*Quick pivot back to partisan talking points*

I joined millions in watching televised coverage of D-Day’s 80th anniversary ceremonies last week.

And I wept.

Who didn’t?

The dwindling number of centenarian heroes on stage. The historic footage of that landing, a daring dash that literally saved the world. Rows of silent white crosses. The artillery salute. The fly-over. The soaring words of inspiration, and not just – or even foremost – by the political leaders. I was most touched when the young uniformed woman read the adapted version of “The Watch.”

“Eighty years ago, these sailors stood the watch. While some of us were in our bunks at night, these soldiers stood the watch. While some of us were in school learning our trade, marines, airmen and coasties stood the watch. Yes, even before some of us were born into this world, the men behind me stood the watch. …”

And, perhaps most importantly, this: “You stand relieved. We have the watch.”

But do we?

I decided to spend a few hours paying attention to how various media covered the day, mostly switching back and forth from CNN and Fox and MSNBC, but also occasionally monitoring the Associated Press, the Washington Post and other papers. Call it my bias, if you will, but as I fully expected the men and women of the printed word did the best job sticking to the story of the day as it unfolded.

The television talking heads, not so much. In the blink of an eye the anchors and guests pivoted to their usual talking points.

For liberals – MSNBC is the place to be – the message of the day seemed to be that the democracy the heroes of June 6, 1944 fought and died for is being tested again by Donald Trump and his autocratic allies.

For conservatives – Fox is their den – it was Joe Biden’s weak America on display, and the nation is not respected by allies or feared by foes.

Conversations – for that’s what television is, talking and more talking – centered around how it all relates to the election this November.

In no time at all, way too much focus was on Biden and Trump. Not on the old men on stage. Not on the young men whose remains lie beneath those white crosses.

These so-called television news channels have been weaponized. All politics, all the time. They do not have audiences. They have converts.

By the way, CNN played it straighter than either of the two primary partisan channels. That’s not to say CNN is centrist; it leans left. But a viewer can still see the center from there, which is more than can be said of Fox or MSNBC.

Here’s a thought, from an old gray-headed journalist. In today’s fragmented media world these channels are riding the crest of a wave they created. In the age of information by avalanche, it’s all but impossible to put out a profitable product that tries to be what newspapers once were – a product intended for broad appeal. That’s one big reason print media, which still largely embraces facts and not spin, faces so many challenges. Cable, talk radio, online sites, podcasts and so forth picked sides, narrowed their focus, and carved out niche audiences that are told what they want to hear. Social media throws gas on the fire.

I call it outrage as a business plan. If a viewer or listener is not fuming with anger by the end of a program, the host has failed.

And with whom are they angry? People who used to be their friends and neighbors. American against American.

We were led here by profit-seeking ideologues who realized hate and anger can be monetized.

After the D-Day coverage, that almost immediate pivot back to politics-as-war was impossible to miss. It is disgusting. And I hope that offends the left and the right. You do not have a monopoly on good ideas. Or morality. Or patriotism. In what is clearly a 50-50 country, you do not have a right to impose your way.

The old men on stage, the boys in those graves, did not fight for that.

I’m old enough, at the 80th anniversary of D-Day, to remember the 40th. In 1984 it was President Ronald Reagan delivering the message. I am still inspired by Reagan, and by his successor George H.W. Bush, both of whom led with strength and compassion for all, punctuated with a sunny outlook and faith in the future guided by past and principle.

Here’s what Reagan said:

“We are bound today by what bound us 40 years ago, the same loyalties, traditions and beliefs. We’re bound by reality. Here in this place where the West held together, let us make a vow to our dead. Let us show them by our actions that we understand what they died for. … “Strengthened by their courage, heartened by their valor, and borne by their memory, let us continue to stand for the ideals for which they lived and died.”

Today’s partisan bickering and hatefulness is unworthy of their sacrifice.

*Bill Barth is the former Editor of the Beloit Daily News, and a member of the Wisconsin Newspaper Hall of Fame. Write to him at bbarth@beloitdailynews.com.*