
Fernande Hardouin Varin Biography on D-Day

Memories of D-Day from a 16 year old girl's eyes.

I was living in Dives-Sur-Mer, (Cavalδος, Normandie, France) near the port. I was speaking with my friends when we saw the first planes passing over our houses. The night of 5 June 1944, 2300 hours we did not sleep a wink due to the bombs shell bursting everywhere. We went to our next door neighbor to get shelter. We could hear the bombs whistle over our heads. I was told if you hear the bombs whistle that meant it was passing you. We knew the Allies were getting closer and closer towards us. In the morning, my employer asked me to see if there were anyone wounded. The prettiest site to see was the morning of 6 June 1944 at 0600 hours; we were looking out at the sea from the pier in front of the Hotel Imbert at Houlgate (a small village near Dives-Sur-Mer). The sea was black from all the ships and the sky was obscured with planes. All this is a film in my memory which I will never forget, especially the joy in my heart after 4 years waiting for the Allies.

Two days later the Germans forced us out us because they were going to explode the bridges and open the water-gates from the dams to flood the area. That did not stop the Allies from advancing because we saw them later near the villages of Houlgate, Lisieux. The first allied tank I saw was when I was walking to the baker in Torquesne, it was coming from the direction of the commune of Valseme .

Due to being evacuated by the Germans, we were then living on a farm where I was told to go to the cellar to get some cider; it was then I was confronted with an Italian soldier. He was hiding in the cellar waiting to be captured by the Allies. By then, the Germans had left the area.

I remember smoking my first and last cigarette with our friends the Allies. They also gave us food and chocolate.

We finally were able to return to our home in Dives-sur-Mer. The houses were flooded out on the first floor but the Allies had built bridges with ropes and planks to walk on so all was not lost.

In 1949 I married Bernard Varin. My daughter, Claire, was born in 1950. My first son was born in 1952, and then in 1953 my husband found work in Algeria, Africa and off went. In 1955 we went back to France because the Algerians wanted their independence from France. We immigrated to Canada in 1957 seeking a better life and in 1958 my third son was born. Finally, in 1965 we immigrated, for the last time, to California where we lived and founded new lives where my children flourished. I have 5 grandchildren and 11 greatgrandchildren. My life has been eventful and full with memories that are both painful and joyous; it is the joyous that I cling to.