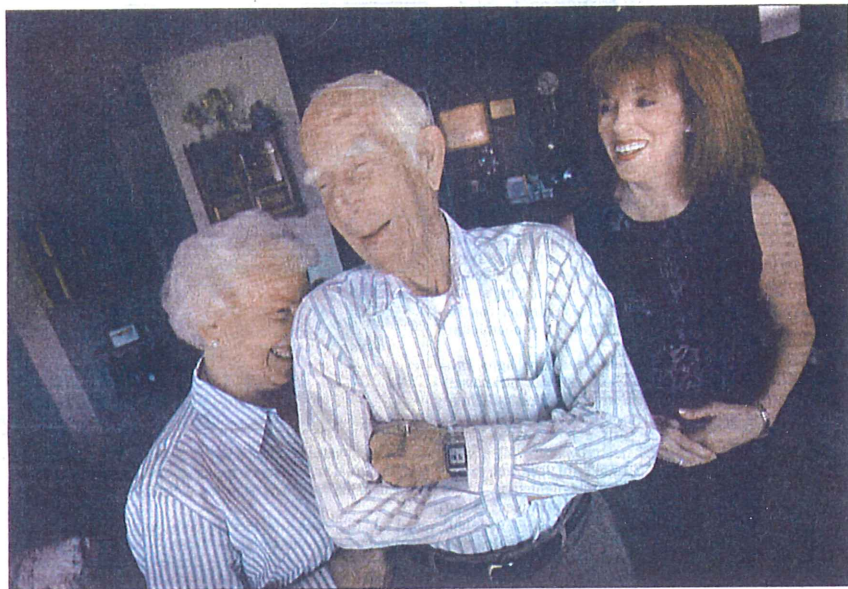


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DOCUMENTARY: FILMMAKER CAPTURES RUBIDOUX COUPLE'S WWII EXPERIENCES



KURT MILLER/THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Jim Marshall shares a moment with wife Gen'e, left, and Emmy Award-nominated documentarian Loren Stephens at the Marshall home in Rubidoux. Stephens films "ordinary heroes" and has completed one on Jim Marshall, whose birthday is on Veterans Day.

WARTIME MEMOIR

U.S. Army medic and Welsh factory girl met before D-Day

BY JENNIFER DEAN
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

It's June 6, 1944. Jim Marshall, an officer of the 5th Engineers Special Brigade, hangs from a ladder off the side of a battleship. It's dark and he is one of thousands of soldiers quietly making their way to Omaha Beach on D-Day.

Soon he is wading through floating debris of battle: barbed wire, gas masks, cigarettes and dismembered bodies. The Army medic stays on the beach for two days to help the wounded and dying.

"When we got to the beach, the Germans were waiting," Marshall said. "We were sitting ducks."

Marshall, who celebrates his 88th birthday on Veterans Day on Tuesday, returned home with his Welsh bride, Gen'e, and they raised six children. His 26 years of military service include World War II and Vietnam.



"The Welsh were only too glad to have us there," Marshall said of his unit's arrival in Wales. "They had lost a lot of their guys."

Now living in Rubidoux, the Marshalls have shared their life stories with Emmy-nominated documentary filmmaker Loren Stephens, who is turning it into a memoir the family will pass down for generations.

"I was playing tennis the day they bombed Pearl Harbor," Jim said. "I got called up

in the draft and was told to report to the train station in Canton, Ohio."

Marshall was qualified to join the Army Medical Corps and within a year reached the rank of sergeant.

He trained in Kentucky, Florida and New Jersey. Then he boarded a ship for England.

"Naturally, everybody was seasick," Marshall said. "We were scared with all the submarine action going on, but there were a lot of guardian ships close by."

Eventually they put into port at Cardiff, England. They traveled by night in blackout conditions to avoid attack, making their way to the outskirts of Swansea in Wales.

"The Welsh were only too glad to have us there," Marshall said. "They had lost a lot of their guys. Because of the port, it was a ripe target for bombing. They'd come over and bomb the hell out of the place ... portions of buildings downtown were gone."

Marshall would meet his future wife in Swansea.

Gen'e Marshall's family had to flee the town during bombings.

"We had a cottage in the country and had to move there to get away from the bombings," Marshall said.

SEE MEMOIR/AB

MEMOIR

bombing," Gen'e Marshall said. She took the bus into town where she worked as a metallurgist in a factory, analyzing metals that went into shells.

"All the men had been drafted, so they were making women do the men's jobs," she said. "I was 17½ at the time. The people at the factory would hold a dance every Saturday night."

"We were scared to death ... but then we felt encouraged when we heard this big ship firing on the beach. It was the battleship Texas. We thought, 'Boy that Texas is going to wipe out the Germans before we get there.'"

JIM MARSHALL ON D-DAY AT OMAHA BEACH

They saw each other a few more times, including one night when Jim Marshall had the commander's Jeep and they disguised Gen'e as an officer to sneak past the military police. At the end of three day's courtship, he asked her to marry him. She said yes, and shortly after, he was sent away.

It was March, 1944, and the troops were preparing for D-Day.

"We had false alarms twice. We got on the ships, and then they'd debark us," Jim Marshall said. Finally, the ships were loaded and they left for Normandy.

"Most of us were really scared," he said. "There was this first sergeant—a high rank in the Army in those days. He was more military than the officers. He calmed us down."

When they arrived, it was dark. They made their way down to the landing craft and to the Germans waiting on the beach.

"We were scared to death ... but then we felt encouraged when we heard this big ship firing on the beach," he said. "It was the battleship Texas. We thought, 'Boy that Texas is going to wipe out the Germans before we get there.'"

There wasn't much that could be done for most of the wounded, Jim Marshall said.

"Some you could take back to the ship, but not too many. The biggest thing to do was give them a shot of morphine. You'd give them a shot ... put a bandage or sling on if you could. The beach was loaded with morphine 'empties' afterward."

He and another soldier hid behind an upended tank until it was peppered with small arms fire. They kept moving until air support arrived and they were able to get off the beach.

AFTER OMAHA

Jim Marshall was soon on the move through France.

"I was sorry for the French," he said. "Their cows were all blown to hell. If it wasn't a human body, it was a corpse of a horse or animal."

"When things were calmer. We set up these big oval tents for the wounded," Jim Marshall said. "They'd come in from all over. You could get more surgeons in there."

Because there was only so much that could be done in field conditions, amputation was often the best solution, he said.

"At one end of the tent there were a bunch of arms and legs," he said. "It was so sickening." Eventually he ended up in Paris.

"They were whoopin' it up in Paris," Jim said. "But there were still a lot of Germans around. They had snipers. You didn't want to be standing in front of an open window."

About 14 months had passed since he had last seen Gen'e, but they had exchanged letters. While in Paris, he bought her a prayer book at a thrift shop, which he would later give to her.

The war was over with Germany, but the soldiers thought they would soon be sent to Japan. Jim had a three day leave and he thought, "This is my

chance."

He took a civilian ship to Wales and made his way to Swansea. They were soon married. It was June 9, 1945.

Soon after, Jim Marshall got the word he would not be going to Japan. He was sent back to the U.S. in August and Gen'e arrived six months later.

"A lot of girls in Swansea married Americans," Gen'e Marshall said. "We were called GI brides. We were shipped aboard the ocean liner SS United States to New York, but he didn't meet me ... the husbands weren't allowed to meet the wives in New York. I was put on a train to Canton, Ohio."

The beginning wasn't easy. By the first anniversary of their marriage, Gen'e Marshall would be on a plane back to Wales and divorce papers were drawn. Jim Marshall found it difficult transition into normal life.

Gen'e Marshall came back and, soon after, Jim Marshall began 26 years of service in the Air Force. They lived in 20 places over a 26-year period, from Guam, where they survived a typhoon, to a tiny one-bedroom cabin in Fairbanks, Alaska.

His last tour of duty was in Vietnam at age 50. He was stationed at March Air Force Base at the time. He was sent from there to Da Nang, where he worked on a base and traveled to a place soldiers called "monkey mountain."

"There were monkeys everywhere," Jim said. "You couldn't wear a wrist watch or they'd steal it off you."

Much of the foliage he traveled through had been treated with Agent Orange.

"I think that's the reason for the eye problems I've had since then," he said.

After Vietnam, Jim retired with a Bronze Star Medal for his service.

He managed a chain of convenience stores for a few years, but when he was asked to make a move with the company, he said, "No way."

The Marshalls had bought a home in Rubidoux and decided they were going to stay. He took a job with the U.S. Postal Service and spent the next 16 years delivering mail.

At age 68, he retired from the postal service. The agency gave him with a plaque thanking him for 46 years of service, which included all his military time.

FAMILY MEMOIR

"So, we've got two heroes here," said Stephens, the filmmaker, of Jim and Gen'e Marshall.

Stephens conducted 11 interviews with the Marshalls, each about two hours long.

"I believe everyone has a story to tell," she said.

Stephens is in the process of completing their memoir, which will be titled "The Chief Master Sergeant and His Swansea Bride."

"It's been a great experience, meeting people with their kind of love and devotion," she said of the Marshalls. "Gen'e earned her stripes right next to Jim."

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ONLINE

Learn more about Loren Stephens' Write Wisdom Inc. at www.writewisdom.com

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GEN'E MARSHALL ON HER WARTIME BRIDE EXPERIENCE