

Normandy

13 May 2024

D-Day Beaches, France

Remembered

The Fallen

9,388 Americans, most of whom were killed in the Allies' D-Day invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944 and its immediate aftermath, are buried in these graves at the [Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial](#) in Colleville-sur-Mer, France. Barely three weeks after D-Day, 850,000 Allied forces were in France.



Utah Beach

Five beaches along a 43-mile / 70-kilometer stretch of Normandy's coastline on the English Channel were code-named for D-Day. West to east, they were Utah and Omaha, where American forces landed, Gold (United Kingdom), Juno (Canada) and Sword (United Kingdom).

Remembered

SOURCES: Underlined words link to them.

Before dawn on D-Day, June 6, 1944, when the first Allied forces began pouring out of small landing craft onto the Normandy beaches in France, some American, British and Canadian airmen were already there to greet them. One of them was Brown Rorie from Union County, North Carolina, Emily's uncle and her mother's brother.

Brown had piloted a WACO glider — an airplane built like a kid's model with wings fashioned around a thin wooden frame built by the Steinway Piano Co., and covered with cotton canvas — that was towed at the end of a cable through the air over the English Channel by a twin-engine C-47.

In the darkness above the French countryside, Brown detached his motorless plane from the cable and guided it on a one-way only approach to a farmyard that he must have been able to see in the moonlight. Whether there were 13 soldiers in the back, a Jeep, a quarter-ton trailer loaded with combat, medical and radio equipment, a 75mm howitzer or a 37mm anti-tank gun, we don't know. His glider could carry any one of those items. But he and his co-pilot landed in the dark, opened the nose of the glider and unloaded safely.

Later in the day, when the third wave of the amphibious invasion arrived on the beach in 36-foot plywood boats, Brown's brother Hinkle waded through the surf and bullets. Back home after the war, Hinkle said every step he took was over dead bodies. Brown made it back home, too. Both of them survived more battles and landings across northern France, the Rhineland and Central Europe. They're now deceased.

Many of the bodies Hinkle stepped over undoubtedly are buried among the nearly 10,000 graves at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial in Colleville-sur-Mer. They are among the many more who died in our military service whom we remember today. These beaches are a place I'd always wanted to visit and which occasioned our quick three days in France. After Emily realized she had two uncles who had survived the D-Day invasion, she changed her mind about what had seemed to be a depressing idea and we found a one-day tour that would highlight where Brown and Hinkle had been.

After three years of build-up and victories in North Africa and Italy, D-Day was the moment the Allies launched their eastward drive across German-occupied Europe that ended in Berlin a year later.

Emily's late father was still training as a navy pilot when the war ended in 1945. My late father served on some pinprick of an island in the South Pacific where he was a navy diesel mechanic repairing PT boats like the one commanded by John F. Kennedy. It sounds like a tourist problem in Tahiti, but the severe tropical sunburn he sustained triggered a sometimes fatal auto-immune illness called *lupus erythematosus*. He was sent back to the United States on a hospital ship and spent a year in naval hospitals in Oakland and San Diego, California, before going home with a permanently scarred face and a lifetime of Veterans Administration medical assistance. In a newspaper interview he did early in the 1980s, he said women he'd meet thought he had syphilis.

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Remembered

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In 1939, when Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler began seizing countries like Austria and Czechoslovakia, Americans were still disillusioned by the inconclusive results of World War I, which had been billed as the “war to end all wars.” Some of the earliest public polling done by the four-year-old American Institute of Public Opinion, now called the Gallup Poll, was done during Germany’s invasion of Poland that September.

Seventy-four percent of Americans supported sending food to England, France and Poland and 58% supported sending military supplies. But only 16% said we should join their fight. Almost no Americans knew that Hitler’s government had studied and admired the United States’ discriminatory immigration and Jim Crow laws and had patterned its own legal approach to anti-Semitic policies after them.

A year later, the America First Committee was formed in the United States and grew to 800,000 members led by Henry Ford, a noted anti-Semite, and Charles Lindbergh, a racist who was suspected of Nazi sympathies. Their argument was that the United States should not be dragged into another foreign conflict and that its military, combined with the double insulation of two oceans, would protect Americans at home.

The committee and public opposition to the war evaporated within days of Pearl Harbor’s attack in December 1941.

Six months before Pear Harbor, the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union, which had been Germany’s ally. The USSR’s leader, Josef Stalin, began pressing the British — and, after we entered the war, President Franklin Roosevelt — to open a second front of the European war to Germany’s west to relieve his beleaguered nation. It was agreed that was necessary, but Prime Minister Winston Churchill was successful in persuading Roosevelt to hold off on what ultimately we would call D-Day until the Allies had amassed sufficient forces in the west to assure success.

After D-Day, the consequences of Germany’s heavy commitment of forces to its eastern front worked to the western Allies’ favor. According to the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, German military deaths in World War II totaled 5.3 million, 80% of them in the east (statistics kept by the German military were much lower). The Soviet Union lost between 8.8 million and 10.7 million military plus another 13 million civilians. Combined U.S. military deaths in Europe and the Pacific were about 417,000 plus another 1,500 civilians. The United Kingdom lost 384,000 military and 451,000 civilians.

It’s entirely appropriate on this Memorial Day to ask that D-Day, which happened 80 years ago next week. and the world war in which it occurred, be remembered in the context of the current presidential election campaign. The Republican candidate, Donald Trump, does not respect the sacrifice these cemeteries literally embody and rejects, along with a majority of his party, the respect for diversity, equity and inclusion of all people for which the United States and its allies fought.



WACO glider

Emily stands next to a restored WACO glider at the [Airborne Museum](#) in Ste-Mère-Église, France, like the one her uncle flew into Normandy hours ahead of the main invasion force on D-Day.



Paratroopers

This window in Ste-Mère-Église (Holy Mother Church) commemorates the 25th anniversary return of some of the U.S. paratroopers who landed in the town in darkness before the sea invasion began.



Gun emplacement

This is one of the German gun emplacements at Pointe du Hoc, a small point of land between Utah and Omaha beaches, which threatened troops landing at both sites and the Allied ships stationed offshore.

Omaha Beach

American soldiers landing on the narrow beach here faced the disadvantage of having to scale these cliffs while being shot at from above.



Notes on photos

SOURCES: Underlined words link to them.

THE FALLEN — The U.S. count of military personnel killed on D-Day itself is 2,501 of a total 4,414 dead among all Allied forces of 156,000 who landed June 6. In addition to the United Kingdom and Canada, forces came from Australia, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Greece, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Poland. Not all American dead from D-Day were buried here; some were repatriated to the United States. In addition, those buried here also include those who died in the larger battle for Normandy in which 73,000 Allied personnel died. The American Battlefield Monuments Commission is in charge of this cemetery. The commission was created in 1923 and maintains 26 permanent cemeteries and 31 memorials in the United States and 17 other countries. They hold graves of 207,621 dead from World Wars I and II.

UTAH BEACH — This was the westernmost beach of the D-Day invasion and was strategically important because it was nearest to the deepwater port of Cherbourg. Until such a port was captured, Allied forces would have to depend on smaller ships docking at temporary harbors to bring in additional men and supplies. Cherbourg was taken 21 days after D-Day, six days later than called for in the invasion plan. Of the 21,000 who landed on the beach here, there were 197 casualties. Among the 14,000 airborne troops who came in by parachute and glider, however, there were 2,500 casualties.

WACO GLIDER — These planes were designed by the Waco Aircraft Co., of Troy, Ohio, but were built under license by many other manufacturers including Ford Motor Co. About 14,000 were delivered to the U.S. Army between 1942 and the end of the war in 1945. Behind Emily, you can see how the cockpit tilted up and out of the way so equipment or men could be loaded and unloaded. It's also important to note that these gliders were considered disposable. Once they landed in actual combat, they were abandoned.

PARATROOPERS — This window was installed in 1969 and includes a background motif of parachutes descending from the sky. It also includes the AA insignia of the 82nd Airborne Division based at Fort Liberty, formerly Fort Bragg, in Fayetteville, North Carolina, near my hometown. While the Highland Scots who settled this area largely remained loyal to Britain in the Revolutionary War, the city was named for Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier de La Fayette, better known to American colonists as the Marquis de La Fayette of France, who believed the American cause in the war was noble. He commanded troops in the Continental Army and lobbied the French government to financially aid the colonists. His most important military act was to blockade British forces in Yorktown, Virginia, until French and American forces could arrive in sufficient numbers to force British General Lord Cornwallis to surrender, thus ending the war.

GUN EMPLACEMENT — There were either five or six of these pinpointed by intelligence atop 100-foot / 30-meter cliffs at Pointe du Hoc, each protecting at 155mm gun capable of firing a 6-inch diameter projectile 20,000 yards (11.3 miles / 18.3 kilometers). It turned out, however, the Germans had moved the guns inland. Nevertheless, 225 U.S. Army Rangers assaulted the position suffering a 70% casualty rate. It took three more days to find and destroy the guns.

OMAHA BEACH — In addition to difficult terrain, many of the U.S. plans went awry including landing craft missing their assigned beach sectors because of strong currents. More than 34,000 men landed here on D-Day and there were 2,400 killed and wounded. It took three days to secure the beach instead of the planned one.

MEANING — The inscription is on one wall of the Normandy American Cemetery's memorial.



THINK NOT ONLY UPON THEIR PASSING
REMEMBER THE GLORY OF THEIR SPIRIT

Meaning

This cemetery is not about death only,
but why these people died.