“General Dwight D. Eisenhower and D-Day”

By Ricardo Jose Vasquez

I discuss the events surrounding D-day Jun 6th 1944 and General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s role in the overall operation.
The Battle of Normandy better known as “D-Day” took place on Jun 6th 1944 this was a critical assault for the Allied forces in their fight against the Nazi war machine. Hundreds of thousands of troops from the United States, France, Great Brittan, Canada and other nations were all gathered in southern England intensely training for the events to follow. “D-Day” was a strategic assault to gain a foot hold on the European continent; aimed at striking at the heart of German Industrial center. ¹ The commander and General over the whole operation was Dwight D. Eisenhower prior to WW2 Eisenhower knew nothing about covert warfare gathering intelligence but he came out of the war well versed journeymen in all these techniques.² Eisenhower was a key to the success of D-day his careful planning and purposeful miss direction of the enemy helped seal the victory.

The events and planning surrounding D-Day were long and meticulously thought out besides gathering troops and Intel on the German forces. One of the first key decisions had to be to choose the landing site of the invasion beaches. Planners collected postcards from people who had been to Normandy on holidays to piece together photographic proof of what the coast looked like. ³ From a picture that I gathered, it was taken by aircraft and used to orientate the troops landing on this section of the coast line code named Sword beach. ⁴ Among the many issues to gain a foot hold on the beaches were the many traps set by the Germans one fortification was the Wall of metal X shaped debris laid out along the coast of France another picture I gathered


2 Ibid., 261


4 Ibid.
shows them laid about. They were designed to tear out the bottom of landing craft when concealed at high tide.\textsuperscript{5}

The boat rides to the invasion beaches were treacherous to say the least a firsthand retelling from George Batts who served with the Royal engineers; on Jun 6\textsuperscript{th} 1944 they start out aboard a troop ship in Newhaven, England in the still dark hours of the morning. A few hours later they were given the order to line up next to the small landing crafts that would take them to the beaches. As they were 4 miles out from the coast they were ordered to board the landing craft that were just tied to the ships lower deck Georges says “the sea was choppy, rising up and down by 16 feet, bringing the smaller craft up next to the ship and then out of reach”. The men had to judge their jump from the main craft to the smaller boats several men misjudged and were crushed by the hulls of the ships.\textsuperscript{6}

At this point in George’s recount you can sense his anxiety he says once they were aboard the landing craft they took off for the shore line. “Everyone knew that they might be dead within minutes. I feel sure we all prayed; I certainly did”.\textsuperscript{7} Even before reaching the Germans wall of debris and before laying eyes on the coast riddled with German fortified bunkers. The dangers of the coastline invasion were felt and the death toll started before any German bullet was fired.


\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.,
In an urgent message from General Eisenhower to General Marshall in the early morning hours of D-day June 6th 1944, Eisenhower writes he has of “yet no information concerning the actual landings nor of our progress through the beach obstacles.” 8 He writes that communication will not be issued until he has actual word that the ground troops have established a presence ashore. Eisenhower states that “preliminary reports are satisfactory” and that all airborne formations landed with little losses he also writes that bombings by air went off as scheduled.9 Eisenhower seems confident in the way he writes that all is going well with the invasion all the while he doesn’t really know what’s going on. He gives General Marshall a weather report talking about yesterday’s weather seeing that June 5th was the Original date where it stormed it would have been impossible to reach the coast under those conditions. He remarks how today’s conditions were vastly improved for both sea and air divisions and the prosperous outlook for the next several days seemed favorable for the troops.10

Last of all Eisenhower Spoke of the troops how he visited the British troops about to leave for the coast line and how the night before he visited the United States Air Bourne Division prior to take off.11 Eisenhower wrote about the enthusiasm in the young men’s eyes he knew that they were battle ready it’s that which gave him confidence that the battle was going strong. From

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
the readings I read Eisenhower was a man of the troops he visited them often walking the barracks he would make un-announced visits and talk with the men.  

Eisenhower was a smart man and knew the odds before heading into D-Day, on the morning of June 6\textsuperscript{th} 1944 D-Day his doubts came into play. He began to doubt the success of the Allied armies in the face of the highly defended enemy forces “led him to consider what would happen if the invasion of Normandy failed.”\textsuperscript{13} If the assault failed to establish an Allied foot on the continent he would have to issue a full order for retreat he drafted such a letter in case it happened but never had to use it. If there were any wonder why such doubts existed, here they are we’ve seen that the Germans though not expecting an attack at Normandy have it very well fortified it. There’s the Atlantic wall of debris to tear up the bottoms of all the landing crafts, “Guns of every caliber-were sited in a wide variety of Ferro-concrete bunkers and casemates covering the beaches. Slit trenches and barbed wire ringed the beach exits.”\textsuperscript{14} Also among those defenses were millions of bombs, shells and mines used to lace the beaches and coast line.

Eisenhower’s doubts were warranted to say the least as we’ve seen all prevailed; Doubts in hand mind set made nothing stopped him from addressing his troops and the people of Western Europe. On the morning of June 6\textsuperscript{th} 1944 he broadcasted his message letting the people of Western Europe that the landings of D-day had begun and that it was a joint effort of the

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United Nations plan for liberation of Europe. Eisenhower speaks to the citizens by imbuing the rhetoric of patriots to all men and women young and old he gave them a role to play in the final victory. To those patriots not in formal resistance cells he gave caution and instructed them to remain docile until the moment was right to strike. Eisenhower was well spoken the way he used rhetoric to inspire the people of Europe was critical in building war morale.

His “Order of the Day” to all the soldiers, sailors and airmen was also filled with patriotic rhetoric he played upon their soon to be assault as a “crusade” that the “eyes of the world” were watching them. That the “Hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you” Eisenhower recounts the Nazi’s “triumphs of 1940-41” how they had made the enemy battled harden and savagely brutal. Though through all that the United Nations had inflicted on the enemy huge defeats across many fronts land, sea and air and has impacted the Germans capacity to wage war on the ground. As Eisenhower speaks he is trying to build confidence in the troops that all of the planning and efforts prior to D-Day have left them well prepared to strike at Normandy and gain their foot hold in Europe.

They battle was as bad for the Germans as it was for the Allies I read this firsthand account by a German solider by the name of Joachim Dahms who served in the Sixth Paratrooper Regiment. He spoke of the “intense fire from American naval artillery” “shells of every caliber” laying waste to the Normandy land scape. As Joachim popped his head from out of his foxhole

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15 Eisenhower Instructs Europeans; Gives Battle Order to His Armies; EISENHOWER GIVES ORDERS FOR BATTLE.” New York Times, June 6, 1944.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
when the bombing had stopped he couldn’t count the number of crater made by the bombings.\textsuperscript{20} Joachim was in the village of Carentan just inland from Utah beach one of the D-day landing zones. He was in a battle that took place between the “Sixth paratrooper regiment and the American 101\textsuperscript{st} Airborne Division”\textsuperscript{21} It was at that point he decided he had enough of the war (like many other Germans towards the end of 1945) he took cover behind the rotting carcasses of some dead cows all hit by the artillery shells and gun fire. Joachim recounts “The smell of rot and excrement was everywhere. One of the animals was still alive, and I used her bloated body as protection.”\textsuperscript{22} Joachim pondered why he was there what was he capable of and was he to die in an obscene struggle for Germany.\textsuperscript{23} The terrors of war on all soldiers were alike though the Germans were deemed to be more brutal in their force many suffered and surrendered themselves in the heat of battle.

In conclusion Eisenhower prior to WW2 knew nothing about how to deceive the enemy and gather Intel how to derive fake battle movements to trick the enemy into thinking where he was going to attack. When he came out of the war he was a seasoned veteran in those exploits his presence and how he presented himself to the troops built confidence in the men. In turn the men built confidence in Eisenhower himself he was a calculated man in each decision he made. The decision to strike at Normandy was under strict controversy but Eisenhower stuck to his guns with his decision to hit there. It was a win lose situation no matter where you were to strike it was a loss of life but a win in the reduced loss of life.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
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