

[General Dwight D Eisenhower, 00:00 – 01:45]

I have been asked to be the spokesman for this Allied Expeditionary Force in saying a word of introduction to what you're about to see. It is the story of the Nazi defeat on the Western Front. So far as possible the editors have made it an account of the really important men in this campaign. I mean the enlisted soldiers, sailors and airmen that fought through every obstacle, to victory. Of course to tell the whole story would take years, but the theme would be the same. Teamwork wins wars. I mean teamwork among nations, services and men. All the way down the line. From the GI and the Tommy, to us brass hats. Our enemy in this campaign was strong resourceful and cunning but he made a few mistakes. His greatest blunder was this. He thought he could break up our partnership. But we were welded together by fighting for one great cause. In one great team. A team in which you were an indispensable and working member. That spirit of free people working, fighting and living together in one great cause, has served us well on the Western Front. It will likewise defeat that other great enemy of human freedom, even now, in the far off Pacific, reeling under the blows delivered our gallant comrades in arms. We in the field pray that that spirit of comradeship will exist forever among the free peoples of the United Nations.

[Member of the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), 05:15 – 05:35]

Of course, we only saw it happening on the wall map. And yet it was, well, quite real. When I started there those markers we used reminded me of toys out of some children's game. But soon they became U-boats and ships carrying cargos, food and supplies and weapons and men to use them.

[American soldier, 05:35 – 07:20]

I remember coming over, the worst thing about the trip was you didn't know where you were going. Wherever it was you'd be a stranger, and nobody likes that. That ship was loaded from stem to stern with sad sacks. Around the third day out things got pally. Like the fella said 'Hell, we're all in the same boat' ha, the comic. Finally we got to Liverpool. They had a band to play us in. An English Army band, full of chimes. 'I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas' they played. To tell you the truth it was pretty corny. But, nobody said anything because, well, you know, it was a nice gesture. Funny thing, on the way over you felt like you were the whole works. You couldn't help it. But then all over the UK you'd see things that made you begin realise you were just part of a hell of a big proposition. All kinds of things.

[British soldier, 13:56 – 14:50]

It was a funny sort of feeling marching down to the ships. We'd done it plenty of times before of course on schemes and that kind of thing. They didn't tell us this was the big show, might have been just another exercise. Some of the chaps cracked gags. They wasn't very comic but, we laughed. I think we all guessed. The general feeling was, ok, if this is it let's get in there and get it over with. Waiting always got on my nerves. Even waiting for a bus, never could stand it. Well, after a bit our ship found its place in the middle of all the rest of the stuff. And there we stayed, for days.

[American soldier, 14:48 – 15:40]

They gave us the final briefing then. We knew what to do and how and they told us where and when. That's a briefing. I listened to every word, wrote it down in my head like a record and kept playing over and over again. Piece of beach in the morning. Ever since I became a soldier they were getting me ready for this. Before there'd been time in front of me, protecting me. Now the time had worn away and there were only a few hours left. In the morning I'd have to face it. I tried to imagine how much fear I would have, you know, to keep me doing my job. I suppose everyone else was wondering the same thing.

[RAF Pilot, 17:50 – 18:14]

I was tugging a glider the way we always practised it. Except that I'd never been in the air with a whole army before. Three airborne divisions, the sixth British and eighty second and a hundred and first American. Just before the glider pilot cast off over the landing zone I wished him 'good luck' over the radio. It seemed a sort of inadequate thing to say.

[British journalist, 21:04 – 21:40]

Back in London, only a few people knew. It was a well-kept secret. Around day break we correspondents were called and told to be at the Ministry of Information, at eight. Then they told us.

[American soldier, 21:40 – 22:37]

They called our beach Omaha, don't ask me why. I've never been to Omaha, the one in Nebraska I mean. If it's anything like Omaha, France you can have it. I understand Omaha was the roughest spot. We lost some good men, took a few prisoners, it was a lousy trade. We'd been told what to expect so it wasn't like a surprise or anything it just, well, when really happens it's different. For a while there we were pinned down but a lucky thing, the other beaches were going better so, we got a little more than our share of the old team work. The Navy come in and the air guys and finally we got moving good. You know you hear a lot about how long it takes to make battle hardened soldiers out of green troops. Listen, I got to be a veteran in one day, that day.

[Scottish soldier, 23:12 – 24:27]

Where I was it wasn't too bad getting ashore. After that it started. We had to fight for every bloody field. It was the same each time. Crawl on your belly, keeping your backside down like you'd been told. Chuck in a few hand grenades then rush them. Sometimes they killed us, but we were killing more of them. The trickiest part was the farms, they were regular little Jerry fortresses, if we couldn't manage them on our own then we'd have to wait while the Company Commander called back for artillery support. The Navy were still with us too chucking in shells ahead of us. In three days we advanced seven miles. Then we were told to stand fast and dig in. Next morning we heard the news, we got it from the BBC. It sounded great. We'd joined up all along the bridgehead. There was a solid line, 45 miles of it. We'd got a foothold, we were in.

[American soldier, 24:54 – 25:34]

There's something nice about a beach, any beach. You think of a beach and chances are you'll remember something nice. Like a party, or a picnic. Pals from the old days, girls in bathing suits. But the one I worked, Utah, looked more like a freight yard once we'd got going. For quite a while we brought most supplies right over the open beach. Like we'd practised it and like we'd made up as we

went along. We worked a 24 hour shift with DUKWs, lights, rafts, row boats, all sorts of 'Rube Goldbergs'. Stuff just kept pouring in. Tanks, trucks, food, ammo, guys, millions of things.

[British soldier, 25:34 – 26:30]

We didn't think we'd spend fifteen days in the same field outside Caen. With the wood behind us and the Germans in another wood half a mile in front of us. And a little empty valley in between. Each side mortaring each other all the time. Just meant you had to live in a slip trench. You got into a routine. You know, stand through from half past four to half past five. Then two hours wait for breakfast. Came up fairly hot. Tinned bacon or sausage, tea and of course, biscuits. We'd been living on compo food since D-Day. It was good food, but, well, you know, you got tired of it. I'd have given a lot for a slice of fresh bread and butter or a cup of fresh cup of tea. Fifteen days is a long time to stay in one place and be mortared. You get so you think everyone's coming straight for you.

American nurse, 26:50 – 27:44]

I can remember every case we ever had, especially the first one. The ambulance brought him in late one afternoon. I came over to where he was lying and he looked up and grinned. I asked him how he felt. He said something about the German with the machine pistol using him for a dart board. He was quiet and patient and a little bewildered, he'd never been hurt before. He asked how the fighting was going. Then he passed out. The doctor came over and looked at his wounds and then swore. Said he had no business to be alive. We put him on the operating table and did what we could. The doctor kept swearing all the time he was operating. We couldn't stop the bleeding. I remember the radio news that night; they said the casualties had been surprisingly light.