

# Catholic Courier

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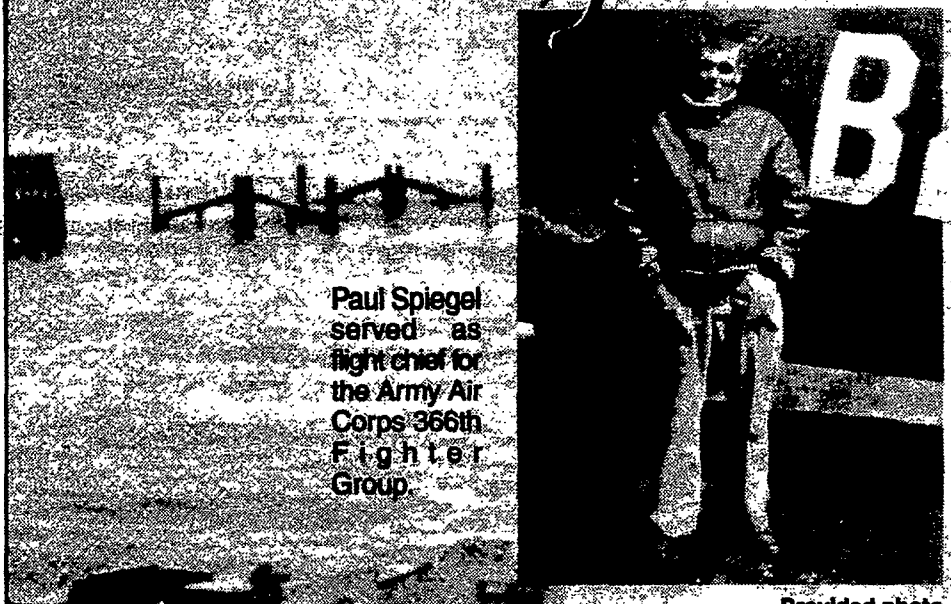


Marauders of Ninth Air Force provided cover for ground forces in Normandy.



Photograph of action at Omaha Beach by Robert Capa of Life Magazine and Magnum.

## D-Day: 'It had to be done'



Paul Spiegel served as flight chief for the Army Air Corps 366th Fighter Group.

Provided photo

### Fifty years afterward, veterans look back on key Allied invasion

By Mike Latona, Staff writer

John Sdoia recalls far too many men who never made it to D-Day's first anniversary, much less its 50th.

"The kids were marching to the front, to the tune of the Notre Dame fight song," the 78-year-old Sdoia remarked with a sad chuckle.

"Half of them never made it back."

Sdoia, who was responsible for checking food and supplies on a U.S. Army ship, was off the coast of Utah Beach when the historic Normandy invasion began on June 6, 1944.

"We were scared to hell," remarked the 78-year-old Sdoia, a parishioner at St. Andrew's Church in Rochester. He served in the Army's 300th Port Company, which was attached to the First Engineer Special Brigade.

Frank Momano, who grew up in the same eastside Rochester neighborhood as Sdoia, also belonged to the First Engineer Special Brigade.

"We had some infantry with us. I'm sure they didn't get past the second or third day, because their job was when they got on shore, to keep going," remarked Momano, 69, a parishioner at Church of Christ the King in Irondequoit.

Unlike Sdoia, Momano does not recall his comrades boisterously singing songs.

"If they were saying anything at all, they were praying to God," he said.

Momano, who served as a hatch foreman on his ship, set foot on Utah Beach one day after the invasion began.

"There were a lot of bodies around, and it wasn't a nice thing for a 19-year-old to see," he acknowledged.

Paul Spiegel arrived at Utah Beach on June 16. A flight chief for the Army Air Corp's 366th fighter group, he, too, was acutely aware of the battle's severe death toll.

"We had 27 original pilots, and they were the best. But only 12 of

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