

D day: one of the greatest battles

War



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One of the most pivotal battles of all time was the Invasion of Normandy, or “D-Day.” It took place on June 6, 1944. The invasion force consisted of 11,000 aircraft, 6,000 ships, and 2 million soldiers, sailors, and airmen from 15 different countries. It is said to be the most phenomenal armada ever assembled. An American bomber pilot said, “ We could see the battleships firing at the coast. And literally you could have walked, if you took big steps, from one side of the Channel to the other. There were that many ships out there.” Operation Overlord was the “ most difficult and complicated operation that has ever taken place.”-Winston Churchill.

The invasion began the morning of June 6. The first airborne drops were at approximately 12:30 a. m. Troops landed via parachute or glider. After months of training and becoming familiar with maps of the area and designated drop zones, it was all wasted in a few minutes. Some of the planes that were dropping the troops took heavy anti-aircraft fire from the ground, and while they were dodging bullets, they were moving several miles out of the drop zones. Some parachutists landed 20 miles out of their drop zones. Some soldiers landed in the correct or almost right place. They formed small squads and attacked the enemy wherever they could. At 3:00 a. m., an intense bombing raid began. About 5,000 artillery rounds and 10,000 tons of bombs were dropped on the coastal areas. However, the raid was for the most part unsuccessful. Pilots missed their targets due to fog and other conditions. The majority of the bunkers on the coast, which were a main target, were missed.

At 6:30 a. m., one of the most spectacular invasions in history took place. Men landed at five different beaches (given in code name): Utah, Sword,

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Gold, Juno, and most notorious, Omaha. The men who landed and survived Omaha refer to it as “ Bloody Omaha”. “ As our boat touched sand and the ramp went down, I became a visitor to hell. I shut everything out and concentrated on following the men in front of me down the ramp and into the water.” –Pfc. Harry Parley, 116th Infantry Regiment. The bunkers were loaded with ammunition, and the German gunners sprayed bullets at anything that moved. Men started dropping like flies. This beach was the obvious site for a landing. It was a wide beach, with bluffs at each end of it. The Germans were just waiting for the Allies to land there. Thirty-six amphibious tanks were supposed to land on the beach with the assault teams. Only thirty-two made it. The first wave of soldiers was almost destroyed before they made it off the beach. Any survivors hid behind beach obstacles and sea walls. “ There were...men there, some dead, some wounded. There was wreckage. There was complete confusion. I didn’t know what to do. I picked up a rifle from a dead man. As luck would have it, it had a grenade launcher on it. So I fired my six grenades over the cliff. I don’t know where they went but I do know that they went up on enemy territory.” –Pvt. Kenneth Romanski, 16th Infantry Regiment. At the end of the day, 2, 200 men had been killed or wounded.

In one day, over 150, 000 American, British, Canadian, and French troops had landed at Normandy. Casualties totaled nearly 5, 000. Hitler’s dream of creating an impregnable coast, or the “ Atlantic Wall”, had failed. At Utah beach, it served its purpose for about an hour. At Omaha, less than one day, and at Juno, Sword, and Gold, it held up for about an hour. Hitler’s empire had begun to crumble, and the invasion of Nazi Germany was in sight. The

men who fought in this invasion saved their nation, but at the expense of their memories. Many of them will never forget the horror of Europe, but they did it for freedom. ” ‘ This is D-Day,’ the BBC announced at 12 o’clock. ‘ This is the day.’ The invasion has begun! Is this really the beginning of the long-awaited liberation? The liberation we’ve all talked so much about, which still seems too good, too much of a fairy tale ever to come true? The best part of the invasion is that I have the feeling that friends are on the way. Those terrible Germans have oppressed and threatened us for so long that the thought of friends and salvation means everything to us!” –Anne Frank, diary entry.