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Reflections on Reading

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REFLECTIONS ON READING

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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 hope and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you.

GENERAL DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, USA

In June 2019, people around the globe paused to reflect on and commemorate what is believed widely to be one of the most significant historical events of the twentieth century: the Allied invasion of Normandy that began on June 6, 1944. On what is referred to universally as “D-day,” the largest amphibious assault in history brought over 160,000 troops ashore in the Normandy region of France to begin the process of wresting control of Europe from the forces of Nazi Germany. Readers seeking to dive more deeply into the details of D-day and the battles that followed may find the following books of particular value.

Crusade in Europe: A Personal Account of World War II, by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, USA. New York: Doubleday, 1948.

Five-star general Dwight D. Eisenhower was arguably the single most important military figure of World War II. For many historians, his memoirs of this eventful period of U.S. history have become the most important record of the war. *Crusade in Europe* tells the complete story of the war as Eisenhower planned and lived it. Through his eyes, the enormous scope and drama of the war—strategy, battles, moments of fateful decision—become fully illuminated in all their fateful glory. Yet this is also a warm and richly human account. Ike recalls the long months of waiting, planning, and working toward victory in Europe. His personal record of the tense first hours after he had issued the order to attack—and there was no turning back—leaves no doubt of Eisenhower’s travail and reveals this great man in ways that no biographer has ever surpassed. (*CNO Professional Reading Program*, www.navy.mil/)

D-Day: The Battle for Normandy, 75th anniversary edition, by Antony Beevor. New York: Penguin, 2019.

This is the closest you will ever get to war—the taste, the smell, the noise and the fear. The Normandy landings that took place on D-Day involved by far the largest invasion fleet ever known. The scale of the undertaking was awesome and what followed was some of the most cunning and ferocious fighting of the war. As casualties mounted, so too did the tensions between the principal commanders on both sides. Meanwhile, French civilians caught in the middle of these battlefields or under Allied bombing endured terrible suffering. Even the joys of Liberation had their darker side. Antony Beevor's inimitably gripping narrative conveys the true experience of war. He lands the reader on the beach alongside the heroes whose stories he so masterfully renders in their full terrifying glory. (*Penguin Books*, www.penguin.co.uk/)

The Dead and Those about to Die: The Big Red One at Omaha Beach, by John C. McManus. New York: Penguin, 2014.

A focused tale of the hellish ascendancy of the U.S. Army's famed 1st Infantry Division on June 6, 1944, underscoring how the Normandy invasion nearly went terribly awry. . . . [M]ilitary historian McManus elicits moving details of courage and hardship from personal as well as historical sources, spotlighting the feats of this heroic division that took the brunt of the first-wave assault on Omaha Beach. Hardened by heavy fighting only months before in Tunisia and Sicily, considered somewhat arrogant and full of themselves, many of the 1st expected to go home. Instead, General Omar Bradley, commander of U.S. ground forces in the coming invasion, discarded "the niceties of justice" and needed to rely on those troops. . . . The troops, disgorged from landing craft in huge, unmanageable swells, were overladen with gear and unable to move quickly, offering sitting-duck targets for the German gunners, while the beaches became clotted with machinery and armament launched on an unsustainable schedule. McManus does not spare us the slaughter of those first hours. . . . Getting the men off the beach became Col. George Taylor's rallying cry (he is credited with the title's quote), while the offshore destroyers helped dismantle the pillboxes to allow the intrepid leaders of the Big Red One to breach German defenses and push inland. An exciting account from the personable point of view of the soldier. (*Kirkus*, www.kirkusreviews.com/)

Every Man a Hero: A Memoir of D-Day, the First Wave at Omaha Beach, and a World at War, by Ray Lambert and Jim DeFelice. New York: HarperCollins, 2019.

Seventy-five years ago, he hit Omaha Beach with the first wave. Now Ray Lambert, ninety-eight years old, delivers one of the most remarkable memoirs of our time, a tour-de-force of remembrance evoking his role as a decorated World War II medic who risked his life to save the heroes of D-Day. . . . *Every Man a Hero* is the unforgettable story not only of what happened in the incredible and desperate hours on Omaha Beach, but of the bravery and courage that preceded them, throughout the

Second World War—from the sands of Africa, through the treacherous mountain passes of Sicily, and beyond to the greatest military victory the world has ever known. (*HarperCollins*, www.harpercollins.com/)

The Chief of Naval Operations Professional Reading Program encourages sailors and Navy civilians at all levels to engage in self-study to better inform themselves of the incredible legacy created by those brave men and women who have preceded us. There is no better “case study” of leadership and valor under fire than the events of D-day. It is fitting and altogether proper that we recall the debt owed to those who served with such distinction.

JOHN E. JACKSON