

World War II POW Survivor Robert Ryan Reflects On 75th Anniversary Of D-Day

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - Legendary Alton attorney Robert Ryan today reflected on June 6, 1944, also known as D-Day.

Ryan, now 99 years old, had an interesting perspective on that historic day, as he was a prisoner in a Nazi prison camp. Ryan is a Marquette graduate and entered the U.S.

Army Air Corps at age 19. When he came back home, he returned to school and graduated with a law degree from St. Louis University.

Later in the day of the D-Day invasion on June 6, 1944, Ryan said he joined several other Allied prisoners for a gathering inside the prison camp.

“Some of the German officers called us together and stepped out and said the invasion had begun and that the slaughter of Allied troops was terrible,” Ryan said. “I thought to myself that day, ‘We will be here for another 10 years.’ I was devastated that day, it was a very depressing day.”

Ryan also said he and the other prisoners were greatly impacted by the thought of the loss of American lives in the invasion.

D-Day was a date of an airborne assault into Normandy, as part of the D-Day allied invasion of Europe, and was the largest use of airborne troops up to that time. Numbering more than 13,000 men, paratroopers were flown to land at the beach and an additional 4,000 men, consisting of glider infantry with supporting weapons, arrived later on D-Day. The estimated Allied D-Day fatalities ranged from 5,000-12,000. German casualties were estimated at 4,000-9,000.

Ryan and his other fellow prisoners were finally liberated on April 29, 1945, when led by General George Patton, U.S. troops crashed into the Nazi prison. Ryan was captured after he parachuted once his plane was shot down in May 1944. Patton, unfortunately, died after a blood clot in his heart after suffering injuries to his head and spine in a car accident in Germany in December 1945. Ryan, however, is forever grateful to Gen. Patton and his troops for what they did to liberate the prison.

Ryan also said there is no way to even describe what would have happened to the world if the Allies had not prevailed in World War II.

“There was elation and euphoria, and to see the Nazi flag come down and the American flag go up, it was beautiful - there were a lot of cheers and tears,” he said.

Robert turns 100 years old on Sept. 23, 2023, and [Riverbender.com](https://www.riverbender.com) plans to visit with him again on that historic birthday. He is going strong each day in the Riverbender Building and comes to work every day in his patented suit and tie and still takes care of his clients' needs.

In regard to his reflection on the historic 75th anniversary of D-Day, Ryan described those who participated on the Allied front in that battle as “brave beyond measure.”

“They knew they were walking into hell,” he said. “There is no way to imagine what that must have been like.”