

### Diary of the battle of Normandy (Operation Overlord).

Dear Diary,

I can barely write due to my trembling hands. Tomorrow we'll be landing at Normandy. Some say that it will be the fight of our lives. Some say it will be the fight of our deaths, I hope neither but it never is. It won't just be us Tommies either. There's a rumour going round that 156,000 Joes will be there and 73,000 will be GIs. We spent the whole day preparing. Oh, better go I can hear the captain waking up.

Dear Diary,

Today was the worst day of my life. I have no idea how many died and I think part of me doesn't want to know.

At first light I felt overcome by the sight of the infinite array of ships stretching from one horizon to the other. How could any opposing force stop such a show of power? From the deck of our ship we could peer into the haze and see the small landing craft making circles as they got themselves organized and headed toward the beach. Before dawn we heard Allied aircraft flying in the direction of the beach. We listened to the distant discharging of bombs. In the background, the immense guns of the battleships and cruisers were firing over our heads toward the coast where we presumed the beach was located. Amphibious landings commenced at 07:25. An LST (Landing Ship, Tank) nearby released three amphibious vehicles called DUKWs that carried 105 millimetre howitzers slid into the very stormy seas. They hadn't gone fifty yards when each one of them floundered and sank. I was never sure how many of the men on board were saved. No more disembarked from that LST for over an hour, waiting for the sea to subside.

There was no confirmation of a landing yet. There was a very subdued atmosphere aboard ship, as we stood around the deck with not much to do but wait and hope for the best. We were all certain that the invasion would eventually succeed by the sheer mass of troops committed to the attack, but more anxiety came over us as the morning wore on without any good news. The LST next to us, with the unlucky number 313, received a direct hit and exploded and burned with high casualties. We remembered this incident as we scanned the skies for enemy aircraft. In the 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division, the 69th Infantry Brigade, (East Yorkshire Regiment, 6th Battalion, Green Howards and 7th Battalion, Green Howards) had been selected for the initial assault unit, followed by the 151st Infantry Brigade (Durham) and then the 231st Infantry Brigade (Devonshire and Hampshire)

My regiment, the 231st, was not due to land until the afternoon, a situation we greatly appreciated. Late in the morning, about 1100 hours, we saw a flight of Lancaster Bombers overhead, returning to England. Suddenly, a German fighter plane appeared out of the sky and shot down one of our aircraft. Immediately, one of our planes peeled off with a help from a hurricane, went after the Messerschmitt and shot it down. Every soldier and sailor in the whole convoy seemed to stand up and cheer as in a football stadium.

As our ship began to move closer to the beach we could make out a column of tanks and other vehicles lined up on the shore but not moving. Late in the afternoon we received word that the Division had finally broken through the beach defences and that part of the 231st Infantry Brigade

had landed. Our company was to wait until D+1, the next morning, to land. Night time, however, was a little different. All ships were ordered to be in complete blackout and for good reason. All night the enemy flew bombing missions over the convoy, dropping bombs indiscriminately, but with little apparent effect. All up and down the beach we saw tanks and other vehicles stuck in the sand or destroyed by enemy mines or gun fire. As our vehicles came off the ship we drove up the draw along a path cleared of mines and assembled just below the last hill. We were not too sure how far our troops had been able to push inland, but it seemed secure. The captain sent our three antitank platoons—each with three 57mm antitank guns, towed by armoured half-tracks—off to join our infantry battalions who were now in the attack, while I set out to locate the Second Battalion 231st Infantry Brigade, Command Post. There I saw eight or ten wounded enemy prisoners, waiting to be attended to at the battalion aid station. They had an oriental look about them. We later learned that they were from the German 352nd Infantry Division, recruited from somewhere in Russia. Following up our daytime attacks, we made a series of night attacks reaching Caumont, fifteen miles from the beach, in five days. There we stayed—out on a point for almost a month while we waited for the U.S. Infantry Division on our right and the British on our left to catch up with us.

So that's it, well the battle of Normandy took much longer, 85 days long to be exact, but that's the end of this diary entry, by the end of August 1944, the Allies had reached the Seine River, Paris was liberated and the Germans had been removed from north-western France, effectively concluding the Battle of Normandy. The Allied forces then prepared to enter Germany, where they would meet up with Soviet troops moving in from the east. I later found out that over 425,000 Allied and German troops were killed, wounded or went missing during the Battle of Normandy. This figure includes over 209,000 Allied casualties, with nearly 37,000 dead amongst the ground forces and a further 16,714 deaths amongst the Allied air forces.

