Analysis Of World War 2 Essay, Research Paper

Introduction

The Allied invasion of France on June 6, 1944 is variously known as D-Day, the Longest Day, Cross-Channel Attack, and probably some others as well. It was the largest single military operation of World War II. Hence, the Normandy beaches are a must stop if you get anywhere close to France.

The 50th anniversary celebration in 1994 generated a lot of hype. The recent movie Saving Private Ryan rekindled that interest. However, the landing always held a special niche going back to the event itself. Much like Gettysburg, the Normandy attack has been studied in great detail — hour by hour, person by person, shot by shot.

We’ll assume a flight landing in Paris and getting a rental car (a must) at the airport. Then you would drive over to Caen (about a 150 miles) and spend the night, which would put you at the east end of the beaches the next morning.

This book by Bruce Bilven, Jr., is a historical documentation of D-Day, June 6, 1944. The book itself contains a lot of dates, names and places, which makes it a tough book to follow.

Bruce Bilven Jr., himself took part in the massive D-Day invasion of Omaha Beach, as a second Lieutenant in the 29th Division Artillery. Drawing on his own experiances as a solider in World War II, he wrote two other Landmark Books about the war; From Casablanca to Berlin and From Pearl Harbor to Okinawa. Since the war he has written The American Revolution as well as many other books articles, and reviews. He lives with his wife and co-author, Naomi, and his college-age son in New York City.

Summary

Strategy

D-Day began with the concept of the “Second Front.” When Stalin’s Russia was invaded in 1941, he immediately demanded that his new allies attack Hitler to take off the pressure. No matter his past complicity.

Churchill and Roosevelt replied with the invasion of North Africa in November 1942 and Italy in 1943. Chief of staff George C. Marshall considered these sideshows draining away troops and time. The real war, argued Marshall, was to be a direct advance on Germany through France.

Even as the “sideshows” proceeded, three other campaigns were under way — the war against the German submarines, the US-British strategic bombing offensive against Germany, and the logistical buildup in Britain.

The submarine conflict was a precondition for the bombing and the buildup. The Allies were fortunate that Hitler was had no interest in naval warfare. By 1943 the Allies had mastered the North Atlantic.

The bombing offensive established control of the skies, which was another precondition for the invasion. The actual effect on German industrial production is still controversial, but there’s no doubt that the bombing drained away German air resources that might have shown up over Normandy beaches in 1944. At the same time, the bombing forced the Germans to rationalize certain production techniques. The result, ironically, was the military production increased during the bombing offensive.

British and American officers drew up plans for several contingencies in 1943. Operation OVERLORD was a large-scale assault against the German Army in France. This plan served as the basis for a final plan developed early in 1944 after General Eisenhower, designated as the supreme commander, arrived in Britain and established his command, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, or SHAEF.

The overlooked question about D-Day is why it didn’t happen in 1943. The Germans were greatly weakened after defeats at Stalingrad and North Africa in 1942. The French resistance was at its most effective. Instead, the British and Americans squabbled about how to proceed, and the delay meant that, in effect, nothing happened in 1943. It’s one of the most interesting What If’s of World War II.

The over-all ground commander for the invasion was the former head of the British Eighth Army, General Montgomery, who also commanded the 21 Army Group, the controlling headquarters for the two Allied armies scheduled to make the invasion. The British were to assault on the left; the Americans on the right. This alignment explains why during the Cold War the weakened Brits defended the North German plain (on the left), while the much stronger American forces in Germany were deployed behind the Carpathian mountains (on the right).

A requirement that the invasion beaches had to be within easy range of fighter aircraft based in Britain and close to at least one major port sharply limited the choice. The state of German defenses imposed further limitations. The final selection was the base of the Cotentin peninsula in Normandy, southeast of Cherbourg. To facilitate supply until Cherbourg or some other port could be opened, two artificial harbors were to be towed from Britain and emplaced off the invasion beaches.

The selection of Normandy was as much political as military. The British were still fearful of the Germans and wanted to land as far away as possible. Left to themselves, the American probably would have gone in through Pas de Calais — the most direct route. In the end, Normandy was a compromise.

Eisenhower was keenly aware of the Gallipoli problem. In World War I, Churchill engineered a landing in Turkey, which became a de factor prison camp.

Normandy could have been easily sealed off. That’s one reason why Eisenhower insisted on a second landing in South France (stripping troops from Italy) to force the issue.

Selecting Normandy was so goofy that at first the Germans believed it was feint. They fed troops in piecemeal, which worked to the Allies’ advantage. When they finally shifted the 15th Army from Pas de Calais down to Normandy, it was too late.

The destruction of the 15th Army denuded France and set up the Allied drive that only ended at the German border. In some ways it was indeed the Longest Day, and the Allies were fortunate in their enemies.

Battle

Despite a weather forecast of high winds and a rough sea, Eisenhower made the decision to go ahead with the invasion on June 6. During the night more than 5,000 ships moved to assigned positions, and at 2 am the operation began. One British and two U.S. airborne divisions (the 82d and 101st) dropped behind the beaches to secure routes of egress for the seaborne forces. Following preliminary aerial and naval bombardment, the first waves of infantry and tanks began to touch down at 6:30, just after sunrise. A heavy surf made the landings difficult but, as in Sicily, put the defenders off their guard.

The assault went well on British beaches, where one Canadian and two British divisions landed, and also at UTAH, westernmost of the U.S. beaches, where the 4th Division came ashore. The story was different at OMAHA Beach; there an elite German division occupying high bluffs laced with pillboxes put the landings in jeopardy. Allied intelligence had detected the presence of the enemy division too late to alter the landing plan. Only through improvisation and personal courage were the men of two regiments of the 1st Division and one of the 28th at last able to work their way up the bluffs and move slowly inland. Some 50,000 U.S. troops nevertheless made their way ashore on the two beaches before the day was out. American casualties were approximately 6,500, British and Canadian, 4,000 in both cases lighter than expected.

Commanded by Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, the Germans nevertheless defended tenaciously in terrain ideally suited to the defense. This was hedgerow country, where through the centuries French farmers had erected high banks of earth around every small field to fence livestock and protect crops from coastal winds. These banks were thick with the roots of shrubs and trees, and in many places sunken roads screened by a canopy of tree branches ran between two hedgerows. Tunneling into the hedgerows and using the sunken roads for lines of communication, the Germans turned each field into a small fortress.

For all the slow advance and lack of ports (a gale on June 19 demolished one of the artificial harbors and damaged the other), the Allied build-up was swift. By the end of June close to a million men had come ashore, along with some 586,000 tons of supplies and 177,000 vehicles. General Bradley’s First Army included four corps with 2 armored and 11 infantry divisions. British strength was about the same.

Seeking to end the battle of the hedgerows, the British attempted to break into more open country near Caen, only to be thwarted by concentrations of German armor. General Bradley then tried a breakout on the right near St. L?. Behind an intensive aerial bombardment that utilized both tactical aircraft and heavy bombers, the First Army attacked on July 25. By the second day American troops had opened a big breach in German positions, whereupon armored divisions drove rapidly southward twenty-five miles to Avranches at the base of the Cotentin peninsula. While the First Army turned southeastward, the Third U.S. Army under General Patton entered the line to swing through Avranches into Brittany in quest of ports.

The arrival of the Third Army signaled a major change in command. General Bradley moved up to command the 12th Army Group, composed of the First and Third Armies, while his former deputy, Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges, assumed command of the First Army. Montgomery’s 21 Army Group consisted of the British Second Army and a newcomer to the front, the First Canadian Army under Lt. Gen. Henry D. G. Crerar. General Montgomery continued to function as overall ground commander, an arrangement that was to prevail for another five weeks until General Eisenhower moved his headquarters to the Continent and assumed direct command of the armies in the field.

In terms of the preinvasion plan, General Eisenhower intended establishing a solid lodgment area in France extending as far east as the Seine River to provide room for air and supply bases. Having built up strength in this area, he planned then to advance into Germany on a broad front. Under Montgomery’s 21 Army Group, he would concentrate his greatest resources north of the Ardennes region of Belgium along the most direct route to the Ruhr industrial region, Germany’s largest complex of mines and industry. Bradley’s 12th Army Group, meanwhile, was to make a subsidiary thrust south of the Ardennes to seize the Saar industrial region along the Franco-German frontier. A third force invading southern France in August was to provide protection on Bradley’s right.

The First Army’s breakout from the hedgerows changed that plan, for it opened the German armies in France to crushing defeat. When the Germans counterattacked toward Avranches to try to cut off leading columns of the First and Third Armies, other men of the First Army held firm, setting up an opportunity for exploiting the principle of maneuver to the fullest. While the First Canadian Army attacked toward Falaise, General Bradley directed mobile columns of both the First and Third Armies on a wide encircling maneuver in the direction of Argentan, not far from Falaise. This caught the enemy’s counterattacking force in a giant pocket. Although a 15-mile gap between Falaise and Argentan was closed only after many of the Germans escaped, more than 60,000 were killed or captured in the pocket. Great masses of German guns, tanks, and equipment fell into Allied hands.

While the First Army finished the business at Argentan, Patton’s Third Army dashed off again toward the Seine River, with two objects: eliminating the Seine as a likely new line of German defense and making a second, wider envelopment to trap those German troops that had escaped from the first pocket. Both Patton accomplished. In the two pockets the enemy lost large segments of two field armies.

Even as General Eisenhower’s armies secured the lodgement at Normandy, the Allies on August 15 staged another invasion of southern France (Operation DRAGOON) to provide a supplementary line of communications through the French Mediterranean ports and to prevent the Germans in the south from moving against the main Allied armies in the north. Lack of landing craft had precluded launching this invasion at the same time as OVERLORD.

The D-Day invasion plan called for landings at five beach locations on the Cotentin Peninsula.

Dwight David Eisenhower by Nicodemus David Hufford (1915- ). Oil on canvas, 38″ x 30″, 1973. Hufford painted Dwight Eisenhower?s portrait for the Army some four years after the death of the former chief of staff and 34th president of the United States. Thus it was necessary for him to work from photographic likenesses.

Eisenhower gives the order of the Day. “Full victory – nothing else” to paratroopers in England, just before they board their airplanes to participate in the first assault in the invasion of the continent of Europe. Some of the men with Eisenhower are presumed to be: Pfc. William Boyle, Cpl. Hans Sannes, Pfc. Ralph Pombano, Pfc. SW Jackson, ; Sgt. Delbert Williams, Cpl. William E Hayes, Pfc. Henry Fuller, Pfc. Michael Babich and Pfc. W William Noll. All are members of Co E, 502d. The other men shown on the photo are not identified.