War Era Story Project 2012

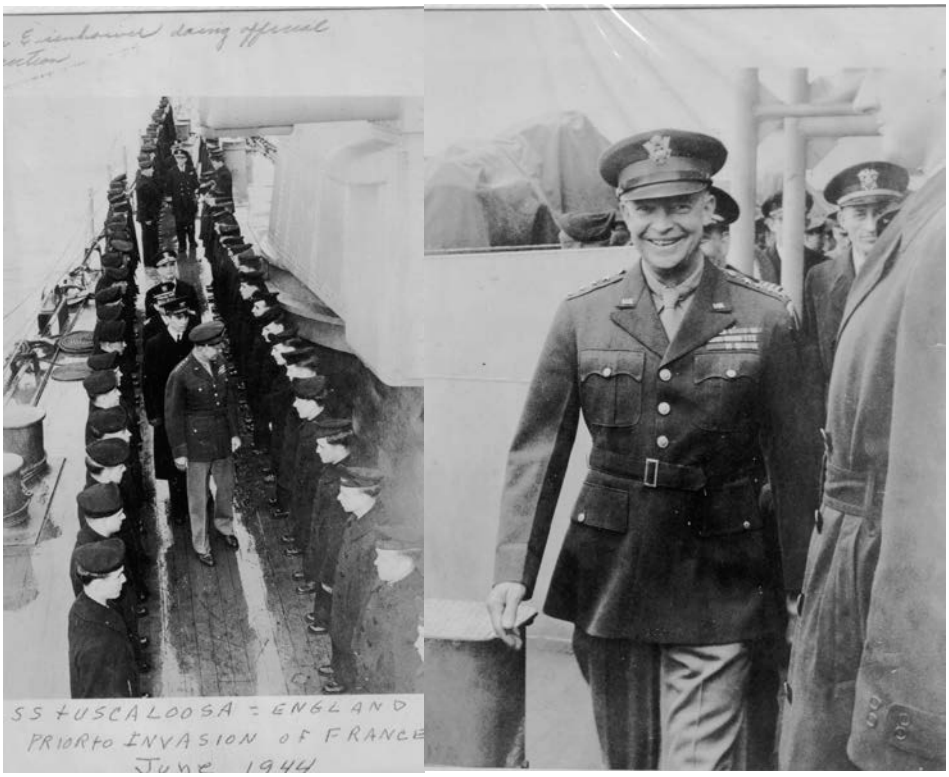
Submitted by: Robert Newell
Current home town: Washington Court House, Ohio
Age: 90

Story recorded by Susan Sears, Hospice of Fayette County

Mr. Robert Newell is a veteran of WWII, spending six years in the Navy serving the United States from 1939-1945 aboard the *USS Tuscaloosa*. Mr. Newell, 90 years of age, is a native of Ohio and currently lives in Washington Court House, Ohio with his wife. He has two sons who served in the Army, two stepsons retired from the Air Force, a granddaughter and grandson who served in the Navy, and one grandson currently serving in the Air Force.

The following is an account of the invasion of Normandy, as told by Robert Newell.

"In late May of 1944, we left the states for England. We could feel it in the air that something was up as we trained for action aboard the *USS Tuscaloosa*. All guns aboard ship were ready for action as the men had trained for what was ahead of us. The Invasion of Normandy was about to begin. As we were waiting to do our part, we were visited by General Eisenhower. Our Captain introduced him over the loud speaker. There was a moment of silence. Then, General Eisenhower said, 'Let's have prayer.' He then led the men in a word of prayer."



General Eisenhower was inspecting all of the troops before the big invasion of the Normandy Beaches. Mr. Newell reports that those three words, “let’s have prayer,” have stuck with him over these many years. According to Mr. Newell, General Eisenhower was frank with the crew as to what was about to happen, that many lives were at stake, the job ahead would not be easy. General Eisenhower then inspected the troops.

Mr. Newell recounts one very poignant story as the invasion begins. Hanging on the wall over his bed is a picture frame with a small remnant of a parachute line and a hand-written story inside. Mr. Newell recalls:

“All at once some German 88s near the beach, under some landing dock, opened fire on us. Shell splashes were coming closer with each salvo. We quickly loaded our small boats aboard, raised the anchor and moved farther out to sea. A small Air Force plane was dispatched to our unit. The pilot provided a smoke screen in front of our vessel. The shelling stopped immediately. The pilot was then shot down by the Germans. The Captain sent a crew out to rescue the pilot. One of our doctors with a boat crew brought the pilot on board. He was dead. He was unable to parachute out of the plane because he was flying low at about 500 feet above the beach. The ship commander ordered that his parachute line be cut in small pieces and distributed to each crew member as a remembrance of the life given during this battle. The pilot was wrapped in an American Flag and placed in the ships freezer, remaining there until the pilot was brought home.”

Mr. Newell never knew the name of the pilot that gave his life for the crew and the United States that day.

The next journey was back to England to pick up supplies, ammunition and fuel. The ship then headed to the Mediterranean, sailing to Palermo, Sicily, for an invasion, lending fire support to the beach for the landing personnel. Their next tour of duty was the Pacific, destination unknown. The crew was granted some R&R at Pearl Harbor. Mr. Newell picks up the story again:

“We went ashore at Guam. The Captain announced as we boarded the ship that the next stop would be Iwo Jima. The job was to soften the islands so the Marines could land, take the island, and make emergency repairs for crippled B-29s. We did not encounter any Japanese aircraft at this time. We saw two Red Cross hospital ships sail out for the United States. We sailed again, this time to Okinawa. The marines were going to invade this island. It was during this trip we heard the news that the atomic bomb had been dropped in Hiroshima. This tour of duty was 91 days long as we volleyed shells where directed by our scout planes. The *Tuscaloosa* was attacked by Japanese suicide air planes. The battleship *Nevada* took a hit, setting it on fire. Later, we were informed that the Japanese were out of pilots, fuel and planes. We celebrated by using our remaining ammunition for practice, the war had ended”.

Mr. Newell lived the motto, “join the Navy and see the world”. He proudly displays on his walls the pictures of the *USS Tuscaloosa*, the picture frame with the parachute line and the seven medals he earned while serving aboard the ship. The medals are the Navy Good Conduct Medal, American Defense Serve Medal, European African Middle Easter Campaign Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign and the

Philippine Liberation Medal. In September of 2000, Mr. Newell was awarded the Certificate of Congressional Recognition for service during the Battle of Normandy.