foxholes they dug at the very edge of the water, in the sand and the small, jumbled rocks that form parts of the beach.

Medical corpsmen attended the wounded as best they could. Men were killed as they stepped out of landing craft. An officer whom I knew got a bullet through the head just as the door of his landing craft was let down. Some men were drowned.

The first crack in the beach defenses was finally accomplished by terrific and wonderful naval gunfire, which knocked out the big emplacements. They tell epic stories of destroyers that ran right up into shallow water and had it out point-blank with the big guns in those concrete emplacements ashore.

When the heavy fire stopped, our men were organized by their officers and pushed on inland, circling machine-gun nests and taking them from the rear.

As one officer said, the only way to take a beach is to face it and keep going. It is costly at first, but it's the only way. If the men are pinned down on the beach, dug in and out of action, they might as well not be there at all. They hold up the waves behind them, and nothing is being gained.

Our men were pinned down for a while, but finally they stood up and went through, and so we took that beach and accomplished our landing. We did it with every advantage on the enemy's side and every disadvantage on ours. In the light of a couple of days of retrospection, we sit and talk and call it a miracle that our men ever got on at all or were able to stay on.

Before long it will be permitted to name the units that did it. Then you will know to whom this glory should go. They suffered casualties. And yet if you take the entire beachhead assault, including other units that had a much easier time, our total casualties in driving this wedge into the continent of Europe were remarkably low — only a fraction, in fact, of what our commanders had been prepared to accept.

And these units that were so battered and went through such hell are still, right at this moment, pushing on inland without rest, their spirits high, their egotism in victory almost reaching the smart-alecky stage.

Their tails are up. "We've done it again," they say. They figure that the rest of the army isn't needed at all. Which proves that, while their judgment in this regard is bad, they certainly have the spirit that wins battles and eventually wars.

OUR VIEW

Front page 'holes' make for troubling weekend

During my stint in the U.S. Army, I picked up a lot of life lessons. One of those examples was from an officer I knew who once told me that as a leader you are responsible for all that your men and women do and what they don't do. The message, of course, was simple and harkens back to President Harry S. Truman's "the buck stops here."

The buck at the *East Oregonian* doesn't necessarily stop with me — I work for our publisher — but the triumphs and defeats of the newsroom are a direct reflection upon me as the editor. When we do something extraordinary, it is my job — as a leader — to spread the praise among those who I lead. However, when a newsroom mistake happens, I am accountable because, in the end, I am the editor.

Last weekend, we made an obvious and serious mistake on our front page. Subscribers — and anyone else who purchased our weekend edition — saw two large "holes" or white spaces on our front page. The two wide-open spaces represented where an

ANDREW CUTLER
COMMENT

advertisement and a photo with the story "Road rage case ends with \$26.5M verdict" should have been placed and were in the page that were proofed throughout the evening, but did not make it to the final product. I could tell you all about the technical reasons the ad and photo, which accompanies this column, did not make it to the press. And while they are all valid and concerns that we have addressed inside the newsroom and other

departments here at the paper, at the end of the day they don't matter.

What does matter is that this was a serious error and I take full responsibility.

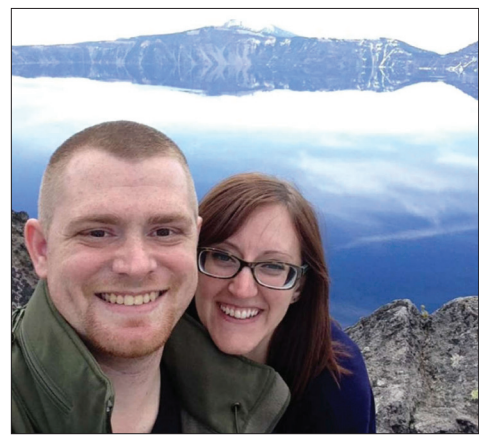
I take the responsibility not only because it is the right thing to do, but because it is essential that we immediately admit errors or miscues as quickly as we can. That's because our credibility is at stake, and, in the end, the only thing we really have as journalists is that credibility. The mistake was acute in another way — it made us look unprofessional.

Two large empty spaces on the front

page of the *East Oregonian* should have been obvious mistakes picked up somewhere by someone, but they were not. The failure on our end also took away from the story, which was done to honor the memory of Sara Allison, who was killed in a 2017 head-on collision near Burns. While the story itself told the amazing story, accompanying visuals distracted from the final product, and that is unacceptable to Sara's memory.

What you need to know, dear reader, is simple. We understand we made a mistake. I, as editor, take responsibility for it and I will institute even more internal safeguards to ensure something like that doesn't happen again.

We could easily just move forward, not call attention to the miscue and pretend it didn't happen. That isn't how I work as an editor. Stepping forward to take responsibility is easy when accolades pile up, but when something goes wrong it can be a difficult endeavor. I believe, though, that we must always stand ready to take credit where it is due — but, more importantly, stand up and be accountable when something goes awry.



Contributed photo

Matthew and Sara Allison beam in a photo taken in front of Crater Lake, their last bit of Oregon sightseeing, before leaving to return home to Boise in June 2017. Sara was behind the wheel of their Ford Focus so Matthew could rest during the drive on narrow Highway 20 east of Burns when James Decou of Clearfield, Utah, drove his flat-bed hauling semi head-on into the couple's car. Sara was killed in the crash. He was 27, she was 30, and they were married five years.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

Send letters to the editor to editor@eastoregonian.com, or via mail to Andrew Cutler, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801