

## Republican Perspective

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### OPERATION OVERLORD

*“This operation is planned as a victory, and that’s the way it’s going to be.” Dwight Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander & 34th President of U.S.*

Tomorrow is the seventy-five year anniversary of D-Day. With the passing of the years, there are fewer survivors of the epic battle that ended Hitler’s dream of Nazi domination. The battle of Normandy lasted from June until August 1944. Code name Operation Overlord, it liberated Western Europe from the Nazis.

What does D-day mean? “D” is for the day of the invasion and “H” for the hour the operation actually begins. The U.S. Army’s Center of Military History, states the earliest known use of these terms is in Field Order Number 9, First Army, American Expeditionary Forces. It is dated September 7, 1918: “The first Army will attack at H hour on D day with the object of forcing the evacuation of the St. Mihiel Salient.”

Extensive planning took place before American, British and Canadian troops could land on the chosen five beaches. These beaches comprised a 50-mile stretch of heavily fortified coast of France’s Normandy region.

In January 1944, the Allies appointed Dwight Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force for the invasion of Europe. The scope and complexity of the invasion planning was enormous. Supply logistics was at the forefront to ensure a sufficient amount of food and medicine was on hand. Details of how many men and which ships would land on which beach had to be agreed upon.

The Allied leadership team was comprised of stellar men. British Field Marshall Bernard Law Montgomery (Monty) became one of the most decorated leaders of WW II. Major General Omar Bradley, Lt. General Miles Dempsey, Trafford Leigh-Mallory commander-in-Chief of the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces (AEAF), Adm. Bertram Home Ramsay of the Royal Navy, Carl ‘Tooey’ Spaatz commander of the Allied Northwest African Air Forces (NWAAF). General Freddie de Guingand, Monty’s Chief of Staff said “nothing was ever proposed that didn’t meet with heated opposition.”

This team planned and executed the largest amphibious military assault in history. The numbers were staggering: 6,939 ships and landing craft, 10,440 aircraft, and 156,115 allied soldiers. German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel fortified the Nazi defenses in France. In 1943, Rommel completed construction of the “Atlantic Wall,” Germany’s 2,400-mile line of bunkers, landmines and beach and water obstacles.

Two months before D-Day, Allied forces conducted a dress rehearsal of the Normandy invasion on an evacuated English beach called Slapton Sands. Code name "Exercise Tiger," thousands of young men boarded Landing Ship Tanks in full battle gear. Four German E-Boats, on a routine patrol, armed with torpedoes approached the convoy and began firing. By the end of the day, 639 soldiers and sailors lost their lives.

The Germans believed that the Allies planned to invade the French coast. To insure the best possible chance of success, Ike's leadership team engaged in widespread deception campaign. Code named "Operation Fortitude," (North & South) the aim was to fool the Germans into thinking the attack target might be either Norway or Pas-de-Calais. Norway was the home of Hitler's U-boat bases.

Operation Fortitude used dummy armies, fake radio traffic and enhanced security. Fortitude South was under the command of Gen. George Patton and the First U.S. Army Group. Patton had earned the respect of German generals and led credence to the deception of an attack on Pas-de-Calais.

The attack was scheduled for June 5 but English Channel weather was too severe. Meteorologists gave Ike's team a 36-hour window for June 6 and the invasion began in earnest. A massive airborne and naval operation preceded the amphibious landings on the five beaches. Some 23,000 paratroopers and glider troops dropped behind German lines in the early hours of June 6.

Despite the airborne and naval support, the landings at the beaches were bloody. The worst was for the American troops at Omaha beach. Men had to wade in water up to their shoulders. Many drowned and many killed by German fire. At the end of the first day, Americans suffered 3000 casualties.

U.S. Army Rangers succeeded in the unthinkable. They scaled the cliffs at Pointe du Hoc in excess of 100 feet. They were charged with eliminating German 155 mm guns. Although the Germans had moved the guns from the cliff top, a two-man patrol subsequently found the camouflaged guns. Mission accomplished!

These were the boys of summer 1944. 18-21 year olds parachuting behind enemy lines and storming enemy beaches. Fighting for the values of western civilization. Fighting and dying so today's students can have their "safe spaces" and "trigger warnings."