

OLD TIMERS HAVE TALES TO TELL THAT YOUNGSTERS SHOULDN'T MISS

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When I was a youngster Memorial Day was known as Decoration Day. It was started in 1871, to honor the Civil War dead and veterans. Dwelling on this caused me to reflect on other historical events and consider my perspective on them.

I was privileged to have been brought up in the same household with my Great-grandfather Franklin Allen. He was born on June 6, 1844, and died on November 11, 1942; I was 15 at the time. I was given a personal view of the Civil War and many other events that he had been witness to. The passenger pigeon and life on a mule-powered canal boat were two other examples that come to mind. Unfortunately, I was not aware of the opportunity and did not press him for more of his recollections.

June 6, 1944, of course, is the anniversary of the Normandy invasion, another important turning point in history. I have been fortunate to have known three persons who participated in that momentous event. One of them gave me a personal perspective on it that I could never duplicate by reading about it.

Gil Miller of Thendara, was that person. A Navy crewman on a LCM (Landing Craft Mechanized), he was stationed in Weymouth, England. His boat was one of a group of 30 LCMs in an armada of hundred of ships that left on June 5 for the coast of France.

In the predawn light of June 6, they found themselves maneuvering for position to unload their cargo of bulldozers. When they were finally able to accomplish their mission, they were kept busy relaying wounded troops out to waiting ships for further medial care and transport back to England.

Somewhere in the chaos and confusion Gil lost his helmet overboard. A badly wounded Army captain noticed his predicament and told him, "Here, take mine; I have no further use for it." Gil was not aware until some days later when a buddy pointed it out to him that it still carried the Captain's bars insignia on it. He scraped them off in a hurry, aware that officers were preferred targets of the enemy. He recalled keeping that helmet throughout the remainder of his Navy service.

His unit was kept active on the coast of Normandy for three weeks before being recalled back to England. Only six of the original 30 boats returned.

My lack of foresight when I was younger prompted this article. I realize too late what I missed by not talking more with the “old timers.”

To make a long story short, you young people get out there and pester all of us old folks. Ask what my children and grandchildren do, “Tell us about the olden days, Grampa.”