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## Breaching Fortress Europe: The Story of U.S. Engineers in Normandy on D-Day

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## 140 Naval War College Review

Bikini tests (!), as well as a good thumb-nail sketch of the intricacies of Imperial Japan and its strategy, culture, and politics. There is also a chapter in this section on "Myths, Conspiracies, and Cover-ups of the Pacific War," which include "Stalin Scuttles Japan's Peace Feelers" ("never established"), "Chiang Kai-shek Seeks a Separate Peace" ("not yet known completely"), "The Doomed Pearl Harbor Survivors" ("in virtually every case, the identities of these men [trapped in sunken hulks] are known but have never been revealed, out of consideration for their families"), and "Japanese Assistance to Subversive Americans" ("never revealed nor acknowledged that it existed").

Also included is a chronology of the Pacific War that is designed to give a detailed, day by day account of events as they happened across the theater. Inasmuch as there is but a single half-page map of the entire Pacific hemisphere, this listing can be frustrating when one is faced with unfamiliar locations or events.

The reader is left with the following impressions: a converted electronic text that was designed to support wargaming, it does contain some interesting, well told tales and unique comparison tables; but it is crippled by a complete lack of attribution, decent maps, any real bibliography, and a condescending, pedagogical style.

This is not a work to cite as a source or read more than once.

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Berger, Sid. *Breaching Fortress Europe: The Story of U.S. Engineers in Normandy on D-Day*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall-Hunt, 1994. 269pp. \$19.95  
*Breaching Fortress Europe* tells the story of combat engineers in the D-Day assault on the Normandy beaches. The book was sponsored by the Society of American Military Engineers and written by Sid Berger, himself an engineer and participant in the landings on Utah Beach. The book was written for two reasons: to bring to light the engineers' role on D-Day, which has not been the focus of popular accounts of the assault, and to raise money to maintain the monuments to the American engineers on the Omaha and Utah beaches.

Unlike some recently published accounts of D-Day that rely almost exclusively on oral histories, Berger uses published accounts and individual unit histories to describe the role of the American engineers in the "battle for the first 1,000 yards." This approach has both advantages and disadvantages, compared to oral histories, in that while personal memoirs are often colorful, they are prone to historical inaccuracies.

Hence, although this book may lack interesting anecdotes, it is an authoritative account of a specific but important element of the battle. Provided are detailed and technical descriptions of German defenses, geographic features of the beaches, and American and Allied weapons, which are crucial in enhancing one's understanding of the operation. The book is replete with useful photographs to illustrate further the technical aspects of the narrative. It comes with four pullout maps of Omaha and Utah beaches that are replicas of those

given to engineer combat units prior to the landings. (One of these maps is a copy of that used by Berger during his unit's assault on Utah.)

The first part of the book rehashes the origin of the cross-Channel attack but pays particular attention to the evolution of the engineer forces. The remainder focuses on the operation itself.

In 1943 Adolph Hitler gave the directive to construct an "Atlantic Wall" to prevent Allied landings along the French coast. Expecting an invasion at high tide, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, commander of the German Army Group B, also constructed obstacles in the tidal zones along the beaches. He erected timber poles tipped with teller mines, fabricated steel structures known as Belgian gates, and hedgehogs to destroy any craft that landed. Allied planners, however, scheduled the invasion for the short interval between low and high tide, therefore exposing Rommel's beach obstacles.

The engineers at Omaha suffered the same problems as their infantry counterparts despite their meticulous planning. Because engineers were among the first units to land, they spent days on the leading landing vessels in the rough waters of the English Channel. They arrived behind schedule and often landed in the wrong place because of strong currents and general confusion, and also they faced stronger resistance than expected from the German forces and suffered high casualties. The engineers were also hampered by infantrymen who could not move forward but instead fought to survive in the tidal area, sometimes using Rommel's timber poles for cover. Of those

lanes that the engineers did clear, the marker-buoys were swept away by the current during high tide and were thus rendered useless. However, despite these hurdles, the engineers managed to neutralize the mines, enabling landing craft to off load closer to shore.

On Utah Beach the assault force had a much easier time. First, the beach area was wider, and the combat teams had more time between low and high tide to clear away obstacles. Second, opposition was also lighter, and engineer teams were able to clear wide areas that enabled infantry and armor units to secure the beachhead.

This book includes several useful appendices, sketches of the beach obstacles, lists of participating engineering units, and descriptions and pictures of the monuments to the soldiers that dot the American beaches in France.

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Bargoni, Franco. *L'impegno navale italiano durante la guerra civile spagnola, 1936-1939*.

Rome: Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare, 1992. 503pp. 30,000 lire

Sabatier de Lachadenede, René. *La Marine française et la guerre civile d'Espagne, 1936-1939*. Vincennes, Fr.: Service historique de la Marine, 1993. 539pp. 130 francs.

These two fine examples of straightforward, descriptive history based on official records depict in full detail the range of roles of navies as instruments of policy in that murky world of international relations between war and peace that was the Spanish Civil War.