



In the presence of
Heroes

When you hear them describe scenes of death and fighting and then look at these men, it doesn't correlate. They are not John Waynes. They are these old grampas. What besides the wrong of war — the Nazis — could make them able to kill? I'm really in the presence of heroes and I'm sure proud my father is one of them.

Excerpt from David Scheinbaum's journal



When David Scheinbaum, above, went to Europe with his parents, he kept a journal of how the experience affected him. The following are excerpts from the journal.

June 2

The real heroes are the guys that didn't make it.

— Dad

The memories keep getting more and more vivid for my father. Each person he meets, each new name or place spurs a whole train of thought. When these men talk to each other, it seems as if they are just giving cues to one another.

It appears the medical corps have (hold) a special place of respect for all these guys. There is one doctor and another medic besides my dad and, as each man meets Dad, they seem to hold his hand a little longer, making the handshake not just a get acquainted procedure, but a sincere thank you.

It's hard to photograph what most of my reaction is to what I'm hearing — not what I'm seeing. (Maybe I should have brought along a tape.) But hopefully I'll start hearing with my eyes.



The reunion of Lou, Smiley and William O'Gorman. Lou and Smiley were medics; O'Gorman was an ambulance driver.

ON THE COVER:

David's father, Louis Scheinbaum, at La Haye du Puits. He was a technician 4th grade sergeant during the war.



THE TEARS FLOW: David's mother, Rhoda, and father, Lou, arrive on the bus at La Haye du Puits.

From the get-go, David Scheinbaum will tell you war is not his thing. He protested during the Vietnam Era. And at 43, he doesn't remember World War II; no memories, that is, except the stories his father told him at bedtime.

When he decided to accompany his father to Normandy for the D-Day anniversary celebrations in early June, it was a trip he wasn't looking forward to.

"Those nine days will be the longest year I ever spent," he quipped to his wife, Janet Russek, as she dropped him off at the Albuquerque airport for the first leg of his trip.

Three days later, in the very town his father, Lou Scheinbaum, 75, helped liberate 50 years before, David Scheinbaum, the owner of a Santa Fe photography gallery, witnessed another chunk of history. This one touched him directly and left him a changed man.

"There was always this mystery about the war when I was growing up in Brooklyn. It was very much part of our lives," Scheinbaum said. "There were objects in the house we never touched. A Nazi flag. A German beer stein. Don't touch that, was the rule. That's from the war."

"I never understood it, the war. It was this thing my father did. The places and people he remembered were things he spoke about fondly, with pride and humor.

"We never talked about the dreams he would have; the times



A BIG SMILE FOR SMILEY: David's father smiles as he gets off the bus in La Haye du Puits and sees his war friend Smiley. "Lou, you son of a bitch, we made it!" Smiley yelled.

when he'd wake up screaming in the middle of the night. If I close my eyes, I can still hear this howl thing he would do in his sleep. My father never told us the horror stories.

"As a child, it added to some kind of confusion in my mind. My own involvement with war (in Vietnam) was as a protester. The images of war I was exposed to were nothing like the stories I heard from my father."

Scheinbaum squeezed his eyes shut. "I had my father's war pictures, his snapshots," he said. "As I grew older, I had less understand-

ing of how my father had this sense of pride. I knew my father was a medic and that he was awarded the Bronze Star for his courage. But what I didn't know was that my father was a hero."

For Scheinbaum, that reality changed when the bus pulled into La Haye du Puits, a small town south of Cherbourg. On it were Scheinbaum, his mother and father and other World War II veterans. Lining the streets, the townspeople stood, waving American flags, and cheering.



THE TOWN HONORS: Leaving church after Sunday Mass for the returning veterans in La Haye de Puits.

"I was in awe. I was moved. Everyone on the bus was crying. I don't cry, but I was crying, too. Just minutes before, I was on this bus filled with an Elderhostel tour. Suddenly, I was on a bus filled with heroes.

"Everyone on this bus was welcomed by this town. Just being there, it made me one of the group. I was one of them. I could hardly focus the camera. I was just totally blown away.

"I knew this welcome wasn't for me. I was just there with my parents, but this was for Americans. For all Americans. The scene was incredibly powerful. The church bells started ringing. Everyone on the bus was overwhelmed. I began looking at everyone a little differently. They weren't old; they were soldiers returning to a town they had liberated. Right here, you realize that these guys had come back to a town and they were being welcomed by people who knew that if it were not for these men, there wouldn't be a town. The town's people credit these men with their very existence."

Scheinbaum paused, wiped his glasses and smiled shyly. His eyes brightened as he again was caught up in the excitement of the moment, and he ran his fingers through his long, black hair.

"My father has Parkinson's. This past year, he hasn't had a whole lot of facial expression, but in this pic-



THEY'RE ALL HEROES: Children line the parade route to the 79th Infantry memorial monument ceremony in La Haye du Puits.

ture (on the cover of this section) there is more facial expression than I've seen in a year. And sitting on the bus, I just wasn't used to such an open show of emotion.

"We were being treated with such honor and respect. You know this was love. It wasn't out of a sense of duty. It came right from inside. For me, when I looked at my father, it was like a light going on. That's when I suddenly understood what this war thing was all about for him.

"One of the things that stayed with me long after I returned home was that these people in La Haye du Puits were celebrating 50 years of

peace. There's a strong feeling that they want their children to know what happened so that it will never happen again. A lot of the children were involved in every single part of the ceremonies. I had the feeling that the monuments and parades were for their children as much as for the returning soldiers.

"There were these children who have grown up with this image of American heroes. And the way they looked at the returning soldiers, it was as if they were finally meeting the people their parents and grandparents had told them about. They were wide-eyed as they approached

June 4

After being in the ferry all night we landed in Cherbourg. The bus (group) got very quiet. All the men just staring out the windows and slowly you hear the whispers to whomever is sitting next to them. My father tells me all the fields we're driving through were filled with dead animals from the shelling.



Lu and Smiley's reunion.

If you want to feel proud to be an American this is where you'll find it. The people not only show an unbelievable amount of respect, but they exude real love. This was an unbelievable emotional day. To be on the bus with the returning soldiers ... we were escorted about a mile out of town by police and soldiers and officials and all of a sudden we turned a corner and the streets were lined with the whole town waving and cheering. Forget



A boy salutes parading veterans.

even holding in tears — they just flowed. I looked around the bus. These soldiers saved and made the lives of these towns and people and they know it.

As men got off the bus today to enter the mayor's

office, the cheers and applause were enough to break you down to tears, but then I hear "Lou, you son of a bitch, we made it!" Smiley, one of my father's closest friends from the war, was standing there waiting



Monument at La Haye du Puits.

for him. Both men hug and share what I can hardly imagine what they have been through together. When you hear them talk about the battles and hear them describe scenes of death and fighting and then look at these men, it doesn't correlate. They are not the John Waynes or rednecks we imagine the soldiers might be. They are these old grampas — short, fat, skiny, real regular guys. What besides the wrong of war — the Nazis, etc., could make them able to kill. And then finish their job and go back to a normal life. I need to write more about this. But I'm really in the presence of heroes and I'm sure proud my father is one of them. To be treated like I've been treated here due to my father's actions only begins to tell me how much these soldiers mean to these people.

I'm so glad my father has been able to come back here to see the result of his effort that so affected his life. I know after being here ... there is no doubt of its worth. What pride he must feel! I'm so glad for him and all these guys.



PAYING THEIR RESPECTS: After getting roses from children, Smiley and Lou place roses at the monument in La Haye du Puits.

these men. They had autograph books. And here I was the son of one of these men and I had no idea about what the importance of what my father did during the war."

Two days later, at official D-Day ceremonies at Omaha Beach, Scheinbaum trained his photographer's eye on the cliffs and beaches.

"When I saw these beaches, it was unbelievable they were so narrow," he said. "The cliffs almost came right down to the sea. It was like White Sands meets the Sangre de Cristos and the war's on top."

"That afternoon, there were these great ceremonies, pompous and elegant, but the biggest ceremony came after when I would watch these men walking alone on the beach, maybe replaying that battle 50 years ago in their heads. Only they know what they had to deal with there. And they would stand on this beach at Pointe du Hoc (a cliff head that juts out between Utah and Omaha Beach) beneath these 100-foot cliffs where so many of their comrades had lost their lives and reach down a pick up a stone or a little sand and put it in their pockets and walk away in silence."

Scheinbaum's photographs tell this story. In stark black and white, they are eloquent in their uncensored simplicity. A child playing in the crater left by a bomb, now an inviting grassy knoll. Two men, their arms linked for support, placing flowers at the base of a monument to the 79th Infantry Division — the famed Cross of Lorraine Division, disbanded after World War I, the so-called war to end all wars, but reactivated for the invasion of Normandy.

In another photograph, two ceremonies — one German, dark with its Germanic iron crosses, the other American with row upon row of

white crosses and an occasional Star of David, but both graverdiggers dressed with freshly cut flowers.

And finally, a photograph of a labyrinth of barbed wire awesome in its silence and rust and left behind by the Germans some 50 years before at the very top a cliff above Omaha Beach.

"I knew I wanted to bring my father back for D-Day," Scheinbaum said. "I knew he was ill. I know soon he won't be able to travel much. He's never been back (to France). My mother had never been to Europe. I'd been saving up for about a year to take them."

"In La Haye du Puits, we would be staying with a French family, and to tell to you the truth, I was not looking forward to these three days with a strange family. As it turned out, it was one of the best things that's ever happened to me.

Suddenly, I had a new family and I'm a different person because of it.

"It absolutely changed my life. All this stuff just clicked and came into place. I never had strangers treat me like that and love me like that," he said, touching his heart.

Scheinbaum, an associate professor of art with a specialization in photography, typically spends years on a photographic project. The event changed the way he works, helping infuse him with a new sense of immediacy. "I shot 16 roles of 36-exposure film," he said. "When I got home, I developed all 16 roles in one day. This has brought back a certain passion for photography I haven't had in a long time."

"It'll take me awhile to process my feelings, but I feel that when it's all sorted out, it gets down to one thing — people. The men who returned and those who honored them, giving thanks for a generation that's known peace."



June 7

The session with the children this morning was very moving. All the kids wanted autographs of all the soldiers — the heroes they must hear about.

They were able to ask questions. ... The questions were interesting. ... One most moving question was asked: "What was the saddest part of the war?"

The "Doc" Kirchner told the kids that the Army would mark bombing targets with white phosphorus so the pilots could see them at night. They especially would cover church steeples because they were so prominent. The phosphorus (powders) would slide off the rooftops and burn the children.

They all asked if the soldiers would fight a war again — a resounding "yes," especially if it's about liberty.

It's amazing the feeling of leaving the families — the emotions were intense.

... The departing was more intense than most I've had in my life — all because — my father. I can't express how proud I am that he was in the unit of such fine men. I know of no other situation that would put me with these folks — yet we are all a family.

Pointe du Hoc — where a major battle took place. This point had to be taken for the landing. German positions with guns pointed at both Utah and Omaha beaches. 200 men were put ashore. They used powered (shell) ropes up to the top of the point and climbed to take the hill. Only 65 men made it alive and they completed the mission.

Today it's like a park. Kids play in the giant depressions which were made by the bombs. It also contains a monument to the Rangers who took it.

Ironic that the children play in the same hills and valleys where so many lost their lives.



▲ THEY WON'T FORGET:

Children were honored carry medals for the returning vets. "I had the feeling that the monuments and parades were for their children as much as for the returning soldiers," David said.

◀ **ONE FOR LOU:** David's father, Louis Scheinbaum, is presented with his medal during a ceremony at La Haye du Puis.



June 8

My father was talking tonight at dinner in Paris. Sophie's boyfriend was saying how unbelievable it sounded to land on the beach and fight, etc. ... (My father) said he was lucky he was wounded on the first day of the landing (D-Day plus 6) when he was taking care of shrapnel in his ankle. He spent the night helping the other wounded and in the morning the doctor thanked him and asked, "What can I do for you." My father said, "Keep me working here."



A house window bearing Allied flags in La Hève du Puits.



THE PRIDE SHOWS: Veterans enjoy D-Day ceremonies at Omaha Beach, where world leaders praised them for their war efforts.

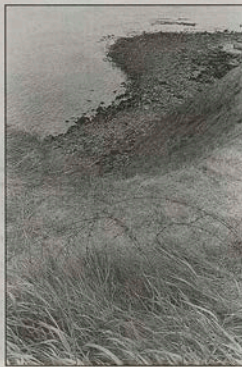


▲ **A SOMBER NOTE:**

A decorated veteran reflects during the ceremonies at Omaha Beach.

▼ **THE CLIFFS MEET THE SEA:**

Rangers were sent to take Pointe du Hoc, hours before the invasion started. Only 65 of 200 sent survived the assault. The area, now a monument, was left as it was.



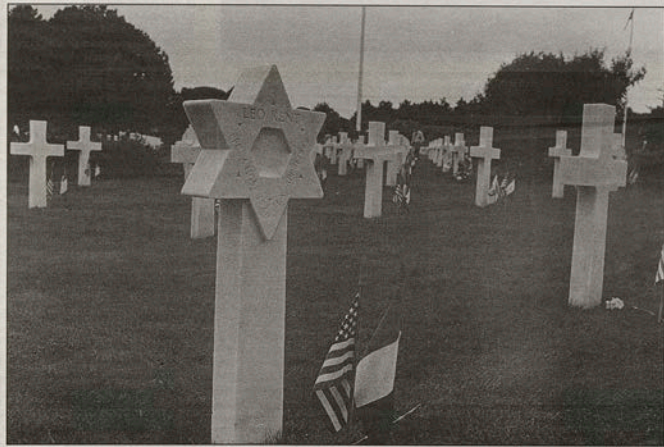


◀ **LIKE WAGNER:**

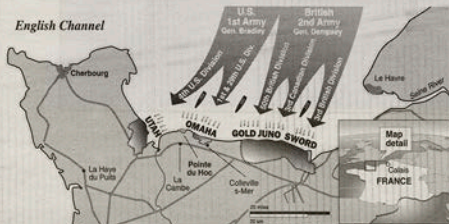
The German cemetery at La Cambe is dark and ominous in the shadow of old trees and with dark stone crosses.

▼ **LIKE BACH:**

The American cemetery Colleville is open, airy and has white crosses and some Stars of David.



English Channel



UTAH BEACH: Where David's father, Lou, landed on D-Day plus 6, the sixth day after the initial invasion.

POINTE DU HOC: The ridge between Omaha and Utah beaches.

CHERBOURG: Where Lou's unit went after landing at Normandy.

LA HÈVE DU PUITS: The town that welcomed Lou and his unit 50 years after the invasion of Normandy.

LA CAMBE: Where the German cemetery is.

COLLEVILLE S-MER: Where the American cemetery is.

June 9

On the airplane ... Paris to Miami

As we were seated the pilot made his usual announcements and ended it with a special note of welcome to the veterans on board and considered them honored guests. ... It was all restated in French — the passengers broke out in applause. Throughout the flight people continued to come over to my father to "thank him" ... giving him their cards and explaining that he is always welcome at their homes or offices if he is ever in need.

My father spent most of the trip crying.

In the presence of Heroes

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◀ LIFE GOES ON:

A child plays in a huge bomb crater at Pointe du Hoc, France.

▼ A TIME TO REFLECT:

A D-Day survivor takes a lone walk on the beach. Many soldiers took solitary strolls to recall the battle, perhaps collect a little sand. It was a moment of their return and their good fortune to have survived, and to think of those who didn't.

