

D-DAY: THE BATTLE FOR NORMANDY¹REVIEWED BY FRED L. BORCH III²

This is an outstanding book. Anthony Beevor, whose prize-winning *The Battle for Spain*,³ *Stalingrad*,⁴ and *The Fall of Berlin 1945*⁵ earned him accolades from both professional historians and readers generally, has written another superb book that will appeal to all judge advocates and is certain to be a best-seller.

While Max Hastings (*Overlord*⁶), Cornelius Ryan (*The Longest Day*⁷) and others have written about the Allied invasion of 6 June 1944, what sets *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* apart from these earlier works is that Beevor views the landings as merely the beginning of a larger, and more important story: the fierce, bloody, and unbelievably destructive battle for Normandy that culminated in the liberation of Paris more than two months later.

This explains why only the first third of the book is devoted to securing the Omaha, Utah, Gold, Juno, and Sword beachheads while the next 300 pages examine the Allied march across France to Paris. The value of this approach is it allows Beevor to place the amphibious landings—which are well known—in the context of a larger event, the Normandy campaign—about which much less has been written.

¹ ANTHONY BEEVOR, *D-DAY: THE BATTLE FOR NORMANDY* (2009).

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³ ANTHONY BEEVOR, *THE BATTLE FOR SPAIN: THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR 1936–1939* (1982).

⁴ ANTHONY BEEVOR, *STALINGRAD* (1998).

⁵ ANTHONY BEEVOR, *THE FALL OF BERLIN 1945* (2002).

⁶ MAX HASTINGS, *OVERLORD: D-DAY & THE BATTLE FOR NORMANDY* (1984).

⁷ CORNELIUS RYAN, *THE LONGEST DAY: THE CLASSIC EPIC OF D-DAY JUNE 6, 1944* (1959).

Beevor understands the interrelationship between strategy, operations, and tactics, and this means that *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* tells a complex story of planning and execution in a complete yet nuanced manner. While this alone makes the book worth reading, Beevor's narrative is further enriched by his examination of topics that are not usually covered by military historians writing about 6 June 1944—but which will be of great interest to judge advocates.

First, Beevor shows that the French inhabitants of Normandy suffered horrific casualties: Allied bombing killed 15,000 French civilians and wounded another 19,000 *before the invasion*,⁸ and there were 3000 French civilians killed in the *first twenty-four hours of the invasion*—twice the number of U.S. dead.⁹ Prime Minister Winston Churchill was particularly alarmed by these civilian deaths, as he feared that this collateral damage might “easily bring about a great revulsion in French feeling towards their approaching United States and British liberators.”¹⁰ Roosevelt, however, rejected Churchill's plea that French civilians be spared, and instead sided with General Dwight D. Eisenhower and other military commanders who insisted that collateral damage from Allied aerial attacks was the price that must be paid for a successful invasion of Normandy. While Churchill's fears of French rage against the Allies never materialized, Beevor does record that some Frenchmen and women were less than enthusiastic about being freed from their German occupiers. When one remembers that 300 civilians died during the Allied bombing of St. Lo on 6 June, and “well over half the houses in the town were razed to the ground,”¹¹ this makes perfect sense. Since a total of 19,890 French civilians were killed by the Allies just in Normandy *after the invasion* (and an even greater number injured),¹² one has to question whether the customary international law principles of distinction, military necessity, and proportionality were ever considered by Allied war planners.¹³ Whether French civilian casualties were excessive, however, is a forgotten issue today, as memories have faded and only the good about D-Day is remembered.

⁸ BEEVOR, *supra* note 1, at 49.

⁹ *Id.* at 112.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 49.

¹¹ *Id.* at 123.

¹² *Id.* at 519.

¹³ For a discussion of these principles, see GARY D. SOLIS, *THE LAW OF ARMED CONFLICT: INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW IN WAR* 250–300 (2010).

Second, *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* shows convincingly that the fighting in north-west France was “certainly comparable to that of the eastern front.”¹⁴ Since a popular belief (promoted by post-war Soviet propagandists and still shared by some military historians) is that Germany’s best troops were on the Soviet-German front and all the heavy fighting occurred in the east, this is an important point. Beevor shows that, from June through August 1944, the Wehrmacht alone suffered nearly 240,000 killed and wounded;¹⁵ another 200,000 men were taken prisoner.¹⁶ Average losses on both sides in Normandy, in fact exceeded those for German and Soviet divisions during an equivalent period on the Eastern Front.¹⁷

Combat was fierce and it was brutal, and both sides committed war crimes. A paratrooper who served in the 82d Airborne is quoted as remembering that he was to “get to the drop zone as fast as possible” and “take no prisoners as they will slow you down.”¹⁸ A sergeant in the 508th Parachute Infantry was “horrified” when he learned that members of his platoon were using German dead for bayonet practice.¹⁹ Some American Soldiers unfortunately also practiced “ear-hunting”—mutilating the bodies of dead German soldiers by collecting their ears.²⁰ But the enemy was equally savage (Beevor reports that the Germans mutilated some U.S. Soldiers by cutting off their “privates”),²¹ and Free French troops also repeatedly disregarded the law of armed conflict in refusing to accept the surrender of German soldiers and in executing enemy combatants they had taken prisoner.²² While judges familiar with World War II know that there was little regard for the Geneva Conventions of 1929 on the Eastern Front, *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* shows that war crimes go hand-in-hand with combat, and that even the best trained and best led Soldiers commit them.

Third, Beevor’s comparison of American, British, and Canadian soldiers with their German counterparts is particularly instructive. The Canadians (who often are overlooked in the story of 6 June 1944) played

¹⁴ *Id.* at 522.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.* at 67.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 68.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.* at 434.

an important role in the invasion; their junior officers in particular provided British units with much needed leadership. The British, having been in combat since 1940, were seasoned, experienced, and “stubborn in defense.”²³ But, while they were battle-hardened, they were exhausted from years of combat and this “decline in boldness and initiative” was reflected in their performance in offensive operations: “a growing reluctance to make sacrifices in attack” meant that “time after time they were checked or even induced to withdraw by boldly handled packets of Germans of greatly inferior strength.”²⁴

The Americans, still relatively fresh, learned quickly after the landings and, with aggressive leaders like General George S. Patton, advanced promptly and decisively. But not without considerable suffering, including thousands and thousands of Soldiers suffering from “battle shock.”²⁵ Beevor writes that American “medical services in Normandy were almost overwhelmed at times” by these cases of combat exhaustion (today’s Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)) and it took some time before Army psychiatrists were able to create a treatment program for these psychologically damaged Soldiers that would get them back to the front lines.²⁶

Today’s judge advocates will be interested in learning that Soldier suicides—as a direct result of battlefield stress—are nothing new in our Army (although one might assume otherwise given the media reports about suicides in the Army today). For example, a report from the 4th Infantry Division (shortly after that unit’s arrival in Normandy in June 1944) lamented the fact that Soldiers arriving as replacements “were definitely inadequately prepared, both psychologically and militarily, for combat duty . . . the majority of suicides were committed by replacements.”²⁷ Beevor reports that a female American Red Cross worker remembered that, to reduce suicides among these new and untested Soldiers, “belts and ties were removed from some of these younger men” before they went across the Channel to France.²⁸

²³ *Id.* at 323.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.* at 260.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.* at 258.

²⁸ *Id.*

Interestingly, there were “apparently few cases of psychoneurosis” among German soldiers.²⁹ Beevor explains that this may be because German authorities refused to acknowledge the existence of this illness. It may also be explained by the fact that Nazi propaganda had better prepared the Germans for battle. But Beevor also writes that the Germans had little time for weakness: a soldier who shot himself in the hand or foot was simply executed by firing squad. Perhaps this explains, in some way, the fewer number of German troops suffering from PTSD.

At the time of the Allied landings in Normandy, “almost everyone at every level was acutely conscious of taking part in a great historical event.”³⁰ *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* tells the story of this truly pivotal event in 20th century history, and the book’s superb writing, good photographs, and excellent maps make it a “must read” for judge advocates.

²⁹ *Id.* at 262.

³⁰ *Id.* at 75.