
EXTRA! EXTRA!

DELIVERING THE PAPER ON D-DAY

WHI IMAGE ID 54821



Newspapers always played a central role in my life. As kids, we sprang to our feet at the thud of the *Racine Journal-Times* landing on the front porch. Whoever brought in the paper doled out the individual sheets so my two younger brothers and I could read sprawled on the living room floor while my mother and older sister did the same sitting in our comfortable living room chairs. My older brother Jim, serving in the army overseas, had favored the dining room table.

Central to our newspaper reading was the paperboy, who delivered the paper every day except Sunday and came to the house every Thursday afternoon to collect the weekly subscription fee. We kids all knew the paperboy and looked up to him. Secretly, we all aspired to become carriers when we were older. It was the early 1940s, and these jobs offered a start in life for young boys whose early years had been scarred by the Great Depression.

To qualify for the job, you had to be at least fourteen years old. If you were under sixteen, you were required to have a state-issued work permit. Above all, you had to be a responsible person—one who could do the job and do it well. It was obvious that Harry Rarick, the *RJT* circulation manager, was selective in hiring teenage boys to deliver the papers. Several of my friends who desperately wanted carrier jobs applied regularly but were never hired. Knowing their habits, I understood why.

I applied for a job shortly after my fourteenth birthday. In early 1943, a nearby route opened up. To my delight, I was chosen to fill it. Several months later, the route that included our street became available, and I was able to transfer to it.

I don't recall any special orientation for newly hired carrier boys. I suspect that Harry Rarick gave me detailed instructions when he signed me on, including such directives as delivering the afternoon papers as soon as possible after picking them up, keeping accurate records of the names and addresses of subscribers, recording the weekly payments received from subscribers, and every Friday afternoon going downtown to the newspaper office to turn in the newspaper's share of the subscription price. I also received an account book to keep my subscriber records, along with a new bright orange newspaper bag stamped with big bold black letters: THE RACINE JOURNAL-TIMES.

New carriers learned the ropes by spending a day or two shadowing their predecessors. That was when you found out exactly where people expected to find their delivered newspapers. You picked up important information about your customers, such as their generosity or lack thereof, their propensity to complain, and their procrastination in paying you each week. If the retiring carrier hadn't already taken another job, you accompanied him on his Thursday collection rounds and were introduced to your customers.

Left: For decades, serving as a newspaper carrier was a highly sought-after job. In the mid-1940s, photographer Arthur Vinje took a series of photos featuring carriers like this one, name unknown, for the *Wisconsin State Journal*.

Being a paperboy was a highly desirable job. It provided spending money to teens in an age long before parents thought much about weekly allowances. That was certainly the case with my parents, who seemed to have never heard of allowances. Once you became a paperboy, you no longer had to search out odd jobs mowing lawns, shoveling snow, or weeding people's gardens to bring in a dime or sometimes a quarter. Vivid memories of the Great Depression and the uncertainty of the ongoing war caused people in the 1940s to watch their finances carefully.

As a paperboy, you quickly learned many skills that proved to be of great value later on. Most parents impressed on their sons—mine certainly did—what kind of behavior was expected of paperboys: being courteous to your customers, being conscientious about collecting money from your customers, and being persistent with customers whose payments were past due. Perhaps the most difficult part was that we had to make it clear that nonpayment for more than two weeks would mean a canceled subscription.

We paperboys took great pride in our bright orange *RJT* newspaper bags. The real mark of distinction, however, was the coin dispensers we ordered from the newspaper. These shiny, silver-plated gadgets, which you snapped on over your belt, had four cylindrical tubes to accommodate pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters. As you collected money from your customers, you inserted the coins you received into their appropriate slots. To give change, you simply pressed the appropriate dispenser lever as many times as needed.

The day's work began when our group of a half-dozen paperboys gathered around 4:00 p.m. at our newspaper drop-off in front of Jefferson Elementary School on West Sixth Street. When the speeding, orange *RJT* delivery truck reached us, it came to a quick stop. The fellow in the passenger seat hopped out, opened the back door of the panel truck, and tossed our newspaper bundles, labeled by route number, onto the sidewalk. He jumped back into the truck and sped off to the next stop. We picked up our bundles of newspapers, untied them and counted the papers, and then stuffed the papers into our newspaper bags.

We then headed off to our delivery routes, rolling our newspapers tightly so we could throw them accurately onto people's front porches. The process is even more complicated to describe than tying a necktie. Suffice it to say, the point was to create a compact missile that could be thrown easily and accurately.

The next challenge was to lob the rolled newspaper to a targeted spot on each customer's doorstep. For people who lived in upstairs flats—and there were many of them—papers had to be placed inside entrance doors on the front, side, or back of the house. Rainy days required that we take special care to ensure that the delivered papers would stay dry. Cold,



Collecting money and keeping accurate records were important parts of the job for newspaper carriers.

snowy days posed a different problem: keeping your hands warm enough to fold the papers and wearing loose enough clothing so you could throw the papers accurately. Delivering my eighty to ninety newspapers usually took about a half-hour in the summer and forty-five minutes to an hour in winter.

While waiting for the delivery truck to arrive, we paperboys always found ways to amuse ourselves. We talked about all kinds of things, horsed around with one another, played marbles on the school ground, organized friendly snowball fights, and engaged in typical teenage bragging about all kinds of preposterous activities and accomplishments. None of us knew enough about sex to make that a viable topic of conversation.

One special joy I remember could occur only in Racine. On Friday afternoons the delivery truck usually arrived late, sometimes after 4:30, perhaps because the printing was delayed long enough to include the week's stock quotations. By then we had already completed most of our subscriber collections for the week. I think we received five cents of the twenty-five-cent weekly subscription price. Feeling prosperous and deserving of a special treat, we would saunter across West Sixth Street to Jensen's Bakery. Typically, each of us would buy a small, pecan-filled kringle, a delicious Danish pastry. We then headed back across the street to the school steps, where we hung out, consuming our kringles in a matter of minutes. I think we paid ten cents for a twelve-ounce half kringle; a full-sized kringle cost twenty cents, but that was more than any of us could eat at one sitting. How delicious those kringles were! Although we ingested a lot of sugar, we burned it off quickly as we made our delivery rounds.

The high point of the year for every paperboy came on Christmas Day. The *RJT* provided us with calendars, one for each subscriber. We were to distribute them to our customers as a way of thanking them. More importantly, it was an opportunity for them to thank us with something more valuable than words—namely, cash. I recall going from door to door, knocking, and, when the door opened, politely wishing the customer a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. While doing so, I pulled a calendar out of my delivery bag and handed it to the customer. People knew the routine, which played out something like this: “Come in, it’s so cold out there. Oh, thanks so much for the calendar. Wait here just a moment.” They soon returned and pressed some coins into my hand.

You thanked them but didn’t dare look to see how much they had given you; that would have seemed crass. But once you were out of the house and heading down the sidewalk, you took a quick glance at the coins. It was rare for subscribers to give you nothing at all. It was equally rare for them to give you a dollar bill. Most commonly, you received some coins, ranging from a nickel or a dime to a half-dollar. When you got home, you eagerly counted your “take.” I remember receiving twenty dollars in Christmas tips that first year, an average of about twenty-five cents per subscriber or the equivalent of the weekly subscription price. For a fourteen-year-old in 1943, this was a real bonanza.



The *RJT* delivery truck dropped off our newspaper bundles as usual on a Monday afternoon in early April of 1944. To our surprise, we found that each bundle included a notice from Harry Rarick commanding us to meet at 6:30 that Friday night in the downtown newspaper office. Packing our papers into our newspaper bags there on the steps of Jefferson Elementary School, we puzzled about the likely reason for the meeting. Nobody had the slightest clue; nor could anybody recall any similar meeting in the past.

Friday night arrived. We trekked to the downtown newspaper office. One by one, we turned over the money we had collected for the newspapers we’d received that week. The money was collected by the intimidating, red-faced, chain-smoking Hank Larson, who was the stereotypical newspaper guy we all knew from the movies. After that, the hundred or so paperboys squeezed into an adjacent room, where Harry Rarick called us to order. We still had no idea what he might say.

“We want to alert you to the likelihood of a big news story in the next couple of months,” he began. “We plan to publish ‘Extra’ editions of the newspaper that day. We will need your help delivering these papers. When the time comes, a phone call will inform you when to report to your newspaper



Each Christmas, newsboys delivered Christmas calendars to their customers.

drop-off location to pick up your papers. What you will then do is deliver a paper to each of your customers. As you walk your route, from time to time you should yell, ‘Extra! Extra!’ In addition, call out the headline on the Extra, whatever it might be. We hope people will be attracted by your calls and rush for their newspapers to read the news.”

That was it. As we were dismissed, Rarick told us not to say anything about what was discussed at the meeting. Most of us followed that instruction, having been indoctrinated in World War II secrecy protocols with cautionary phrases such as “Loose lips sink ships” and “Silence is security.” As if there were German and Japanese spies lurking everywhere, listening to us talk while we waited for the *RJT* delivery truck! I think we all had some inkling that the Allied armies would be invading France to create a Second Front, but I don’t think any of us put two and two together.

On June 6, 1944, it began. Early that morning, at about 4:30, our telephone rang and a voice told me to report immediately to my newspaper pickup spot. I dressed quickly, ate my bowl of Wheaties, and ran the two blocks to Jefferson School. A couple of fellow paperboys were already there, and a few more arrived breathlessly minutes later. We opened our newspaper bundles and saw the headline. Set below “EXTRA!” and the newspaper banner, the three-inch-high letters proclaimed: “ALLIES LAND IN FRANCE.” Below that, in the center four columns, was a photo of infantrymen rushing forward through the surf, rifles held high, with the word “INVASION” superimposed across the top.

So, the long-awaited, much-discussed Second Front had finally opened. What electrifying news after two-and-a-half years of war! As we loaded our papers into our orange carrier bags, we talked briefly about how to proceed. We all figured we could make our deliveries and still get to school on time that

4th EXTRA

THE RACINE JOURNAL-TIMES

VOL. 88, NO. 133.

Tel. Jackson 400

RACINE, WIS., TUESDAY MORNING, JUNE 6, 1944.

United Press — Associated Press

6 PAGES—5 CENTS

INVADERS SLASH INLAND

3rd EXTRA

THE RACINE JOURNAL-TIMES

VOL. 88, NO. 133.

Tel. Jackson 400

RACINE, WIS., TUESDAY MORNING, JUNE 6, 1944.

United Press — Associated Press

6 PAGES—5 CENTS

BEACH-HEAD IS SEIZED

Picked
Spearhead
On Front

WASHINGTON—(AP)—A
troupe, picked south
the U. S. army made
attack on German forces
ing out positions and
of the rapid
will, the war department
day.
Putting to sea
in North Africa, Sicily
the assault units hit the
der cover of heavy
artillery fire.
These units, assault
men, were given special
to spearhead the assault.
The war department

2nd EXTRA

THE RACINE JOURNAL-TIMES

VOL. 88, NO. 133.

Tel. Jackson 400

RACINE, WIS., TUESDAY MORNING, JUNE 6, 1944.

United Press — Associated Press

BIG INVASION LAUNCHED

Picked Infantrymen No Enemy Fire

EXTRA!

THE RACINE JOURNAL-TIMES

VOL. 88, NO. 132.

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RACINE, WIS., TUESDAY MORNING, JUNE 6, 1944.

United Press — Associated Press

6 PAGES—5 CENTS

ALLIES LAND IN FRANCE

France Awakens
To Battle Shouts
Of Allied Friends

By CARL C. CANNON
Associated Press Foreign Staff
The long trail of blood and
hardship winding through nearly
five years of war from Warsaw
and Dunkerque turned toward
Paris again today with the long-
planned Allied invasion of the
shores of France.
The avenging force, the greatest
military expedition in this or

Philippe Petain, 84-year-old hero
of Verdun, suddenly announced, "I
surrender today. It is necessary to stop
the fighting."
He had asked the government, he
said, as one soldier to another to
grant an armistice with honor. He
still did not suspect the depth of
his defeat.
Paris had fallen, the western
ward ever Versailles, the Magdalen
line, France's half billion dollar

INVASION!



Blow Centered
In LeHavre Area,
Germans Report

By WES GALLAGHER

Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expedition-
ary Force—(AP)—Allied forces landed in
northern France early today in history's
greatest overseas operation, designed to de-
stroy the power of Hitler's Germany and
wrest enslaved Europe from the Nazis.



A young paperboy delivers a paper to a soldier on V-Day, eleven months after D-Day.

morning. But to school we did not go. When I'd completed my deliveries, another phone call informed me that another Extra was waiting to be delivered. By noon, more Extras had arrived and needed to be delivered. Later that afternoon, the regular edition was dropped off for delivery. There were four Extras in all, with headlines reading "BIG INVASION LAUNCHED," "BEACH-HEAD IS SEIZED," and "INVADERS SLASH INLAND." Other than these stories and "2nd EXTRA" or "3rd EXTRA" at the top, the rest of the content remained unchanged.

With the arrival of the full-sized afternoon edition and its many background stories, readers learned about the size of the invasion force and the logistics of mounting the invasion. The news was upbeat. What we did not know at the time was how precarious a hold the Allied forces maintained on the French beachheads in those early hours. Inside, in lieu of the usual editorial page offerings, was an already-famous Norman Rockwell *Saturday Evening Post* cover illustration titled *Let Us Pray*. Announcements told readers that prayer services were

being held at local churches and that President Roosevelt would address the nation that evening, offering prayers for the success of the invasion.

The afternoon edition carried a particularly interesting story: "Journal-Times Gives Readers Special Service on Invasion." It described how the newspaper staff had planned for its D-Day coverage. Over the previous weeks, the editorial staff had worked to prepare background stories. The fires had been kept lit so the molten lead in the linotype machine would be ready on short notice for setting type for the Extras. In addition, the *Journal-Times's* 106 paperboys, described as "carrier salesmen," had been alerted by the Circulation Department to be at their posts by 5:00 a.m. to begin delivering the Extras. It also mentioned that additional Extras would follow in rapid succession as war correspondents reported in. The story was accompanied by a photo showing a local man purchasing the first Extra early that morning.

At home, we kept the radio on to hear the latest news. That evening we listened to the popular news commentator

THE RACINE JOURNAL-TIMES, WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, JUNE 7, 1944

D-DAY IS HERE

ALLIED FORCES INVADE EUROPE

This is an appeal to every citizen of this community to go to church TODAY or TOMORROW and spend ONE HOUR in PRAYER to implore the BLESSING of GOD on our boys and their efforts and for a complete and EARLY VICTORY. Our boys are PRAYING—Let's all join them for at least ONE HOUR TODAY.

5th Victory Loan NOW GOING ON

BE A VICTORY VOLUNTEER BUY EXTRA BONDS

Don't Make This Soldier's Dream Come True!

In a dream, an American soldier was about to shoot an enemy in front of him when his sergeant came up and said, "Sergeant, buddy, I have to have your gun."

"Why," said the soldier.

"Because," said the sergeant, "I've better who paid for that gun never to back. He needs to keep it in his war bond."

KEEP THE BONDS YOU NOW HAVE—AND BUY MORE BONDS TO GIVE HIM EXTRA BULLETS AND GUNS

PRAY! BUY BONDS! STAY ON THE JOB!

This Message Published by **TAVERN LEAGUE OF RACINE**



Lee Hansen with his younger brother Harlan, ca. 1943. Harlan followed in his older brothers' footsteps, becoming a paperboy in the late 1940s.

Many papers, including the *Racine Journal-Times*, carried notices asking readers to pray for American soldiers and for a swift end to the war.

Gabriel Heatter, known as “the voice of doom.” He always began his evening radio broadcast with the words, “Ah, there’s good news tonight.” And that night he was correct. We also listened to the famous Edward R. Murrow with his dramatic opening: “This [pause] is London,” and his sign-off statement: “Good night and good luck.”



News about the war on other fronts had not been squeezed out of the afternoon edition. Most evident was the extensive coverage of the fall of Rome to Allied forces two days earlier. Briefer reports appeared on the fighting in the Pacific and on the Russian front. Several news items reported on deaths and injuries of Racine servicemen.

We paperboys already knew about casualties among our military personnel. The newspapers we delivered regularly carried notices about young Racine men being drafted or

enlisting, as well as those wounded or killed. From time to time, we noticed changes in the service flags that wives and parents hung in their front windows to indicate that a family member served in the armed forces. In the red-bordered flags visible on my paper route, some of the blue stars mounted against a white background had already been replaced by silver stars to indicate wounded servicemen. In several homes, the blue stars had turned to gold, indicating that someone living there had been killed.

That had happened at our house seven months earlier when, on November 11, 1943, Armistice Day, a dreaded “We regret to inform you . . .” telegram from the War Department arrived with the news that my older brother had been killed in action in Italy. The wartime death of a family member is something you don’t get over; you simply go on, profoundly changed. I can still recall my dad, on returning home from work, reading the telegraph brought to the house earlier that day by a Western Union delivery boy. I am sure Dad knew what the telegram meant before reading it. All he could say



Lee Hansen at his brother Jim's grave in Nettuno, Italy, in 2018.

was, “It’s Jim.” A few weeks later, in early December, Dad arrived home one evening with a phonograph record. It was Bing Crosby singing the popular ballad “I’ll Be Home for Christmas.” That was the one and only time I ever saw my father cry. The rest of us did, too. Needless to say, that record was never played again.

Some months after D-Day, I delivered the newspaper that announced Jim’s death and his posthumous award of the Silver Star for bravery under fire. In later years, I visited his grave marker, one of eight thousand at a memorial for American soldiers outside Nettuno, Italy. It reads

JAMES W. HANSEN
SGT 125 FA BN 34 DIV
MINNESOTA OCT 27, 1943


He was one of so many young men whose lives were snuffed out long before they had an opportunity to really experience life.

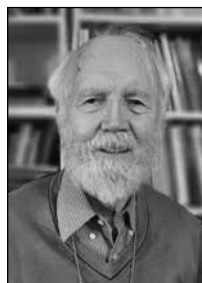


I kept my carrier job for more than two years, giving it up at the end of my junior year in high school. I could not continue because, as a senior and the incoming editor of the Washington Park High School newspaper, *The Park Beacon*, I would have to be on duty in the school newspaper office every afternoon. In addition, I would be away at Northwestern University for five weeks, enrolled in a summer journalism institute for incoming high school newspaper and yearbook editors.

Both of my younger brothers followed in my footsteps as paperboys, and at one time or another, we all delivered papers on the West Sixth Street–Park View route. For years afterward, we loved to discuss our paperboy days, the scandalous behavior of some of our customers, what happened to such and such a family, and who were the worst customers when it came to paying their newspaper bills. Though we all carried memories of our brother Jim, I alone carried the memory of delivering papers on D-Day and of delivering the news of the boys we had lost in the war.

Today, with the advent of online news and the shrinking number of print subscribers, paperboys are, for the most part, history, along with the need for Extra editions to share the most pressing news. With their disappearance, something important has been lost. No longer does the thud of the paper on the front porch signal the shared bond of learning the news together as a family or community. What was once an important learning opportunity and, indeed, a “calling” for young boys, is gone. Boys like me, my brothers, and countless others gained so much from our experience delivering newspapers. At an early age, we developed not only good work habits, but also important life skills that served us well, in good times and in bad. Many paperboys went on to great fame and fortune, including three US presidents (Hoover, Truman, and Eisenhower); famous entertainers (Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Ed Sullivan); and national icons (Carl Sandburg, Jackie Robinson, Martin Luther King Jr., Isaac Asimov, and Tom Brokaw).

We must recognize that with time, everything changes—including the price of those delicious Danish kringles we gobbled down on Friday afternoons, whose price has risen from ten cents in 1943 to five dollars today. 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

W. Lee Hansen is a professor emeritus for the Department of Economics at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. This essay was prompted by his discovery of the D-Day Extras, now yellowed with age, in a box of high school memorabilia stored in his attic.