

June 6: A Requiem for a Birthday



By Anna Von Reitz

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I was born on the twelfth anniversary of D-Day, the invasion of the Allied Armada on the beach heads of Normandy, which marked the end of the Nazi occupation of France and ultimately, the end of Hitler's Third Reich.

This event which both preceded and has foreshadowed my own life has always held special and ironic meaning for me. As I attended school twenty years later, I was still being shoved around and called names like "filthy German" even though my Father ---like many other German Americans--- served the Allied cause faithfully and honorably throughout the war.

My Uncles, Merton and Henry Schnur, two more German-Americans, also served in combat positions throughout the war. Merton was among those shivering heroes wading through the deadly surf on June 6 and went on to face the Battle of the Bulge as a radio operator--- a position known as a "living target". Because of the weight of the radio equipment, he couldn't carry a gun; he had to depend on the bravery and personal determination of other men in his unit to defend him.

Henry flew supply and combat missions as a pilot, over "the Hump" of the Himalayan Mountains.

My best friend's Father, Gerhardt Peterson, was another infantryman wading ashore on Omaha Beach, June 6, 1944.

None of these men were ever the same. In a sense, I never knew them. Whoever they were, whoever they might have been, was lost in the war.

I remember lying on my back listening to Gerhardt playing drums in the basement late at night, his steady rhythms and beats seeking to make sense of genocide.

I remember my Uncle Merton standing at his kitchen window, looking out over the beautiful flower gardens he planned and planted each year, his face drenched in tears.

I remember Henry, back riding a tractor instead of a B-52, his eyes fixed on some spot on the horizon very far from my view.

I remember my own Father doing one-armed push-ups in the middle of the night, even after he retired, still obsessed by the need to be physically fit, ready at any moment to defend my Mother and me to the death.

I never knew these men before. I only knew them afterward.

I remember them each year, especially on my birthday. I remember what they did and why they did it. And that secures me like an anchor to my purpose now.

We, in our joyous peace, have each time been granted victory and then forgotten the price we've paid.

After the Revolution, we forgot about the British Loyalists still here among us, wheedling away so that two centuries later we are still bound to pay British taxes and ensnared in British Government intrigues.

It did not occur to us, in our joyous peace, that other battles still raged after the Civil War; we didn't ask to see the official Peace Treaty. We didn't notice when the freed black slaves were seized upon as chattel. No, we didn't notice that we were seized upon ourselves.

After the Second World War, we forgot about the Nazis and their virulent beliefs, waiting like Smallpox to infect new generations. We closed our eyes and crossed our fingers and hoped that these nightmares were gone for good.

Now there are others talking about another war---Armageddon. The final war.

Let me say that there can be no end to war in the external world until we put an end to the war within ourselves. There can be no future untainted by the past until we both remember it and willfully let go of it, our lessons learned.

In some ways I love my birthday, coming at the dawn of summer, when all the world is in bloom and the Earth sighs with warmth and life. The air is always perfumed.

The grass is always soft beneath my feet. The skies are always blue.

And yet....

It's a day for a requiem, too, strangely solemn in the midst of celebration.

There are ghosts with me tonight, as there always have been, and always will be.

They stand sentry and keep the faith. Their blood cries out from the ground that all their suffering should not be in vain, and that all the venal, little men whose profits and pride have driven us to war, must be recognized for what they are and fought in different ways.

A friend of mine, a Vietnam combat vet, once got angry with me and spat, "You're just a woman!" ----and then he stopped and thought about it. We are "just" who we are, and in the end, that's all we've got and it has to be enough.

We can all look at ourselves and count what we are not. The money, the youth, the health, the education, the whole long list of things that we lack. We can all easily find excuses not to try to save this country and not to act, to stay silent, to let someone else volunteer, to be safe, to be politically correct.

We can say the Great Fraud is not our fault, not our responsibility, we didn't ask to be here at such a moment in history. We can plead ignorance. We can plead fear.

But it is June 6th---and in the fabric of time--- a great armada appears on the misty horizon, so vast that it seems unreal, and those soldiers wade ashore in the face of barbed wire and machine guns.

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