



U.S. Soldiers with 75th Ranger Regiment scale the cliffs like Rangers did during Operation Overlord 75 years ago at Omaha Beach, Pointe du Hoc, Normandy, France, June 5, 2019. More than 1,300 U.S. Service Members, partnered with 950 troops from across Europe and Canada, have converged in northwestern France to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Operation Overlord, the WWII Allied invasion of Normandy, commonly known as D-Day. (U.S. Army photo by Markus Rauchenberger)

Army Senior Leaders Send — Lessons from D-Day

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Seventy-five years ago today, this nation led one of the most complex and daring military operations in the history of warfare. The Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6th, 1944 was the culmination of over three years of relentless work to organize, train, and equip a force capable of breaking into "Fortress Europe" and defeating the Nazi regime. Despite General Eisenhower's bold declaration that "we will accept nothing less than full victory," the likelihood of success on the eve of the operation was still very uncertain.

In fact, after giving the command to execute the operation, Eisenhower drafted a second message that read, "our landings have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold

and I have withdrawn the troops." The Germans had thousands of soldiers dug into concrete pillboxes, defended by mines, machine guns, and artillery, and were expecting a cross-channel invasion at any time. As the Allies' 5,000 ships, 13,000 planes, and 160,000 Soldiers departed England, Operation Overlord was under way.

During hours of darkness, Allied airborne troops began dropping behind enemy lines. The paratroopers were badly scattered, but they fought fiercely, causing confusion among the German commanders, keeping the enemy troops occupied. Meanwhile, the largest amphibious landing force ever assembled began moving through the rough waters toward the Normandy coast. As the



Graphic by the NCO Journal. Black and white photos from the *National Archives and Records Administration* in College Park, M.d. Color photos from the commemoration ceremony of the 75th anniversary of D-Day at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial on June 6, 2019, collection by U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Andy M. Kin.

troops hit the beaches, they faced devastating machine gun fire that turned the shoreline into a vast killing field. Despite heavy casualties, the Allies fought inward and by nightfall had seized a foot-hold in Western Europe, never to be dislodged.

Many of the lessons from that day are timeless. A high level of physical fitness was needed to move through the difficult terrain. Soldiers had to be experts in marksmanship and maintaining their weapons. The ability to call for indirect fires was essential to enabling maneuver. Rapid medical aid was the difference between life and death for those wounded on the battlefield. And units had to continue the mission even when they lost all communications.

In today's new era of Great Power Competition, we must be as equally ready to endure the rigors of combat as the "greatest generation" was at Normandy. The future battlefield will be unrelenting; units will constantly be on the move and under attack. A high level of physical fitness will be required to outmaneuver the enemy and reach the objective. Soldiers at all echelons must master the fundamentals - shoot, move, communicate, protect, and sustain

— in an environment of increased lethality.

Many of the conditions we have grown accustomed to over the past eighteen years will not exist in future battles. Control of the air will be contested; Forward Operating Bases will not provide safe haven; units will be continuously targeted by enemy fires; and communications and navigation systems will be intermittent at best. We must be able to avoid enemy detection, sustain ourselves in austere conditions, and navigate with a map and compass, among many other basic tasks. These skills are the responsibility of our NCO Corps and will be vital to success in future conflicts.

As Eisenhower knew at Normandy, in warfare, nothing is for certain. Against great odds, the troops who assaulted the beaches on D-Day achieved victory. Their legacy calls on us to be ready when our time comes. We must be masters in the basics and prepared to fight on a moment's notice. Regardless of branch, unit, or component, every Soldier will have a role in the next conflict. Together, we will preserve our freedom just as our predecessors did seventy-five years ago. ■




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