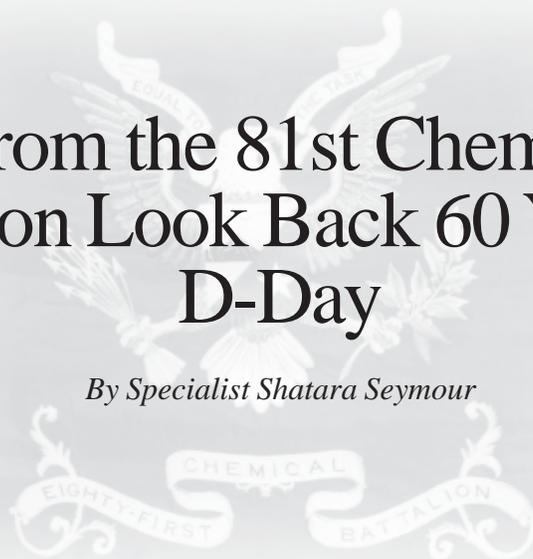


Veterans From the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion Look Back 60 Years to D-Day

By Specialist Shatara Seymour



What would this country be like if the attacks and attempts by American forces had failed on 6 June 1944—D-Day? The events and efforts of this day led to success for many around the world. This year marks the 60th anniversary of one of the most trying times of World War II. To mark this anniversary, the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion gathered at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, 3–6 June. The unit wanted to have its reunion at Fort Leonard Wood because the 81st was disbanded there after World War II.

The 81st holds the honor of firing the first mortar rounds in support of D-Day operations on Omaha Beach in Normandy, France. Of the eight distinguished service crosses given to the Chemical Corps, six were awarded

to the 81st—four for actions against the enemy on D-Day. Eight veterans and four widows, along with their children and grandchildren, attended the reunion. The US Army Chemical School and the Chemical Corps Regimental Association honored the veterans with a dining out, memorial service, K-ration lunch, tours, and a view of training (provided by the 3d Chemical Brigade). Each veteran received a reunion glass from the Chief of the Chemical Corps/Chemical School Commandant, Brigadier General Stanley H. Lillie, and a videotape of the reunion programs.

Throughout the reunion, veterans shared their memories of the day in which so many of their fellow soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice. John Martino of Greensburg, Pennsylvania, remembers that it was raining when the battalion landed on Omaha Beach, “We all put our life preservers on. My buddy right beside me was killed, and most of the war, we were scared. ...When I knew I was going [overseas to fight], my mother gave me a prayer book and a prayer rosary to take with me. I carried them throughout my Army career. I said those prayers, and God was with me. I made it through the war safely and returned home.”

For those veterans who have passed on, their loved ones continue to mark anniversary reunions in their honor. Betty Young of Charleston, West Virginia, whose husband, Walter Young, was a member of the



Don Pike, John Martino, and soldiers from the NCO Academy laying a wreath in memory of their fallen comrades

81st, feels that attending reunions is something that she is supposed to do. "It was very hard to go to Normandy and see where the men came in on Omaha Beach. I don't see how any of them lived to get on the beach, much less to spend 4 years over there and make it back home," Young said. She added that the men of today have come through when they were needed and are doing a great job. "... it makes you appreciate more what the men go through and do so we can have freedom," she said.



Widows of the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion members

Clint Longenecker of Toledo, Ohio, said that D-Day was the scariest of all, but that the times of war were not all grim. "We had a time when we were placed in an apple orchard and had an apple war. I threw an apple and hit the captain in the temple and knocked him out," Longenecker said. Though the veterans can add humor to their war stories, it is still not enough to make them want to relive those tragic events. "There is not enough money to have me do it all over again," Longenecker said, but then added, "I probably would if the country needed me to"

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Members of the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion with Brigadier General Lillie and Colonel Don Bailey, Commander of the 3d Chemical Brigade

