

Honorable Mention
Redwood Writers 2015 Non-Fiction Contest
"OMAHA BEACH"
Nathaniel Robert Winters

The sea was an ugly shade of green, tossing the enormous fleet of ships like toys in the bathtub of a boy having a temper tantrum. Leo Winetzky was at home in the surging swells as he maneuvered his landing craft below the transport's netting.

The man had been driving boats since as an early teen, during Prohibition, he ferried booze across the Detroit River at night.

A year earlier at the invasion of North Africa he boated troops to Casablanca where the Vichy French waved the white flag shortly after the US Navy opened fire.

Assigned to the destroyer escort, USS Patterson, he became a well-seasoned combat veteran. On convoy duty he helped his ship fight off enemy submarines and he shot down attacking Nazi bombers.

The invasion of Normandy had been put off a day because of stormy weather, but the next night, the ships sailed from Britain in the churning North Sea, on their date with destiny.

It was June 6, 1944 when he tossed a line from his landing craft to the sailor on the transport, which was quickly secured, holding the boat against the big ship's hull. Twenty-four seasick soldiers climbed down the netting and into his bouncing boat as an awesome naval barrage

continued. Clouds were dissipating and as far as he could see, ships of all types and sizes were lined up behind his boat. Smoke and shells filled the air and exploded on the French shore.

He turned the vessel toward that beach which had been given the code name Omaha. A long line of landing crafts joined him, the first wave. Thousands of Americans were there to begin to take France back from the occupying Nazi hordes.

The seasoned German army was waiting for them behind Hitler's sea wall. Had the Naval barrage softened the defenses enough, Leo wondered anxiously? The answer came suddenly and shockingly. Machine gun bullets pinged off the craft's steel as they neared the shore. The boat next to him blasted into a fiery mess.

At the beach he dropped the gate. Water and bullets splashed in. Twenty-two of twenty-four splashed out. Leo literally kicked the butt of the last two and moved them out. Choice was not an option. They went to death and dismemberment.

The gate came up as Leo gunned the engine in reverse and watched the carnage in front of his eyes. His boat moved away and turned to get the next wave of soldiers. Alone, he let the tears fall, unashamed. They will never get off that beach he thought.

Heading back to the fleet he watched as two destroyers headed towards him, towards the dangerous shallow water. As they passed him, he heard the guns open fire battering Hitler's wall.

When he arrived back at the transport he learned those two brave ships opened a hole. The survivors poured through, headed inland towards victory.

He brought the next wave of soldiers to the beach, to the quiet and bloody Omaha Beach. He lowered the gate and twenty-four men simply walked off into the red tinged tide and onto the shore.

Leo had a new assignment. Help pick the dead and dismembered out of the waves.

The nightmare of that victory would follow him for all of the fifty years he lived after D-day, until he joined the ghosts of the bodies that lay under the crosses and the stars at a beach in France, code named, Omaha.