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Voices of War: The Experiences of LDS Servicemen during the D-Day Invasion
Dennis A. Wright

Soon after 0500 hours on 6 June 1944, the guns of the naval cruiser *Orion* opened fire on the Normandy coast.[1] D-Day had arrived, and H-Hour was minutes away as the pre-invasion shelling began.[2]

John Flade, a German infantryman, served as a forward observer on the cliffs overlooking the Normandy beach. As a spotter he was to report troop movements and identify targets for the artillery. Because of his membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints, he believed that the Zion of the latter days was in the United States and felt that the Lord would protect the Allied forces.[3] Trusting in God to bring an end to a long and horrible war, Brother Flade prepared to fulfill his difficult assignment as the invasion began.

The D-Day invasion, formally known as "Operation Overload," proved to be the largest single military effort in the history of warfare and the climactic invasion of World War II. It successfully broke open the Atlantic wall of the German defense and allowed the Allied troops to liberate Europe, invade Germany and force a German surrender. D-Day was a defining moment for the Allied effort in World War II.

At 0630 hours an armada of over 5,000 Allied ships and 10,000 planes combined with 150,000 ground troops to launch the attack.[4] The memories of that day are now over fifty years old, and the surviving veterans are entering their eighth decade. Yet in spite of the passing years, they clearly recall those momentous events and their voices are strong as they share their memories.

It is estimated that 100,000 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints participated in World War II and that approximately 5,000 lost their lives.[5] It is not known how many of that group participated in the D-Day invasion, as records needed to determine that information are incomplete.[6] However, current research efforts have identified many Latter-day Saint D-Day veterans who have willingly shared their experiences. The accounts of these veterans provide a unique perspective on that historic event.

Preparations for the Invasion
For Germany the war took a turn for the worse when their defeat in Russia and Italy placed the Allies at an advantage. The air war soon shifted from the skies of Britain to those of Germany, resulting in the destruction of cities, factories, and supply lines. In addition to limiting the effectiveness of the German military, the Allied bombing also demoralized the German people who were already tired of the war. The success of these preparatory air strikes made the D-Day invasion possible.

Pre-invasion Bombing Experiences. Edward Michael and Ken Schubert are representative of the LDS pilots and crewmen who completed the hazardous bombing runs over Germany.

Edward Michael, a B-17 pilot, was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic action during a bombing run over Germany two months prior to D-Day. The citation for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty" describes his heroism.[7]

Under attack from German fighter planes, Brother Michael found his plane riddled with bullets. As the plane lost altitude, the fighters pressed their attack. A cannon shell exploded in the cockpit, destroying his instrument panel and seriously wounding Michael and his copilot. When he learned that the bomb bay was on fire he ordered his crew to bail out before the plane exploded.

After most of his crew had parachuted to safety, he realized that one member of the crew remained behind because he did not have a working parachute. Michael then determined that their only chance for survival was for him to successfully land the plane. His citation states, "He gallantly evaded the enemy, using violent evasive action despite the battered condition of his plane."[8]

Suffering from loss of blood, he fought to remain conscious as his plane flew at treetop level to evade the enemy fighters. During this time Michael drifted in and out of consciousness from the loss of blood. Despite insurmountable

obstacles, he successfully crashlanded the plane on a British airstrip, saving all aboard.

Ken Schubert, a Canadian serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force, served as a crew member of a Halifax bomber assigned to destroy railroad targets in preparation for D-Day. He recorded an account of his last bombing run, a trip over southern Belgium to destroy a railroad center:

Shortly after the bombing we were attacked by an enemy fighter, being so low we could take very little evasive action and soon had 2 engines on fire and fire in the aircraft. At about twelve hundred feet the pilot ordered the crew to bail out. He did not get out and was killed in the Crash. In John 15:13 we read that Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Our pilot did just that when he saved our six lives and lost his own. When we landed we were scattered over about twenty miles. The wireless air gunner and I were not captured. . . . The other four were taken prisoner.[9]

A Belgium farmer discovered Schubert while he was burying his parachute. The farmer took the Canadian airman home and hid him for the next four months from the German troops. This farmer and his family demonstrated their courage by putting their lives in danger while harboring an Allied airman.

While Schubert was fortunate to evade capture, other Latter-day Saint airmen were not. Vernon Tipton spent the months leading up to D-Day and those that followed in a German prisoner of war camp. During his twenty-fifth mission, his B-24 bomber was shot down over France, two months before D-Day. After parachuting to safety, German soldiers captured him and placed him in Stalag Luft 3 as a prisoner of war. Of this experience he recorded:

Our squadron commander was in the lead bomber and we were second in the formation. Both planes were hit by flak at about the same time. Our plane was on fire and we had to bail out. We were flying at about 22,000 feet, so there's not very much oxygen. The concussion from the bombs down below and the flak all around us caused a lot of turbulence in the air. I was swinging back and forth, and I passed out as I was coming down in the parachute. This was the second time Id bailed out. Even though I had the former experience at bailing out, I pulled my ripcord too soon, instead of free falling for 10,000 feet; I was in the parachute for most of the 22,000 feet. I was supposed to get out of my parachute before I hit the water, but I didn't because I passed out. So when I hit the water, I was still in my parachute and it was dragging me under. It was then that the Germans came along in the tugboat and pulled me out with some big grappling hooks.[10]

Historian John Keegan recognized the importance of the air war to D-Day. He noted that prior to the invasion, the Allied air forces had dropped almost 200,000 tons of bombs on rail centers, roads, and bridges as well as military airfields, radar installations, and gun emplacements. While Allied losses were considerable, the air campaign succeeded in preparing for the D-Day invasion by severing critical supply lines and destroying manufacturing centers. Keegan cites Luftwaffe officers who later conceded that the superiority of the Allied air force prior to the invasion ensured its success."[11]

Buildup of Supplies and Personnel. During the relentless air campaign, the Allies completed a massive buildup of supplies and personnel in preparation for D-Day. Much of the task of moving troops and supplies to staging areas in Britain was left to the Merchant Marines under command of the Army Transportation Corps, Marine Division. This force consisted of professional seamen and recruits commissioned by the Army for the duration of the war to transport troops and supplies across the Atlantic. A newspaper report recognized the contribution of the Merchant Marines by saying that while serving in the army Marine Transportation Corps in World War II, "your chances of being killed were higher than if you served in any of the U.S. armed services [army, navy, marines]." The report then quoted General Douglas MacArthur, who declared, "I hold no branch in higher esteem than the Merchant Marine Services."[12] Forest A. Wright, a Merchant Marine engine room officer on the *George W. Geothels,* a transport ship, made numerous trips across the Atlantic carrying troops and supplies. His account provides insight to life aboard these supply ships:

Most of the supply ships were Liberty class. I was fortunate enough to serve on a larger ship. We had two large steam turbines that powered our twin propellers. Our ship could cross the Atlantic in seven days. We were fast enough that we rarely traveled in a convoy. Our ship usually carried mail and supplies but sometimes we would have 300 or more G.I.s aboard. They would sleep in hammocks strung in the hole of the ship and eat in a temporary mess hall. I did not have

much contact with them, but do remember how sick they were for most of the week it took to travel to England. The hole of the ship really smelled at the end of the trip. Most of the time the troops were put ashore at established ports, but when the port was under fire, they left the ship in large rubber rafts.[13]

While some of the troops were unfortunate enough to make the long trip across the Atlantic on small freighters, others traveled on large ships such as the *Queen Elizabeth.* Edmond Morgan Jr., one of the soldiers who traveled on this ship, remembers the large number of soldiers aboard the ocean liner. Others have reported more specifically that there were up to 24,000 troops on the ship and that it took a week to unload the men and supplies.[14] Three enlisted men were assigned one bunk and took turns sleeping in eight-hour shifts. Morgan remembers how he did not appreciate this arrangement. The ship was especially fast and did not travel in a convoy. The crossing took six days and was relatively uneventful.[15]

The Friendly Invasion. The British locals referred to the troops arriving in England as the "friendly invasion" because the village streets were crowded with thousands of troops who along with their tanks, trucks, and jeeps seemed to be in constant motion. Temporary airfields were built throughout the countryside for the bombers and fighters while the harbors and waterways were filled with boats of all kinds. As historians consider the realities of this situation, they are surprised at the lack of friction between the locals and the gathering army because the size of the invasion force presented a real challenge for the British populace.[16]

The life of the servicemen was cramped and restricted while they were waiting in camps scattered across Britain. Awaiting invasion orders, Rex Boyd Greenwood remembers resenting fellow soldiers from Missouri who openly declared their anti-Mormon feelings and expressed their pleasure over the problems experienced by the Saints while in their state. Because of this experience he was especially grateful for the opportunity to attend Church services with several other servicemen from Utah.[17]

Most soldiers knew few of the details regarding the coming invasion. As D-Day approached, Greenwood recognized that "a person would have to be awfully dumb not to know that something was going on" because of the movement of the troops and supplies.[18] Melvin D. Barney remembered that soldiers awaiting the invasion were prohibited from going into town or talking to nonmilitary personnel.[19] The soldiers regretted the fact that outgoing mail service was halted prior to the invasion. The restrictions and strict security were in response to fears that German spies would learn the specific details or timing of D-Day.

Invasion Day

The D-Day invasion involved LDS servicemen in several different areas. Some were assigned to fly support missions during the invasion; others manned the ships off the coast of Normandy, while yet another group fought to secure the beaches. Their experiences provide an important insight to the events of that historic day.

Air Corps. The Allied air force prepared over 10,000 aircraft to support the D-Day invasion. There were 4,000 bombers and almost as many fighter planes, including the famous British Spitfires and American P-51 Mustangs. In addition, transport planes carried paratroopers behind German lines, gliders brought more troops and supplies, and reconnaissance planes gathered information on German movements on land and sea.

The objective of the bombers was to neutralize the German batteries while the fighter planes were to protect the infantry from air attack during the invasion. Much to the surprise of the Allies, the German Air Force did not mount a significant air defense effort. While some German aircraft rose to challenge the incoming planes, it was a minimal effort, leaving control of the skies to the Allies.

Rex Greenwood, an airman based in Britain, described the beginning of D-Day for those serving in the air corps.

We knew of D-Day the day before. We were put on full alert, and we could guess why. . . . The night before the invasion, we didn't go to bed. We all sat out in the fields. . . . If you weren't on duty that night, you were out in the field. . . . In the morning, the invasion was announced on the radio, so then we knew what was going on. I myself went on duty at daybreak. I'd never heard so much radio contact. In combat, pilots carry radio silence; they don't talk to each other very much. But that day, radio talk was constant. Some of the pilots were telling us what they were seeing. They were amazed at the number of landing crafts, boats, and people flooding onto the

beaches. Strange as it may seem, we didn't lose as many pilots on D-Day as we did on other maximum strike days, even though there were more airplanes in the air. There was very little resistance, only anti-aircraft. From D-Day on, I think the Allies had supremacy of the air.[20]

Early in the morning Greenwood reported seeing thousands of Allied bombers and their fighter escorts filling the skies. He said there was never a time during the day when the skies were not filled with aircraft. The ground shook as planes thundered overhead flying toward Normandy.

Robert H. Hinckley, a B-24 pilot, called D-Day a "lark" for the air force when compared to his previous bombing missions over Germany. He flew two D-Day missions and met no antiaircraft flack or German fighters as he bombed Omaha Beach. He noted that there were 480 B-24s in the air on D-Day and that this represented 4,800 airmen.[21] While this was a large number, it was only a small part of the total air strike on D-Day.

Scott Hansen, another pilot who flew on D-Day, had orders to bomb coastal targets on the invasion morning. He remembers that it was hard for him to maneuver his plane because of the number of planes in the sky over Normandy. His description demonstrates the challenge faced by some airmen participating in the invasion:

We took off in the wee hours of the morning and assembled the group together. The release time for the bombs was to be 7:25 A.M. This was pretty early to get that armada of planes assembled and across the channel. It was very impressive. I am proud to have been a part of the invasion of Europe. They had briefed us that morning that there would be 12,000 allied airplanes in the air that day. . . . They set up a course where we would go in a circle and do our bombing and when we came off the target we would swing to the south quite a way out over the ocean and back to England. That way we could stay out of the stream of airplanes coming from England to the invasion. There were so many planes you never knew when there would be a mid-air collision or when you might be it. The sad part of it was, there was an overcast. . . . We were going in at 12,000 feet but it was solid overcast below us. I didn't ever get to see one ship on the invasion.[22]

Hansen reported that they were expected to drop their bombs between the invasion fleet 1,500 yards offshore and the paratroopers inland. He noted that when it was time to drop the bombs that there were Allied aircraft below them. In such a situation their orders were to drop the bombs regardless of the situation with the other aircraft. There was great relief when the planes below cleared away just before the bombs were released.[23]

Like many other pilots he described thick clouds that blocked their vision during his second D-Day mission. His plane changed altitudes several times in an attempt to catch sight of their target. Finally they had visual contact and moved into position only to have the clouds again obscure their vision and force them to rely on radar to finish their mission. They were not sure if they dropped bombs on the intended target or near the beach where the troops were coming ashore.[24]

Bernell Sharp also flew bombing runs on D-Day. He provided the following description:

I was sitting on the bed with my shoe in my hand, one shoe on, one off. . . . I was just going to bed at midnight and he came and said fly. So we found it was D-Day. . . . We were real eager to fly. In fact, we were scheduled for four missions that day. It was such bad weather we only few two. . . . We got over the coast and there were hundreds of ships. You could see the beaches. See, I'm emotional about it after fifty years at the knowledge that that day thousands of American, British, and French soldiers were going to die. It was very upsetting. As we flew over, it was very cloudy and you could barely see the beach with the landing infantry and landing tanks pulled up on the beach and you could see the gunfire as the battleships were still firing. As we got over our target, which was a little ways in from the beach, behold there was an opening in the clouds right were we was supposed to bomb. Just like the Lord knew where we needed it. So we dropped our bombs and headed back.[25]

Navy. In addition to the increased air attacks, the navy began shelling the beaches in preparation for the landing of thousands of infantry troops and supplies needed for a beach assault. The first ships to approach the Normandy coast were the minesweepers. Their responsibility was to clear a path through the various types of mines and barriers placed by the Germans as a deterrence. Typical of the dangers faced by the incoming ships were the "Belgian gates," mined

ten-foot steel frames placed parallel to the beach. Other obstacles included posts driven at angles into the ocean floor with teller mines attached on the top and the deadly "Hedgehogs," or mined six-foot metal crosspieces. T h e Germans had carefully placed these so they would be submerged at high tide. It was the job of the minesweepers to clear a path through these obstacles so that the landing ships could reach the beach.

William Rice relates his experience on a minesweeper early in the morning prior to H-Hour. His orders were to clear the mines away from the shallow areas near the beach. He described the minesweeping operation as an extremely hazardous assignment:

> Our orders said we would sweep for mines, sweep both beaches, and it is figured that you should have about up to seventy-five percent causalities of the ship, of the minesweeper. We were there all alone. The rest of the 4,000 ships were way back there, you know, and the only reason that they (the Germans) didn't really shoot at us much was because they saw those ships and they didn't want to give away their positions for a bunch of little minesweepers, so our main enemy was mines. They said, if your ship is sunk, grab a gun and go in with the infantry[26]

At night the Germans would fly over the landing area and drop more mines, creating a need for continuous minesweeping activity. Rice provides a description of the variety of German mines:

The Germans were very clever with mines. There were maybe five or six different types of mines. There was a moored mine, like you see the pictures of, a block of cement with a cable coming up and the mine hooked to that with horns on it and it could be set at any depth that was desired. Our job was to cut the cable, bring the mine up and then sink it with gunfire. There were floating mines. They were the most dangerous because you had to see them before you could sink them. They were difficult to find. They caused a lot of deaths. There were acoustic mines that were set off by the noise of a ship going over. There were magnetic mines set off by the metal in a ship. There were pressure mines. There were mines in Cherbourg that were snag mines. They had a bunch of corks with hooks in them attached to cords that went to the mine. When a ship would pick up some of these hooks, 25-pound pull on the ship would set off the mine. That was a brand new one. They were very sophisticated. We also got sophisticated, finally, at quite a cost.[27]

While the minesweepers did the best they could, the enormous number of mines prevented them from being completely successful. The landing craft carrying troops remained at risk as they approached the shore.

Thousands of seamen manned the numerous ships that filled the English Channel.[28] Forest A. Wright served as an officer on one of the transport ships loaded with supplies needed by the troops going ashore. Though his duties confined him below deck and limited his direct experience, he recorded:

> We crossed the channel and waited for smaller ships to unload our supplies. We had large cranes on deck that would lift the crates into smaller landing craft. We did not have troops on board on D-Day. In fact we did not know it was D-Day; all we knew was we had to drop off these supplies in the channel. At the time we assumed an attack of some kind was going on, but no one informed us of any details. It was just another day in the war.
>   All the engine room personnel were required to be below deck during battle conditions. The engine room was a very noisy place with furnaces and turbines and all. However, in spite of the normal engine room noise we could hear the endless pounding of the artillery and what appeared to sound like bombs going off around us. It was a very busy time and I did not get to go on deck to see the action, but I can imagine what it must have been like.[29]

The battleships and other naval vessels that shelled the Normandy coast prior to troop landings provided the most dramatic naval presence in the channel. The Germans had heavily fortified the Normandy coast with concrete bunkers. Because it was understood that aerial bombardment might not have completely destroyed these well-protected gun placements, it was left to the navy to finish the task. Beginning early in the morning of D-Day, the 14-inch guns of six large battleships began firing on the Normandy coast. The troops in the smaller landing craft could feel the force of the shells as they passed overhead. One described it as "the fireworks display of a thousand fourth of July's."[30] The

shelling lasted until the first landing craft landed on the beach.

 Infantry. Challenges facing the infantry soldiers who waded ashore to confront the enemy firsthand differed from those experienced by those serving in the air corps and navy. Their day began as they loaded into a variety of landing craft that would carry them ashore. Included among the several different kinds of landing craft was the LCI, a large 158-foot vessel that carried 200 soldiers across the channel. The LCT was another type of landing craft equipped to carry up to six tanks. Both of these ships were equipped with ramps and runways to unload troops and supplies onto the beach. However, it was the smaller Higgins boat, or LCVP (Landing Craft Vehicles and Personnel), that carried most soldiers into combat. They were small craft, 36 feet in length and 10 feet wide. They could carry 36 soldiers or 12 soldiers and a jeep. Their shallow draft enabled them to land in lower water levels and drop a front landing ramp that allowed the soldiers to jump into the shallow surf and wade ashore.[31]

 Melvin D. Barney landed on Utah Beach. His account provides insight to the events of that day. For him the action began before they landed on the beach:

> Not much was said on the boat. It seemed like each man had his own thoughts. Corning in, I never felt so sorry for guys in my life. After we took the first hit, all the men had their heads down and their eyes were glassy. They were saying very little. . . .
>
> Slightly before the ramp went down, the motors opened wide. Then an armor piercing shell came right in between the angle irons of the opening. I was in the process of picking up the tripod and cradle, behind the blade of the Caterpillar. My rifle was laying on the track of the cat. I couldn't quite decide what to pick up first, the tripod and the cradle on my shoulder first, or my rifle. So I decided to get the tripod and cradle; it would be easier. I stooped down to pick that up and said to Frank, about two steps away, "Frank, will you hand me my rifle?" He said, "Oh geez!" That is all I heard. He took one step over, and the next thing I knew, I was down on the deck. My helmet was blown off, I had blood, flesh and brains all down my face; my face and hands were bleeding. There was nothing left of Frank from the neck up, and every time the heart beat, there was a big gush of bright red blood. . . . The shell continued on and hit a fellow named William D. Franko, also from Chicago. He was hit in the chest. . . . The shell tore him completely in two. Also, when the shell hit him, it detonated one of his two hand grenades, snapped on to the upper right of the combat pack.
>
> I moved up about two steps, to where a jeep was sitting, with a trailer behind it. I was kneeling down by the front seat, and another artillery shell came through the side of the boat, through the windshield of the jeep and hit a fellow by the name of Alvin VanZant. . . . He died sometime later. My face around my lips was bleeding, from the glass from the jeep. By that time the ramp went down.[32]

The description continues as Brother Barney prepared to leave the landing craft and wade toward the beach.

> I stood up and saw in front of us the steel hedgehogs, the crossbars you see in the pictures. There were men hanging on them, men who had come in on smaller boats but hadn't reached shore. Machine and rifle bullets were hitting all around them and some of them were dead. The water was bloody around them. Some were hollering for help. . . . About 20 men were laying in the bloody water, some just floating, dead; and there were dips in the water where small arms fire was hitting. They were hollering, "Help! Help!"[33]

 The navy captain commanding the boat then argued with the infantry officer because the infantry officer wanted the boat closer to shore. He had recognized that the water was neck deep and that the jeeps would be lost at that depth. The boat lifted the ramp and backed out and tried to get closer.

> After we backed out, I went back to the head, to wash all the blood and other things off me. I looked in the mirror and said to myself, "Is that me?" My eyes looked glassy "You scared sonuvagun, you! Now we've got to go do this again."
>
> So our boat went in again, and the second time we landed. But the fear was greater the second time, because the first time we didn't know what to expect.
>
> The water was from knee to shoulder depth, when we got off. The sand on the bottom of the beach was uneven. . . . I was one of the first men onto the beach.[34]

The horrors of the beach landings were further described by Alan Pixton, who crossed the channel on a troop carrier named *Ancon* and landed on Omaha Beach. He was an officer in a group of combat engineers.

I could see smoke coming up from burning landing craft and burning tanks and of course, hear all kinds of explosions on shore. When I did get ashore, it was amazing the amount of carnage that was there. Dead soldiers, injured soldiers on stretchers down by the water's edge. The Germans were heavily involved in some cliffs that were right behind the beach. They were about 100–150 yards inland from the beach and they were 100 feet high and they had emplacements in there, machine guns, mortars, snipers, and it was pretty rugged.

The first time that I tried to cross the beach, I happened to be the only one going at that particular time and I took about five or six steps and all you know what broke loose, machinegun fire, sniper fire and the beach in that particular area was not a sandy beach, but it was rocks, rocks the size of your fist, or a little bit larger. I could hear these bullets ricocheting off the rocks and spooling all over the place. It was scary. It is a naked feeling, being out there and knowing that you are the only one that's the target for all that fire. . . . My guardian angel was with me.

I saw a soldier who had been run over by one of our tanks and he was only about three or four inches thick. I saw soldiers that were on stretchers down at the water's edge and the tide was coming in and to hear them screaming, "Somebody help me! I'm drowning." There were no people to help them, to get them out that way. That night there were screams all night from soldiers that had gone through mine fields. So much of the area between the beach and the shoreline and the cliffs were heavily mined and soldiers went in there and were wounded and at night you couldn't go in there to get them out because we'd get more wounded and there were screams all night. Those things stay with you.[35]

He then described the difficulty of getting close enough to shore to unload the men and jeep aboard his landing craft. He observed that other ships were also having problems; one in particular had unloaded too far out and lost its cargo in deep water. Unfortunately, his situation did not improve when his craft was finally able to unload on the beach. He then described the horror he experienced crossing the beach area:

I was wondering how we were going to get off the beach. I said I wish I could carry a foxhole with me, because that's where I'd like to be. I tried to console the men. Some were a little frightened. I was as scared as the rest of them but couldn't show it because you had the men there—you had to carry them along with you. Anybody that goes through that and says they are not scared is not human. People shooting at you out there is no fun. While we were going back and forth waiting to go in we were under small-arms fire. Anytime anyone popped their head up high, got up and started moving around, they'd draw some fire from way back there. I thought if I could carry my own dog tags home, I would be a happy guy. . . .

I was walking along with an infantry sergeant. You don't hear a mortar come in that goes straight up in the air. All you hear is a puff, but you can't hear when it comes down. It doesn't whine, it just comes down, blat. Well, this thing came down on the sergeant's side. It lit only a few feet from him. He was right between me and the shell. I never got a scratch, but it tore him to shreds. I got blood and little pieces of bone over my O.D's (olive drabs). It was that close and just happened to be there. Of course it killed him, but I never got a scratch. . . . I threw those O.D.'s away and put my other ones on. They were just covered with all parts of him and I didn't want any part of it.[36]

Hobart Bright landed at Omaha Beach one day after the first invasion force. His description reflects the ongoing battle that raged for several days as the Allied forces gradually moved inland:

On June 7th we went ashore at Omaha Beach. The landing was unforgettable, planes as far as the eye could see. Struggling ashore through water chest high, under heavy fire, through mine fields, over abandoned equipment, bodies everywhere, a part here and a part there. It was our job to secure the beach and rid it of snipers. My assignment in the platoon was a foot messenger. I would go day and night to deliver messages. Sometimes a soldier would halt me, having his gun stuck in my belly asking me for the password before I could go any farther. It was dangerous at night, especially if we were in the woods. The cliff had been cut down somewhat by the troops ahead of us, and after we scaled to the top

we dug in for the night. During the night a mortar shell hit beside me, leaving a huge hole. We found this underground bunker made from logs and was (about to throw) a grenade inside when French civilians came out. We kept getting sniper fire and couldn't find where it was coming from. There was a church nearby and it had been searched, but no one was found. We finally learned that the Germans had a tunnel under the pulpit. They would come from the tunnel up through the pulpit, fire and disappear. We were tired and hungry, and I longed for a glass of sweet milk. We found what we thought was an abandoned house, but there was a little old French lady there. She took her little bunch of twigs, built a fire in the fireplace and boiled two eggs for my buddy and me.[37]

The Weeks following D-Day

The D-Day invasion force had broken through the German defenses. This allowed Allied soldiers to push inland and establish significant strongholds before the Germans could organize a counterattack. Soon the invasion site experienced traffic jams when tons of supplies and numerous military vehicles were brought ashore. Artificial harbors, or "mulberries," were constructed offshore by sinking prefabricated cement blocks to form a breakwater for the harbor. Pontoon-supported roadways were then constructed from the piers to the beach. While they lasted only a few days before being destroyed by a storm, these temporary harbors aided the rapid deployment of supplies and reinforcements.[38]

Dale Blickenderfer landed at Utah Beach on 9 July. Evidence of the battle that had ranged over a month earlier was still observable.

> The boat stopped out about a couple of hundred yards offshore, and we went in on LSI's (Land Ship Infantry). They dropped their front ends down about 50 yards from shore and we waded through water up to our waists. We still had our 105-pound packs on.
> Utah beach was just sand, with the ships out in the water. . . . The beach had been cleaned up some. Still you would often see rifles and other things laying around. A few tanks and other vehicles that had been blown up were still there. We walked to the staging area, I assume maybe a half-mile or so.[39]

The troops continued to land at Normandy as General George Patton's Third Army broke the German lines and swept through Brittany The Germans countered with five Panzer divisions determined to stop the Allied thrust. The resulting battle left the German army fleeing ahead of the Allies on every front. In a desperate attempt to sever the Allied lines, the Germans launched a counterattack known as the Battle of the Bulge. This ended the Allied hope for an end to the war before Christmas 1944. After several more months of bitter fighting, the Allies pushed the German army across the Rhine. With the Russian army moving from the east and the Americans, British, and Canadians from the west, the German front collapsed. On 25 April 1945, Russian and American troops shook hands in Berlin. On 7 May 1945, the German High Command signed an unconditional surrender and the war in Europe ended.

Response to the D-Day Invasion

Looking back at the importance of the Normandy invasion, it is interesting to consider the reactions at that time. President Franklin D. Roosevelt responded to news of the D-Day invasion with a prayer he had written while the troops were landing on the Normandy beaches. He read this prayer on national radio at 10:00 P.M. (EST) on 6 June 1944. He began his prayer:

> Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our republic, our religion and our civilization and to set free a suffering humanity. . . . They will need Thy blessings. Their road will be long and hard. The enemy is strong. He may hurl back our forces. Success may not come with rushing grace, but we shall return again and again; and we know that by Thy grace, and by the righteousness of our cause, our sons will triumph.[40]

He continued his prayer with the recognition that some of the soldiers involved may not survive the conflict and pleaded that God would accept them into His kingdom as honored servants. He acknowledged that the road would be long and hard and asked the Lord to give the nation strength. He then concluded by pleading for peace and acknowledging that all was dependent on the will of God.

The First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter–day Saints issued a statement that was printed on the front page of the *Deseret News.*

We have been asked for a comment upon the invasion. We feel that this is a day, not for comment, but for prayer for our loved ones who are in the service and for the triumph of righteousness.
Heber J. Grant
J. Reuben Clark Jr.
David O. McKay

The First Presidency[41]

During the days that followed local papers were full with news of the invasion. Pictures and interviews brought the details to the public at home. The general response of the citizens of Salt Lake City to the invasion was captured in the headline, "Invasion Finds S. L. Calm." The related article explained that the calmness that characterized Salt Lake City was in contrast to the feeling exhibited in other cities in the United States. Reaction was varied, but there were no noisy receptions in Salt Lake. In most homes the news was received by grim, tight-lipped residents, for virtually every one of them had a son, a relative or a friend somewhere in the invasion territory whose name might soon appear in the casualty lists.[42]

The article included a photograph of Mrs. Samuel W. Jones reading her scriptures in response to the invasion news. This member of the Church had three stars in her window indicating the number of her sons serving in the military. One son, Private Sherwood Jones, participated in the D-Day invasion. His mother indicated that his letters had stopped weeks before. She was quoted as saying, "I do not care to read the headlines today. . . . I pray for the safety of my son, but that is not all. I want him, under any test, to be true and truly brave. Also I want him to pray."[43]

On Wednesday, 7 June, the day following D-Day, articles in the paper outlined the grim task facing the troops as they marched inland. D-Day was not the end but only the beginning of the final stage of a long and terrible war. As one observer said, "For the moment, let's temper our enthusiasm with caution."[44]

The war continued to a successful conclusion and grateful soldiers returned home to their families. Latter-day Saints present at D-Day would remember forever their part in that great battle. The significance of their contribution was expressed by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, leader of the Allied forces at D-Day and later president of the United States, when he stood on the Normandy beach in 1964:

It is a wonderful thing to remember what those fellows twenty years ago were fighting for and sacrificing for, what they did to preserve our way of life. . . . I think it's just overwhelming. To think of the lives that were given . . . But they did it so that the world could be free.[45]

D-Day has passed into our history. The Latter-day Saints who shared their experiences from that day have reminded us of the cost of freedom. The sacrifices of those who fought at Normandy challenge us to respond with the same devotion and dedication in our time. Sacrificing and dying for a freedom that is squandered on things of no eternal value is a mockery to those who gave so much. As we remember D-Day and honor those Latter-day Saints who served in that great effort, it is appropriate to read again the words of a *Church News* editorial written 10 June 1944, four days after the invasion:

When D-Day dawned last Tuesday and Americans all over the land were awakened by cries of newsboys announcing the beginning of the European invasion, a sobering influence swept over the nation. A pronounced religious note crept into discussions of the great undertaking, radio programs were characterized by appeals to the Almighty . . . and many prayers were said.

The wave of spiritual devotion which seemed to move from coast to coast was indeed heartening to all who understand the real meaning of prayer. . . . But it recalled the words of Lincoln in a similar situation when he suggested that just praying was not sufficient, but that living the divine law was quite as necessary "I am not so concerned," he is quoted as saying, "about whether the Lord is on our side. What does concern me is whether

we are on the Lord's side."

The cause of freedom without doubt has the sympathy of the Almighty, but being on his side means far more than a readiness to fight for liberty. It means living from day to day in conformity with his teachings, sustaining religious activity, abstaining from demoralizing practices, worshipping the Author of Liberty in our homes, rearing our children in the fear of God, helping the poor and unfortunate, overcoming selfishness and being kind to others.

To what extent can we say we are on the Lord's side?[46]

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[1] Warren Tute, *D-Day* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 167.

[2] The official name of the World War II invasion of Normandy, France, was "Operation Overload." "D-Day" was the military term that referred to the start date for launching the operation. "D" simply refers to the first day of the invasion. D-Day was originally set as 5 June 1944, and then because of weather it was postponed to 6 June 1944. H-Hour designated the hour of the day that an operation was to begin. H-Hour for the D-Day invasion was 0630.

[3] John L. Flade, interview, typescript located in the Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; hereafter Church Archives.

[4] Different sources provide different figures relative to the number of planes, ships, and boats. The numbers provided above are representative and illustrate the size of the invasion force; see 50th Anniversary of the Invasion of Normandy, http://www.nando.net/sproject/dday/toll.gif (accessed 1 June 2000).

[5] Heber J. Grant, *Deseret News Weekly, 7* April 1945, 6, as cited in Robert C. Freeman, "Saints in Uniform: Latter-day Saints in World War II," presentation given at the annual convention of the Mormon History Association, held June 2000 at Copenhagen, Denmark.

[6] Contact with the National D-Day Museum revealed that LDS servicemen were designated Protestant on their military record. They suggest that there is no way of identifying those who were LDS from existing records.

[7] Medal of Honor Citation issued to First Lieutenant Edward S. Michael on 15 January 1945, Saints at War Collection, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; hereafter Saints at War Collection.

[8] Michael citation, Saints at War Collection.

[9] Kenneth Tooley Schubert, personal history, 8–9, Saints at War Collection.

[10] Vernon John Tipton, interview, typescript, Church Archives.

[11] John Keegan, "The Invasion Conceived, 1941–1943," http://Normandy.eb.com (accessed 1 May 2000).

[12] Cited by Michael O'Shea, "A Final Victory?" photocopy, Saints at War Collection.

[13] Forest A. Wright letter, Saints at War Collection.

[14] Allan Kent Powell, "Harry Ostler," *Utah Remembers World War II* (Logan, Utah: USU Press, 1991), 42. J. Robert Bullock remembers that there were 16,000 troops on board a ship designed for under 3,000 luxury passengers (J. Robert Bullock as cited in the transcript "The Private Ryans amongst Us: D-Day through the Eyes of Those Who Were There," a program sponsored by the Hinckley Institute of Politics, 11 November 1998, Salt Lake City; hereafter Hinckley Institute).

[15] Edmond Morgan Jr., interview, transcript, Saints at War Collection.

[16] Tute, *D-Day,* 58–59.

[17] Rex Boyd Greenwood, interview, transcript, 2, Saints at War Collection.

[18] Greenwood, interview, transcript, 7, Saints at War Collection.

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Melvin D. Barney, interview, transcript, 4, Saints in War Collection.

[20] Greenwood, interview, transcript, 7, Saints at War Collection.

[21] Robert H. Hinckley Jr., Hinckley Institute, 6.

[22] George Scott Hansen, personal history, 86–87, Saints at War Collection.

[23] Hansen, personal history, 87–88, Saints at War Collection.

[24] Hansen, personal history, 89, Saints at War Collection.

[25] Bernell Sharp account, 2–3, Saints at War Collection.

[26] William Rice, 5, Hinckley Institute.

[27] Ibid., 6.

[28] Tute reported that a force of 1,213 naval warships, 736 support craft, 864 merchant ships, and over 4,000 landing and other craft were off the coast of Normandy on D-Day.

[29] Forest A. Wright, interview by author.

[30] Lt. Cyrus Aydlett, as cited in Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-Day* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 263.

[31] he LCVP Design, http://higginsboat.org/html/eureka.html (accessed 5 May 2000).

[32] Melvin Barney, interview, 4, 6.

[33] Melvin Barney, interview, 6—7.

[34] Melvin Barney, interview, 7—8.

[35] Alan Pixton, 1—2, Hinckley Institute.

[36] Powell, "Harry Ostler," 43–44.

[37] Hobert Bright account, Saints at War Collection.

[38] Reinforcing the Invasion, http://www.nando.net/sproject/dday/mulb.gif (accessed 1 May 2000).

[39] Dale Blickenderfer, interview, transcript, 1, Saints at War Collection.

[40] "FDR Composes Prayer for Nation on Invasion," *Deseret News,* 6 June 1944, 1.

[41] Ibid., 6.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Deseret News, 7 June 1944, 2.

[45] General Dwight D. Eisenhower during an interview with Walter Cronkite, as cited in Ambrose, *D-Day,* 583.

[46] "Consistency!" editorial in the *Church News,* 10 June 1944.