

Leo Disher



On November 8, 1942, United Press correspondent Leo Disher went in the American landing at Oran with a broken ankle. He came out of that battle with 11 wounds, 15 minor injuries, and what he considers one of the best stories of his career.

Disher was among the war correspondents who sailed for Africa with the American invasion fleet late in October of 1942. En route, bad luck overtook him and he broke his ankle while aboard ship. Determined not to let that interfere with his coverage of the important operation, Disher hobbled on a crutch into the cutter which was to carry him ashore. He wore a life preserver tied to the cast on his ankle in case he went overboard.

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As Disher's cutter reached the jetty it suddenly blew up and burst into flame. Half the men aboard were either killed or injured, and Disher, who was hurled to the bottom of the boat, lost his crutch in the confusion. With blood streaming from his injuries he crawled through the fire and plunged overboard.

With great effort he was able to swim to a nearby pier. Then, as he pulled himself up out of the water, a stray bullet hit his right heel. With both feet disabled, he had to crawl up the street, which was swept with machine-gun fire, in an effort to reach cover. Finally a bullet, which had spent its energy, struck him in the temple and knocked him into unconsciousness. It was not until an hour and a half later that a medical aid patrol carried him to a hospital.

Army authorities were so impressed with his conduct under fire that they presented him with the Purple Heart. More important to Disher, however, was the fact that the story he dictated from a hospital cot after the shooting was over was displayed on the front pages of most of the UP papers.