

COLORADO WORLD WAR II VETERAN

"They knew they had to win at all costs"

Indergand enlisted in Army at 19, landed in Normandy weeks after invasion

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CENTENNIAL» John Indergand was 19 when he joined the Army in March 1943, some 15 months after the nation entered World War II.

"I was very motivated to join," the 99-year-old veteran recalled in an interview before today's 80th anniversary of D-Day. "Defeating Nazi Germany was the most important thing anyone in the world could do."

After completing basic training, Indergand — a rifleman and E-4 corporal — arrived in Normandy, France, in July 1944, several weeks after Allied forces invaded German-occupied France on June 6 in the massive air and sea assault.

More than 150,000 U.S., British and Canadian troops landed on beaches code-named Gold, Juno, Utah, Omaha and Sword, accompanied by an airborne assault over Normandy.

More than 4,000 Allied troops were killed during the invasion, according to records from the National D-Day Memorial Project.

Recognized as the greatest amphibious landing in history, D-Day paved the way for the Allied forces to liberate France and ultimately defeat Adolf Hitler's Germany.

For World War II veterans, though, such victories still can bring up complicated emotions.

"D-Day is a tremendous complex of responses," Indergand said. "It'd be like if you had a family, and there were eight in your family, and four of you were living



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World War II veteran John Indergand poses for a portrait outside of MorningStar Assisted Living and Memory Care at Jordan in Centennial on Monday. Indergand arrived in Normandy, France, a few weeks after D-Day. He has been honored with medals, including a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star.

and four of you were dead, you'd have tremendous relief and satisfaction that four of you were alive — but you'd feel terrible about the other four.

"Almost all victory days are mixed," he added. "They're wonderful, and they're a deadly mixture, too — all at the same time."

Indergand spent a year in the 80th Infantry and the 14th Armored Division in the European Theater of Operations, according to his Separation Qualification Record, attending intelligence briefings and preparing for battle in France.

"I was very impressed with how well the people in Normandy lived," Indergand said. "I was impressed with their toughness and staying power. They had endured a tremendous amount of conflict right in their backyard."

The U.S. Army and Allied forces used tanks, artillery and machine guns to force the Nazis to retreat during battle, Indergand said.

"I felt closed in and cut off from the world, but I also felt that the Army and our intention of filling the world with American soldiers, which seemed to be the primary idea of both Dwight Eisenhower and Franklin Roosevelt, was a very good approach to war," he added.

"The more battles you fight, the more battles you can win."

In September 1944, Indergand suffered his first battle wound.

"We entered a French village that intelligence said was empty, but we found German troops that were still leaving," Indergand said. "We met weak resistance, but there were still

lots of bullets flying around. I was shot in the left leg, but it was a minor wound."

He spent a week in a field hospital and returned to full duty.

Indergand was wounded a second time in March 1945 just outside of Paris.

"I was wounded by the explosion of an artillery shell nearby, it was a shrapnel wound in my left thigh that caused left sciatic nerve damage," he said.

Indergand was evacuated to a field hospital in England before returning to the U.S., where he was treated at Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco. That's where he met his future wife, a Jewish woman who emigrated to the U.S. in 1939 after Nazi Germany annexed her home in Vienna, Austria.

"Surgery that was experimental at the time was per-

formed, allowing me to recover," he said, adding that it took him almost three years, with two years of outpatient treatment, to recover from the nerve damage and learn how to walk again.

After completing treatment in 1948, Indergand was discharged from the Army.

"I thought his service was amazing," Bob Indergand, John's 70-year-old son, who also lives in metro Denver, said. "I have a lot of respect for that. Imagine how scary that is."

Indergand received three medals for his service: a Bronze Star for achievement in active ground combat, a Purple Heart with an oak leaf cluster for his two injuries and a Combat Infantry Badge, recognizing that the infantryman "continuously operated under

the worst conditions," he said.

He was awarded the Purple Heart and Combat Infantry Badge in 1944 after his first wound. After being wounded a second time in 1945, Indergand said he was told they were out of oak leaf clusters, which soldiers who already have Purple Hearts receive for subsequent injuries. He said he was given a piece of paper he could redeem for the award, although he later lost that.

Nearly 70 years passed before Indergand received the Bronze Star and oak leaf cluster he was promised.

At a luncheon in 2013, U.S. Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Calif., overheard Indergand discussing the missing awards. Eshoo spoke to Indergand and collected his service number and documentation and, in 2014, the veteran finally received the oak leaf cluster and Bronze Star.

"I was very proud to get them," Indergand said. "The medals probably meant more to me when I got them so late than they would have at the time. At the time, everybody was getting medals for largely good things that were not terribly relevant. I think I appreciated them more."

Indergand is one of 1,910 veterans of World War II living in Colorado as of last year, out of 119,550 living American World War II veterans, according to the New Orleans National WWII Museum. About 16 million American men and women served in the war.

On Friday, one day after the 80th anniversary of D-Day, Indergand will turn 100.

"The 80th anniversary of D-Day means everything," Indergand said. "Winning World War II was essential to the future. The people who fought wanted to be there and they knew they had to win at all costs."