

NCOs of D-Day

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In a letter written to the troops that participated in the Invasion of France, General Dwight D. Eisenhower writes toward the end of his letter,

The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory! I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty, and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory! Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking (Eisenhower Foundation, 1971).

On June 6, 1944, Allied Forces conducted a mission known as “Operation Overlord” that would stun the German Army who at the time occupied Normandy France. American Soldiers and their allies risked their lives in this operation to liberate the French and establish a free will in Europe. The purpose of this paper is to recognize a few NCOs who fought bravely during one of the greatest invasions of military history. This paper will briefly touch on some of the units that participated in this operation and their individual missions. To include the airborne and beach assaults planned by the Allied Coalition Forces. This paper will also describe some of the equipment used during this campaign that includes aircraft, amphibious craft, the M-4 Sherman tank and a variety of weapons. The intent of this paper is to ultimately recognize a few brave American Soldiers that represent the epitome of selfless service, devotion to duty, bravery, and courage far and beyond the call of duty.

“Operation Overlord” was the code name given to the Allied Forces that included a total of 39 Divisions that would storm the beaches of Normandy by sea and by air. Prior to the invasion, the Allies conducted an air campaign primarily to weaken the German forces which

would aide the coalition to execute their mission with little or no resistance. On the eve of June 6, 1944, the Airborne Divisions of the American's 82nd and 101st, to include the British's 6th Airborne Division, took off from the United Kingdom to parachute into Normandy. Their mission was to secure the left and right flanks of the beach and prevent the German forces from re-supplying the front lines. The 82nd and 101st would drop in to the city of St Mere Eglise and secure the left flank by using parachutes and glider planes. The British's 6th Division would jump into the city of Caen to secure the right flank (Williams, 2005). The beach assault would include the American's 1st, 4th, and 29th Infantry Divisions, the British's 3rd and 50th Divisions, and the Canadian's 3rd Division. Their mission was for the 4th Infantry Division to storm Utah beach, the 1st and 29th to take Omaha beach, the British's 50th to take Gold beach, the Canadian's 3rd to crash Juno beach, and the British's 3rd to secure Sword beach (D-Day Links, 2005). This invasion would provide the opening for the Allies to continue with more forces.

The equipment used for this operation proved noteworthy on the battlefield. The C-47 Douglas aircraft was a cargo transport plane that had a wing span of over 95 feet and a max speed of 230 knots. Pressed into service in World War II, it became the major transport for the allies. It also carried cargo, dropped paratroopers and served as a glider tow vehicle in support of "Operation Overlord" (Williams, 2005). The Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel (LCVP) was an amphibious craft made of oak wood with a length of over 36 feet and a max speed of 12 knots. The LCVP could land a platoon of 36 men with their equipment, or a jeep and 12 men, extract itself quickly, turn around without broaching in the surf, and go back out to get more troops and/or supplies. The Landing Ship Tank (LST) was 328 feet in length, a max speed of 10.8 knots, and could complement a crew of 7 officers and 204 enlisted soldiers. The LST could carry smaller vehicles topside and had a tunnel-like hull that could transport tanks, jeeps, artillery

guns, or cargo (D-Day Links, 2005). The M-4 Sherman Tank weighed 32 tons (64,000lbs), held a crew of five, and a max speed of 29 miles per hour. It also had a fuel capacity for 100 miles and a main gun of either a 75mm or 76mm round. The M-4 Sherman tank was a winner by numbers, not by quality. When the US entered World War II it did not have a modern tank, even the latest existing designs were obsolete compared to the modern German tanks (Editors of the Army Times, 1969). World War II produced a variety of weapons that included the Thompson Machine Gun, fully automatic; the Thompson is an all-round field weapon of .45 caliber. It weighs 12.5 pounds when fully loaded with a 30-round magazine. The M-1 Garand was the standard weapon of the US infantry soldier in World War II. It is semi-automatic, fed by a clip that holds eight .30 caliber rounds per cartridge. The Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) is .30 caliber, gas operated, and air-cooled. It may be fired from the shoulder or from the hip. Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and certain enlisted specialists carried a Colt .45 pistol during World War II (WWII weapons used in combat, 2005).

The Invasion of Normandy produced a number of heroes and Medal of Honor recipients that stemmed throughout the entire campaign. To recognize some of these brave Americans is truly an honor and a pleasure.

SSG Lucian Adams a native of Port Author, Texas assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division. A Medal of Honor recipient who on October 28, 1944 took it upon himself to eliminate 3 enemy machine gun post killing 9 Germans after his unit was ambushed while driving a convey of supplies to the 3rd Battalion. His unit suffered 3 fallen soldiers and 6 casualties. His actions insured the convoy to continue on its mission of re-supplying the Battalion.

SSG Stanley Bender a native of Carlisle, West Virginia also assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division. A Medal of Honor recipient who on August 17, 1944, pinned down by several machine

gun snipers, bravely climbed on top of a knocked out tank drawing fire from the enemy. This enabled the unit to advance upon the enemy. He continued to walk down the middle of street upright under heavy fire and took out two machine guns. His actions inspired the unit to charge the remaining German element. In all, the unit accounted for 39 enemy kills and 26 hostages.

SGT Edward Carter a native of Los Angeles, California assigned to the Seventh Army Infantry Company. On March 23, 1945 when the tank he was riding on came under heavy bazooka and small arms fire, he volunteered to lead a 3 man group across an open field. With two of the men killed and the third seriously injured, SGT Carter continued on alone, he was hit five times before finally taking cover. As eight enemy infantry riflemen attempted to capture him, he killed 6 of them and used the 2 remaining hostages as a shield to cross the field after extracting valuable information from them concerning enemy positions. He received the Distinguished Service Cross for this heroic act. In 1995 the Army conducted a study on why no African Americans received the Medal of Honor in WWII. After 30 years Congress decides to award him the Medal of Honor. President Bill Clinton awarded his family the prestige's award.

SGT Harrison Summers a native of Marion County, West Virginia assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. Summers performed one of the all-time remarkable war feats of WWII, single-handedly killing 31 Germans. With only a little help from two other squad members, the paratrooper either killed or forced to flee another 70 or so other German soldiers, who were held up in a series of buildings near the Normandy coast. In the book D-Day, written by Stephen Ambrose, he writes "Summers is a legend with American paratroopers nonetheless, the Sergeant York of World War II" (Ambrose, 1994). Summers received a battlefield commission and the Distinguished Service Cross. His heroic act would have earned him the Medal of Honor if the paperwork had not gotten lost (U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2005).

In conclusion, this paper depicts a mission that is said to be the greatest invasion of military history. The mission “Operation Overlord” planned by Allied Forces which would become infamous in every book written about World War II. Divisions that fought bravely hang streamers from their guidons that represent their true devotion to God and country. This war introduced equipment into the battlefield that would change the way we fight today. Let us not forget the brave Americans who represent the epitome of selfless service, bravery, courage, and pure guts.

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