

Good Afternoon

The D-Day Spirit

Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, the holidays. These are special times. It's also a time when more than a few Americans are in Harm's Way. To honor those men and women serving in the military, I remember the D-Day landings.

D-Day: Over 156,000 troops went ashore that fateful day at Normandy, France. Yes, D-day June 6, 1944 stands as the largest amphibious landing ever. Now, being born a half a dozen or so years after the fact, my most immediate contact with this epic event didn't even occur until 1994. That's when my friend Tom invited me to the 50th anniversary commemorations of those very same Normandy Landings. Such was the ardor and conviction with which Tom referred to the commemorations, at first I thought a trip to France might be in the offing. I asked him when should I meet him at the airport? All the while thinking getting away on such short notice could prove challenging.

"Oh no," Tom assured me. "The ceremonies we're going to are local, here Portland. We only need be at the OHS at 5:30 in the morning."

"5:30 in the morning! Now, that's early."

On arrival at the OHS that early morn, we met 100 and more other folks also toasting the occasion with Champagne, croissants and scrambled eggs. On a large screen TV we saw Ronald Reagan followed by Queen Elizabeth 2nd appearing to us live from the French beach. Later, back at the OHS, among our group, a ten year old girl arose from our hosts, the French-American school to interview one of the local attendees. "What did you bring with you on the beach?" she

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asked. What a memory that old soldier had! He must have driven ashore in an SUV, given all the things he recalled carrying with him on that long ago day in 1944.

Indeed an actual token of the invasion had been taped to one of the walls in the room. It was a scroll-like thing, a long slim mural that ran along the top of the wall. On it were silhouettes of cliffs, beaches and buildings. I asked Tom if he knew what it might be. Oh yes, Tom knew all about it. It was his 'D-Day map, a profile of the beach as it appeared from the ocean. On D-Day, Tom served as a coxs'n on a Higgins boat, a landing craft. That meant he stood at the steering wheel. He explained to me the D-day map, as he called it, helped the boat crews find their assigned landing spots on the beach. In the dim light of early morning on D-Day, in the action of the waves, the smoke and gunfire, that map must have been crucial as all the boats had specific places they needed to land, there was no time for distractions **or collisions**. That D-Day map was a small but vital piece of equipment. Someone thought ahead on that one, right?

Something else the troops were given to help them focus on the task before them might be a little harder to grasp physically. It was a radio announcement from Dwight D Eisenhower, the supreme commander of the AEF. It's received wide circulation since and if later, you'd like to hear the message as General Eisenhower delivered it, it can be found at military.com. His words are inspiring even today, for whether one is at war or at peace; people are eternally engaged in spiritual warfare, right? Courage, duty, fear, discernment, that's always the case, isn't it? General Eisenhower's words capture that conflict well. I just happen to have a copy of his message here. I'll read it right now.

Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!

I have full confidence in your courage and devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!

Good luck! And let us beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

SIGNED: Dwight D. Eisenhower

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What an awesome speech. General Ike spoke with strength and confidence, didn't he?

Did you catch the comment 'But this is the year 1944?' What did you think of that? A moment, a conflict caught in time. Here's another comment caught in its time. This one I tell on Benjamin Franklin. At 81 years of age, Dr. Franklin participated in the Constitutional Convention of 1787. After weeks of intense deliberation, arguments and even discord, the constitution, the foundation of all American laws, lay on the table. The delegates had lined up to sign it on its way into law. On the back of the chair where George Washington had sat chair was painted a sun at the horizon. Franklin said, and I paraphrase his words just a bit. 'Delegates, as we have met here these past weeks, I've often looked at that (gesturing to the sun) behind the President without being able to tell whether it was rising or setting: But now at length I have the happiness to know that it is a rising and not a setting Sun.

It's my understanding Washington's Rising Sun chair can still be seen at Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

Another comment caught from its time. This one our own; <Failed states and nation-building> Very much 'in the news' these days, right? That's what led me to study these previous conflicts our country has faced. I wanted to know <How did our own country weather the storms of nation-building and civil war?> We all know America has not always been sitting on top of the world. It's gone through the throes of nation-building-War of Independence and civil war. The War Between the States, the World Wars, and now the Terror Wars. In every instance, the military has played a vital role.

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The result of my research is an audio CD I call ' *Those Self Evident Truths*. In it I trace Democracy's triumph over tyranny and oppression. It's available through many internet sources. Just do a search for *Those Self Evident Truths* to learn more.

America is a great country; we can thank our warriors in large part for that. It is true, too that from time to time, we will face turbulence. To all that, I can only think of what my friend Tom might say as he steered his landing craft for Omaha Beach, <There is no time for distractions.> You could say it's just one of *Those Self-Evident Truths*, a truth that too often we take for granted but shouldn't.