

# D-DAY

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## D-Day a proud, poignant milestone

Germans weren't expecting it, but Ike said, 'Go!'

By Ken Kaye

FORT LAUDERDALE SUN-SENTINEL

The thunder of heavy artillery ripped through the darkness, and the coastline of northern France was shrouded in smoke and fire.

By dawn, the English Channel boiled with landing craft, delivering thousands of fighting men to the beaches.

Most were wet and scared. Many were seasick. Still they charged the shoreline under a withering barrage of enemy gunfire.

The date was June 6, 1944. The place was Normandy. D-Day, destined to be one of the greatest battles in the history of war, had begun.

Ultimately, the Allied victory at Normandy proved to be the turning point of World War II. The Allies went on to drive back the powerful German army, revealing the horrors of the death camps as they went.

Eleven months later, Germany surrendered, bringing an end to the war in Europe. Soon after, Japan surrendered in the first awesome glow of the Atomic Age.

The dark days of war gave way to a new era of industrial and technological progress. New political alliances were formed and new national boundaries drawn as the world moved from the heat of battle to the chill of the Cold War.

It all began on that beach in



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Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower visits paratroopers in England on June 5, 1944, moments before they boarded transport planes bound for Normandy and the D-Day invasion.

Normandy, on that day forever to be known as D-Day.

Fifty years later, the nation will celebrate it as one of the war's proudest and most poignant moments.

But, for those who were there, for those who survived and for those whose loved ones did not, D-Day was something far more personal. It was, simply, the defining moment of their lives, the day their lives changed forever.

Never before had there been

such an awesome display of military might, all aimed at five beaches spread over 50 miles.

It was the largest amphibious assault in the history of warfare: 156,000 fighting troops, 17,000 paratroopers and 124,000 sailors launched from southern England.

From the air, 1,100 Royal Air Force bombers and 1,365 heavy bombers of the U.S. 8th Air Force dropped nearly 10,000 tons of explosives on the invasion area.

On the seas, a 6,000-ship flotilla

of battleships, rocket-launching boats, cruisers and destroyers pummeled the coastline with thousands of shells and rockets.

When the smoke cleared, the Allied forces - American, Canadian and British - had regained a foothold in France. They marched through Europe, village by village, until they took Berlin. On May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered.

D-Day was a mission that took a

Please see **Invasion/A16**

## D-Day not just day at the beach

Hedgerows and other obstacles proved to be hard to overcome

By Gary Blonston

KNIGHT-RIDDER NEWSPAPERS

The hedgerows of Normandy had been there for centuries - great stands of greenery on berms of earth heaped 3, 4, 5 feet high, defining the patchwork farmlands of northern France.

But no one planning the greatest and most complicated military assault in history realized that those ancient hedgerows would prove to be almost as formidable as the German army.

"None of our senior officers had been to France," Normandy veteran Chester Hansen says today. "The pre-war army was a very provincial army.

"It was astonishing. Despite all the low-level aerial photography, no one ever appreciated what obstacles those hedgerows were. They had hedgerows in England, but not like this."

And so, on D-Day and for weeks afterward, the mounded hedges frustrated the Allied advance. They limited visibility, provided cover for Nazi machine-gun emplacements, blocked Allied tanks and turned every infantry advance through the hedgerow country into a set of small, deadly skirmishes.

It was a war on the seam be-

tween modern technological combat and the head-on clashes of foot soldiers in the 19th century, where tanks made the difference but a bayonet was still a useful tool.

Hansen was personal aide to Gen. Omar Bradley, who commanded U.S. forces in the invasion, and he marvels today at how long ago it truly was.

"This was a rather primitive war, where high ground was important, where a river could stop a division until you built a bridge. . .

Fifty years is a hell of a long time when you think about it.

"The fact that it was secret, that we could surprise the Germans only 100 miles away, is something you simply can't cope with today."

There were no enemy spy satellites to detect the massive buildup of men and equipment just across the English Channel. Nor were there human spies in position to communicate its meaning convincingly to the Nazi high command. Adolf Hitler went on believing the center of the Allied attack would be miles to the northeast of the Normandy coast, even after the invasion began.

It was a phenomenal act of stubbornness, for no one looking out

Please see **Battle/A21**

# Invasion

FROM PAGE A15

heavy toll.

There were as many as 19,500 casualties on both sides of the battle. Of the American casualties, 1,465 were killed, 3,184 were wounded, 1,928 were missing and 26 were captured, according to military experts.

One man, more than anyone else, is blamed for World War II. His name was Adolf Hitler.

History may well regard this squat man as the greatest villain of all time. Winston Churchill, Britain's beloved prime minister, called him "a maniac of ferocious genius."

Whatever the perspective, Hitler was a great orator and a great manipulator. After Germany's humiliating defeat in World War I, he saw - and seized - the opportunity for power.

The German economy was in ruins; the mark had collapsed and inflation was rampant. The government was in disarray, and the Weimar Republic was openly detested because it had been imposed on the country as part of the postwar treaties.

The proud German people were cold, hungry, angry.

Under the banner of National Socialism, Hitler reshaped their hunger and anger into determination and hatred. He offered the people someone to blame for Germany's loss in World War I: the Jews. He argued that a country of pure race had the potential to conquer all others.

Steadily, Hitler won his struggle



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German prisoners of war who surrendered during the Allied invasion of Normandy are escorted by members of the Army's 8th Infantry Regiment. The Germans had superior weapons, but they didn't match the Allies' mobility.

to become a national figure. By November 1923, he had formed a core group, including names such as Goering and Hess - men who later would be tried at Nuremberg and convicted of war crimes.

Once in power, Hitler's mission was simple: Conquer Europe, then the world. He took Austria with no resistance on March 12, 1938, and invaded Poland on Sept. 1, 1939.

By the spring of 1940, Germany occupied France. The rest of Europe fell quickly. Britain was the

exception.

From the time the United States entered the war in 1941, the Allies began planning an invasion of Europe to defeat Hitler's army.

"It was the focal point of our strategy since Pearl Harbor," said Harold Langley, a military historian at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. "Our strategy was, the sooner we advance on Normandy and the German capital, the sooner the war will end."

The Allies would learn an amphibious raid was no easy task.

In August 1942, 6,100 British and Canadian troops crossed the English Channel and attempted to storm Dieppe, a small French port. Nearly half were killed or captured.

This test taught an important lesson: Do not attack a fortified port, but rather an open beach area.

In January 1943, Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt met in Casablanca, Morocco. Plans were set for a cross-channel invasion of a much greater magnitude. The top-secret mission was called Operation Overlord.

Even though the German Army was weakened and on the defensive, an invasion of the French coastline would prove to be treacherous.

Hitler had set up a concrete and barbed-wire barrier, extending from Denmark to southern France. He called it the "Atlantic Wall."

Behind this barrier, the Germans set up forts, gun emplacements and machine-gun nests. They booby-trapped the area around their positions with mines.

Allied military commanders carefully studied Normandy's beaches and planned their attack to the smallest detail. There were

several dress rehearsals.

D-Day is the military term for the day of any planned attack, just as H-Hour is the term for the exact hour. Because of strong winds, heavy clouds and rain, the exact day and hour for the invasion of Normandy was uncertain.

German military leaders, including Hitler, anticipated an attack on northern France. But, because of the weather, they did not think it would happen before June 20.

The German general in charge of that front, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, returned to Germany on June 4 to celebrate his birthday with his wife.

That same day, U.S. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and his advisers met in a mansion called Southwick House, near Portsmouth on the south coast of England.

Despite the weather, they knew their troops were ready. Eisenhower said, "Go!"

The first objective was to pummel the Atlantic Wall with bombers and ship artillery. Three airborne divisions dropped paratroopers and sent in gliders to knock out German positions behind the lines.

The most difficult task fell to six divisions of infantrymen. They

would travel to the beaches in awkward landing boats and charge the shoreline. Then they would try to advance across the beach, up the coastal cliffs and break through the German lines.

The landing boats headed for the beaches in two long lines. Only 32 men could fit in each vessel. Rough seas splashed in, and the men had to use their helmets to bail water. Almost all got seasick. By the time they reached the shore, they were exhausted, wet and cold.

Yet, hearing the thunder of the bombs and shells before their arrival, they thought the pre-attack had all but wiped out the Germans. The truth was that an amazing number of Germans survived the heaviest bombardment in history.

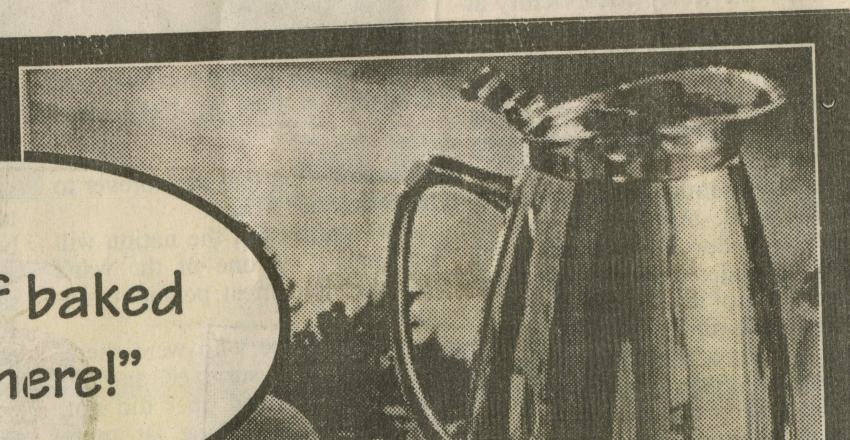
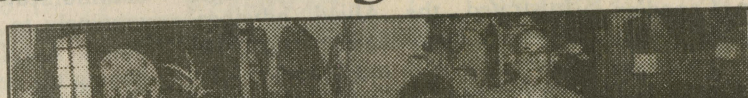
When the men hit the beaches, German gunfire turned on them. The American 1st Division, which stormed a beach code-named Omaha, suffered 2,000 casualties as the men tried to cross the sand.

Many thought they could hide in the shallows or pretend they were dead. The German gunmen had no problem seeing them, shooting again and confirming their kills.

But, overall, the efforts were successful.

**We Must Be Doing Something Right!**

**"No half baked gifts here!"**



## Battle

FROM PAGE A15

on the seemingly countless ships that rose from the mist that June morning could doubt that the Allies indeed were coming.

From the moment the invasion began, the consequences were sometimes deadly, sometimes almost comic:

Paratroopers carrying massive packs of supplies and weaponry were dropped into the darkness, sometimes miles from their intended landing areas, sometimes into deep water, sometimes into the center of villages, sometimes into the teeth of the German resistance.

The most famous of those hapless troopers was John Steele, whose parachute snagged on the roof of the church in the village of Ste. Mere Eglise. While Germans picked off other soldiers as they drifted down into the town, Steele hung motionless for several hours and survived. He later was taken prisoner but lived out the war.

Of the 6,600 U.S. casualties on D-Day, 2,500 were paratroopers of the renowned 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. So brutal was their experience that no night parachute drop was attempted

again for the rest of World War II.

Along the invasion beaches, infantrymen, too, confronted combat situations like nothing they had trained for. After practicing the invasion on English beaches with mocked-up enemy guns at shore level, they suddenly were facing real guns mounted on bluffs high above the water.

Especially along the various landing points of Omaha Beach, circumstances combined to break down the elaborate landing plan. There, Americans suffered some of the worst casualties of the assault.

As landing craft approached beaches obscured by smoke and dust, they often missed their designated landing places, and strong currents carried them onto shorelines nothing like those described in briefings.

Some soldiers never landed at all. Their boats swamped in the rough seas, or they jumped out into deep water with full packs and drowned. Some men were cut down by machine-gun and mortar fire before they reached dry land.

Of 32 tanks that were supposed to land and provide cover for the

advancing troops, 27 sank.

The shallows and beaches were heavily mined, as was every path, field and road in Normandy, it seemed. It was the duty of the first waves of invaders to find the way through those mine fields and mark safe passage for those to follow. In the water, on the beaches and with every step inland, the German mines took a vicious toll.

In large measure, the war was won by the sheer volume of men and machines the Allies threw into France.

Harry Kennedy, a German-speaking veteran of Army intelligence in Normandy, remembers the day that all became clear to him. He was escorting a German prisoner, a colonel, back to the beach:

"On the way I asked the colonel, 'Do you think you still can win the war?'"

"He said, 'Yes, we can throw you back into the sea and negotiate a peace.'"

"Then we came up over the sand dunes and he looked, and this German officer said, 'If you have that kind of equipment, we can't win.'"

## Germans uneasy over D-Day celebration Despite 'grace of late birth,' many bear burden of WWII acts

New York Times News Service

BONN, Germany - Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who says he's content to be left out of the 50th anniversary commemoration of the Allied landings in Normandy on June 6, finds it unfathomable that nobody believes him.

"Quite frankly, I really do not understand what people are talking about," the German leader said in London recently. "At no point did I seek to get invited to the commemorations for D-Day. Had I been invited, I would not have attended."

But the truth is that having lost

the war, most Germans believe they are entitled to be recognized among the winners of the half-century of peace that followed. Many cannot understand why "the grace of late birth," as Kohl often describes it, does not absolve later generations of Germans of some historical responsibility for the uniquely evil acts committed in their country's name between 1933 and 1945.

All over Germany today, millions feel genuine gratitude to the United States, Britain and France for letting them develop in freedom and democracy, and to both

the Western allies and Russia for letting them reunite in freedom in 1990.

But ambiguity about the past remains. Germans do not appreciate being excluded when their neighbors mark the passing of a regime that shamed Germany and spread death and destruction.

The Germans' search for symbols of redemption sometimes leads them astray, as in 1985 when Kohl insisted that President Ronald Reagan visit a military cemetery in Bitburg that turned out to include a few graves of Waffen-SS members.

Be  
original



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