

Normandy, 75 Years Ago

Seventy-five years ago on 6 June 1944, the western allies of World War II launched perhaps the greatest invasion in history when the allies left England for Normandy, France. Most of the invasion force was from the countries Great Britain, United States and Canada. They were joined by fighters from the Free France forces. Shortly after gaining a foothold on Normandy, the allied forces were joined by fighters from Poland, Belgium Czechoslovakia, Greece and the Netherlands. Air and naval support was provided by the Royal Australian Air Force, the Royal New Zealand Air Force and the Royal Norwegian Navy.

The invasion started with overnight parachute and glider landings in France, huge air bombing and naval bombardments on the beachhead. The amphibious landings were on five beaches with codenames of Sword, Juno, Gold, Omaha and Utah with troops from the US landing on Omaha and Utah, Great Britain on Gold and Sword and Canada landing on Juno.

Planning for the invasion started in early in 1944 with troops engaging in mock invasions in England. The Allies also created a deception operation called Operation Fortitude designed to lead German intelligence to believe the invasion would occur somewhere other than Normandy, ranging from Pas de Calais, France and even through Norway. The Allies created 'fake' armies in locations in England along with 'fake' communications designed to confuse German intelligence. Apparently, it worked, although there were leaks regarding the fake army and invasion location.

Weather played a very important part on the date of the invasion. The invasion needed good weather near the time of a full moon to aid channel navigation and glider and parachute landings and a friendly tide. Allied Commander Eisenhower had originally designated 5 June for the invasion but the weather was bad. However, Eisenhower's chief meteorologist, Group Captain Stagg forecast a brief improvement for 6 June. Eisenhower, amid mixed recommendations from his staff, decided to go on 6 June. As a result, overcast skies limited Allied air support which resulted in limited air damage to the beaches.

Also, because of the weather, German forces stood down with several of the officers taking leave for the weekend. General Rommel for instance took a few days leave to celebrate his wife's birthday. Even after the Normandy invasion was launched, many German Generals still believed that it was a diversion and the real invasion would come later at Calais. The successful invasion gained the Allies a foothold on the European continent, another front for the Germans to defend and took German troops from their Eastern front which helped the Russians.

On this day, let us remember and honor all of the Allied troops who fought and those who died on the beaches of Normandy.