

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

FYI

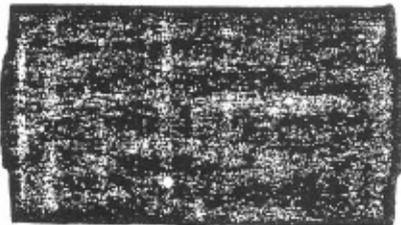
Mr. President:

I ran this by Dick Darman and he thought that page 4 of this letter might be useful to speechwriters for possible use in Europe or for radio speech from Europe. Any objections?

NOT AT ALL.

Col. Caulfield already answered Lisa so no reply from you is necessary.

If Lisa's problem is inability to afford transportation how about a ^{Kathy} 1 cent. initiative to raise money for some people like this? RR



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 10, 1984

Dear Lisa:

Thank you for your letter to President Reagan.

The President has requested the Secretary of Defense to include you and your family on the United States Invitation List for the Omaha Beach commemoration on the 6th of June.

You should receive an official invitation from the Secretary of Defense in a few days. Unfortunately, intercontinental travel and accommodations cannot be provided by the United States government. However, you will be given whatever assistance is required once you arrive in France.

Please provide me as soon as possible the names and addresses of other members of your family who desire to attend the commemoration.

If you have any questions or there is anything else I can do for you, please write or call me on (202) 456-2150.

Sincerely,



M. P. CAULFIELD
Colonel, U. S. Marine Corps
Deputy Director
White House Military Office

Ms. Lisa Zanatta Henn
1100 Elmwood Drive
Millbrae, California 94030

27
March 15, 1984

Ronald Reagan, President
United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing this letter to ask for your assistance.

I have read recently that you are planning to attend the 40th Memorial of D Day.

My father, Peter Robert Zanatta, PFC, 37th Engineer Combat Battalion, landed on the First Wave on Omaha Beach on D Day. This event was probably the most important event of his life. He always planned to go back someday. Since he is no longer living - my mother, brothers and I are planning to attend. We would like to attend not just as tourists but as representatives of the United States. I don't know if there will be any special envoys to Normandy, but if there are, we would like to be part of them. We plan to get there any way we can, but it would be nice to be part of a group of proud Americans who although may not have been there know the anguish and pride of those who faced that day.

I would appreciate it if you would forward this letter to anyone that could possibly help my family realize this dream. Please know that I am available to help you in anyway I can. I am enclosing a short story I wrote about my father that explains how deeply I feel about attending this Memorial.

I can be contacted at:

Lisa Zanatta Henn
1100 Elmwood Dr.
Millbrae, California 94403
(415) 588-6609

OR

1340 North Dearborn, Apt 16E
Chicago, Illinois 60610
(312) 440-9395

Deeded

I would appreciate any assistance you can give me.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Lisa Zanatta Henn

(415) 574-1452

"Someday, Lis, I'll go back."

"Someday, Lis, I'll go back. I'll go back and I'll see it all again. I'll see the beach, the barricades, and the graves. I'll put a flower on the graves of the guys I knew and on the grave of the unknown soldier — all the guys I fought with."

I heard my father say these words hundreds and hundreds of times for as long as I can remember. When he said them, he always looked like he was somewhere else, remembering something painful yet something he was so proud of.

My dad landed on "the beach"—First Wave, Omaha Beach, The Invasion of Normandy, June 6, 1944. The infamous D-Day. Not many people my age know or even care about this day but I always will—I can't remember when it wasn't important to me.

I know most fathers tell their kids war stories. The kids start to roll their eyes and say "oh no, not again. We've heard them all a million times." My brothers and I never said that in our house. No matter how many times we heard the stories, we never got tired of them. I tried to figure out why my dad's stories were different. The only thing I came up with is that he made you see it all, made you feel how it must have been.

My dad was 18 years old when he went into World War II. Eighteen — when I was 18, I graduated from high school and the only heavy decisions I had to make were what college I wanted to go to or what kind of car I wanted my parents to buy me. Real life and death situations. But when my dad was 18 he had no choices, he went and fought for his country and was proud to do it. He never even thought twice about it. But those three years and the Normandy Invasion would change his life forever.

I can only remember a few of the stories he told us. There was one about a castle in Europe that had a long winding staircase. I guess my dad and his division were camping there for the night. Most of the guys were my dad's age, so being kids they slid down the banister. This always struck my brothers and me so funny — that my dad slid down some banister, in some castle in some strange city in Europe during the war. It seems they found a moment to be kids in a situation that would turn them old before their time.

I also remember the story about how he had to lay for a long period of time on top of a dead soldier without moving as German troops plowed by. He told us of how he was afraid to breath because the Germans might see him; of how the smell of the dead man made him so sick. We just looked at him with awe and without really comprehending it all. Not then anyway.

There were many stories — Christmas over there when the shooting stopped for a few minutes at midnight and turkey dinners fell from the sky; of giving his food to starving children so they would stop eating garbage; of being injured and then sent right back to the front; of the beauty of Paris even with the destruction of war; of the guys he knew — who lived and fought right next to him and those who died; of the songs they sung (that he taught us to sing); and of being afraid and yet going on every day — just trying to live and make it back to the glorious place called home.

But the story to end all stories was D-Day. No single incident in my dad's life ever meant more to him and I can understand why.

As I said earlier, my dad landed on Omaha Beach — on the First Wave. Even when I was small and he would tell us about D-Day, I could tell by the look in his eyes that this was different — this was the biggest thing that had ever happened in his life.

He made me feel the fear of being on that boat waiting to land. I can smell the ocean and feel the seasickness. I can see the looks on his fellow soldiers' faces, the fear, the anguish, the uncertainty of what lay ahead. And when they landed, I can feel the strength and courage of the men who took those first steps through the tide to what must have surely looked like instant death. I don't know how or why I can feel this emptiness, this fear, or this determination, but I do. Maybe its the bond I had with my father. (I was really lucky — we never got tired of talking to each other). All I know is that it brings tears to my eyes to think about my father as a 20 year old boy having to face that beach.

When I grew older, I read everything on D-Day that I could find. As it turned out, the fact that my father lived to tell his children about it was a miracle. So many men died. I know that my father watched many of his friends be killed. I know that he must have died inside a little each time. But his explanation to me was — " You did what you had to do and you kept on going."

My dad won his share of medals. He was a good soldier and fought hard for his country. He never considered himself or what he had done as anything special. But I always did. I guess most kids put their fathers on pedestals, but I truly believe my father belonged on one. He gave up three years of his life and when he came back, everything was different. But he went on. He was just an ordinary guy, with immigrant Italian parents who never really had enough money. But he was a proud man. Proud of his heritage, proud of his country, proud that he fought in World War II and proud that he lived through D-Day.

June 6th is a special day at my family's house. When we were younger, my dad's best friend would come over, and he and my dad would just sit in our kitchen and drink and talk about old times until the early hours of the morning. They had been friends since they were eight years old and had both fought in the war.

They talked of the war of course; of their lost childhood (you can't ever be the same can you?); of the friends they had lost. Some people would say that they made too much of it or hung on to the memories too long. But how can anyone forget something like that? I never will and it all happened 12 years before I was even born.

My dad is gone now. Its been eight years. He died fighting a war against cancer. Even then the experience of D-Day was on his mind. When he was just about ready to go into surgery, I asked him how he was doing. He looked at me and said, "Lis, I feel just like I did at the Invasion of Normandy, I don't know if I'll live or die."

Maybe he made it too big a thing in his life. Maybe my family and I hang on to this part of my father's life and make it more than what it was. I've tried to make my friends understand what I feel, but they all just look at me like I'm kind of strange. Maybe if they had listened to my dad, they would feel the way I do. I guess most people my age feel that it all happened so long ago, why should they think about it.

But it was and always will be a big event. It changed everyone's lives —then and now. Everyone takes it for granted. Maybe that's what made my dad different. After he fought one of the most important battles in our nation's history, he could never take anything for granted again.

It will always affect me too. War movies, old songs, stories of the war, all of it gets to me. I know a lot of it is because my dad is gone now, and these things were so much a part of his life. But it was those events that made him the man he was — the man that came to be my father.

When I talk of Dad, I always say he landed on the First Wave at Omaha Beach. People are amazed that I even know or care about that day or event at all. But I'm just so proud of it and I always will be.

"I'm going there someday, Dad, and I'll see the beaches and the barricades and the monuments. I'll see the graves and I'll put the flowers there just like you wanted to do. I'll see the ceremonies honoring the veterans of D-Day and I'll feel all the things you made me feel through your stories and your eyes. I'll never forget what you went through, Dad, nor will I let anyone else forget — and Dad, I'll always be proud."

Lisa Zanatta Henn
March, 1984