

D-Day began end of World War II

Extraordinary planning, sacrifice created success of Normandy invasion

MARK SMITH
Guest Columnist

Early in the morning on June 6, 1944, over 4,000 ships set sail from ports all over England carrying the largest invasion force ever seen in history. It was unseasonably cold and the waters in the English Channel were choppy and rough. A storm had wrapped the British Isles in a veil of clouds and rain for almost a week. But on the night of June 5, the weather cleared.



Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander for the European Theater, listened to the report given by the Royal Air Force meteorological department before the invasion. They promised Eisenhower only a brief period of clear weather. He took a chance and gave the order to go.

Three million soldiers, serving in every branch of the military, participated in what is known as D-Day. Thousands of landing craft, 12,000 aircraft, 600 warships were used. Nine divisions of Allied troops along with three armored brigades formed the majority of the invasion force. By the end of the first 24 hours, 155,000 Allied soldiers were fighting in France.

Many of the soldiers were Aggies. Possibly the most famous was Col. James Earl Rudder. Rudder was the commanding officer of the 2nd Ranger Battalion. The 2nd Rangers were charged with the unenviable task of securing Pointe-du-Hoc so that the Germans could not use their artillery there to shell the invasion beaches. Their obstacle: scaling 100-foot cliffs while German soldiers fired down on them from above. Rudder insisted on personally leading the attack.

The leaders on both sides of the Channel knew how important the first day of the

invasion would be. The Allies had to secure a foothold or be swept out of Europe. German Gen. Erwin Rommel, who commanded Army Group B defending the Normandy coast, said it would be "Die längste Tag." The Longest Day.

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For many of the soldiers on the invasion beaches, it was the longest day. Omaha beach, wedged between the other invasion beaches, saw some of the bloodiest action on June 6. Instead of a beach where the sand gradually gave way to small dunes and scrub brush, Omaha beach was guarded by a steep cliff and sea wall. Soldiers from the U.S. 1st and 29th Divisions waded ashore

only to run into a wall guarded by a veteran unit of German soldiers, the 916th Regiment.

As the landing craft approached the shore at Omaha, a current drew them off course and they landed their troops at the wrong positions. Some pilots of the landing craft, scared by the shelling from the German positions, dropped their ramps too soon. The GIs waded out and the 50-pound backpacks they wore dragged them under the water. Many did not make it to the beach. By the end of the day, 2,000 U.S. soldiers who made it to shore were dead.

If the soldiers on Omaha could not get off the beach, the invasion would almost surely fail. One US officer was quoted as saying, "There is only two kinds of people who are

going to stay on this beach: those that are dead and those that are going to die."

With such inspiring words urging them on, the Americans broke through the German defenses.

With the break-out from Omaha beach, D-Day succeeded. It did so, in part, through the cooperation of the Allies. But, there was another factor that aided their cause. Luck. Behind the invasion beaches, the Germans had a strong armored reserve. The 21st Panzer Division was waiting for orders to wipe the Allies out of Europe. They were waiting for authorization from Adolf Hitler.

When the German Commander-in-Chief West von Runstedt phoned Hitler's headquarters to receive the authorization to release the Panzers, he was informed the Führer had taken a sleeping pill and was not to be disturbed. So, the German tanks sat idle.

One interesting thing about June 6 is that it was not the only D-Day during World War II. D-Day was just a distinction used by the US Army to designate the day for an invasion. Every operation that required an amphibious assault had a D-Day.

However, June 6 was the D-Day. It has come to symbolize the war itself in many respects. The invasion required cooperation between numerous countries, and the logistics of the operation was mind-boggling.

But, more importantly, it was the day the Allies fought back.

For the British and French, it was revenge for Dunkirk.

For the Americans, D-Day was the opportunity to join completely the war in Europe, which they could, for the most part, only sit by and watch before.

For the Nazis, it was the beginning of the end.

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EDITORIAL

JUNE 6, 1944

It can be hard for modern students to understand the heroism, daring and legacy of World War II and the famous beginnings of D-Day, the final assault on German-held Europe.

The blood-soaked beaches of Normandy and the shelling of landing craft by German troops are more than just a symbol of the horrors of modern warfare. They are not very different than hundreds of other battlefields strewn across the world and across the centuries. The D-Day invasion is a symbol of faith for the American people. The United States proved to the world that aggression and tyranny are never tolerated, even at the cost of thousands of young men's lives.

The United States was not threatened with immediate invasion and occupation, unlike the other Allies. Its soldiers fought because America's goals and ideals demand action against foreign powers that reject peace for the sake of war and conquest. The United States would not and cannot allow such violence.

Few people remember what it was to fight the Nazis. For a brief moment in history,

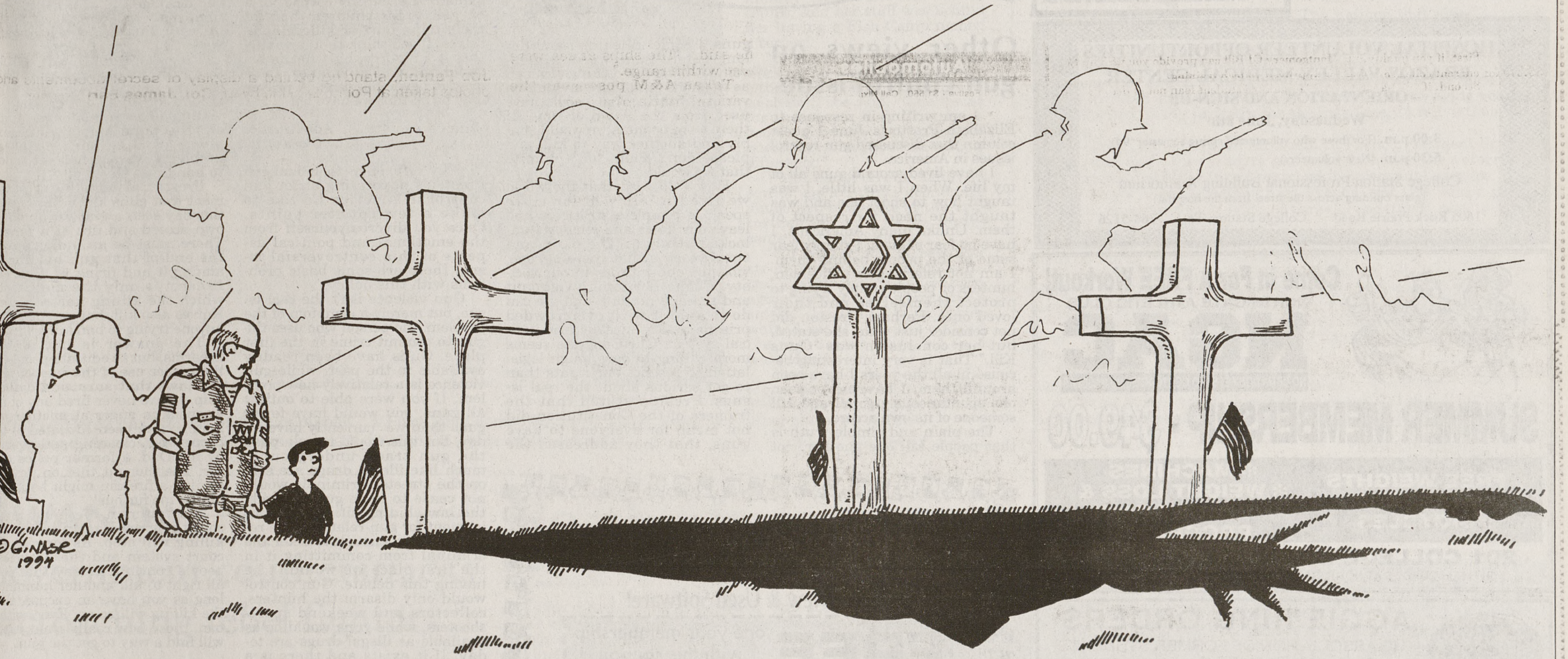
America brought to bear all its efforts and resources to achieve a common goal. Against the most vile and dangerous enemy, soldiers — rich and poor, literate and illiterate, vulgar and kind — came together on one beachhead to strike at the heart of immorality and hatred.

So many died that there had been discussion of canceling the landing. Parachutists dropped at the wrong locations, men failed to break through the German defenses. Yet D-Day still succeeded and initiated the long campaign to victory.

Every Aggie has a direct link to those who fought in that war. Men like Earl Rudder, Class of '32, led the soldiers who fought their way up the beaches and cliffs.

Today marks the 50th anniversary of the D-Day invasion. Every American should look to the past and remember that the Normandy invasion served a cause that still shapes this world.

We can never be so foolish that we forget to teach our children about the costs of war and the American troops who died valiantly in the service of world freedom.



Americans should demand support for science, research

JOSEF ELCHANAN
Columnist

In times of crisis, people are generally blind to everything outside their immediate necessities. For work which is directly productive of material wealth, they will pay. But science, if it is to flourish, must have no practical end in view." - Albert Einstein

JOSEF ELCHANAN
Columnist



People seem to worry quite a bit about the future. Everybody wonders if there will be enough food, enough jobs, and enough happiness for the upcoming generations. Due to our government's overspending, many of the government-sponsored services we have come to expect may no longer be available. The Congress can no longer simply pass a bill that bleeds money like an open artery. Unfortunately these circumstances have caused politicians to move toward a policy of appeasing the American public with "cost-cutting." Yet some programs must not be affected so dramatically by government cutbacks. One of these is scientific research.

Most people would deny the importance of research programs to the future needs of this country. After all, would you rather support more people on welfare and assist education or fund the search for quarks and alternative fuels? The problem with this question is that it does not recognize the far-reaching effects of scientific discovery.

Sometimes it is simply just a drop; sometimes science floods the world with new ways of thought and innovative methods and technologies that we soon find in our homes and everyday lives.

Many people working in this field feel that they have been let down by politicians who want fancy, high-profile inventions but ignore long-term goals and needs. Take for instance the superconducting super collider project. It was not managed or presented well, but neither are most government-sponsored projects. Yet it was going to place America ahead of every other country in high-energy research.

If this were the Olympics, everyone would be real agitated if the U.S. did not have the best basketball team; but a super-collider, who cares? And what about space? The U.S. cannot, under any circumstances, allow any country to gain a lead on us in space research. Space can provide limitless resources, more room for a

growing population, and simply the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge. Space also has a direct affect on national security, from early warning and detection of possible threats to the fact that earth's orbit is the new high ground for any possible conflicts.

Consider the fields of medicine, psychology and the like. Can anyone believe that medical research, at a time when researchers are saying that India may have 14 million AIDS patients by the end of the century and the African continent is dying from disease and

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hunger, that the United States government does not have an absolute obligation to build a comprehensive plan for assisting the world's research communities?

Admittedly, research has sometimes been overfed. Too many of our universities promote research over education, and too many corporations have used science as a way to fill their pockets with tax dollars. To throw away good science, however, cannot be justified by

these arguments. Government has consistently managed scientific programs poorly, magnifying costs. Some critics of such waste say we should leave research to the private sector. But such a move would kill the small projects that may uncover any one of the universe's deeply-held secrets. Congress allocated a measly \$72,866,000 in 1991 for scientific research, according to the Federal Funding for Research and Development study. \$42 million of that was spent on military projects. For a government that spent \$273.3 billion on defense in the same year, \$30 million is not really enough money to devote to peacetime research.

It is time that Americans demanded more concern from their government about scientific grants and government-sponsored projects. A clear, concise policy, plus a long-term outlook, would fix many of the problems associated with research.

America is about discovery. We must support, as one scientist said, "Balanced technological development, consisting of long-term, broad investment to the basic underpinnings [of science] for a much greater impact that will build for the future. It is crazy not to prepare."

Science must move forward.

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