

COUNTDOWN TO D-DAY

The information included here is intended to provide a framework for understanding the decisions and activities leading up to the invasion of Normandy at a variety of levels, from the Supreme Headquarters to the individual soldier, sailor, or airman. It is meant to provide insight into how each connected with and affected the other, and to humanize the complex story that is Operation Overlord.

Details about the planning and execution of D-Day included in boldface are taken from Operation Overlord: D-Day Day by Day by Anthony Hall. All other information, including quotations from individual servicemen, is taken from the correspondence and diaries of D-Day personnel included in the Archives of the National D-Day Memorial.

Postscripts at the end of this document contain information about individual servicemen after D-Day.

For more information about this project, please contact the Memorial at (540) 586-DDAY or www.dday.org.

Dec. 7 (D-179)

Franklin Roosevelt informs General Dwight D. Eisenhower that he has been chosen to be Supreme Commander for the Allied Expeditionary Force in the upcoming invasion of France. Called Operation Overlord, it is scheduled for May 1st, 1944.



On the same day Corporal Harry Hale of Tennessee, stationed with the 93rd Station Complement Squadron, writes to his brother Corporal Roger Hale, "I have left the States (censored) months and everybody at home still thinks I am there....You have been lucky, boy, I wasn't in but about six months before I was

shipped over and you have been in a long time and still in the States....After you leave there you just don't know how much you appreciate being in the US."

Dec. 12 (D-174)

Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, tasked with the defense of the German-occupied Atlantic coast from Norway to Spain, arrives in France to review the beach defenses against attempted invasion.

Cpl. Harry Hale in England again writes his brother Cpl. Roger Hale still in the states, "No I haven't got those cigarettes you said you sent. I can get all the cigarettes I need but I can't get matches to light them with – ha-ha. You say Opal's brother is over here. I would like to run up on him. You said you might go home on furlough in January. Boy, I sure wish I was going but I won't see home until the war is over."

Dec. 19 (D-167)

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel meets with Field Marshal von Rundstedt to discuss using armor against Allied beach landings in France. Rommel believes armor will be essential in halting the invasion on the beaches.

Dec. 24 (D-162)

British General Bernard Montgomery is named commander of 21st Army Group, the ground forces executing Operation Overlord.

Dec. 29 (D-158)

Cpl. Harry Hale in England writes brother Roger Hale still stationed in states "You say you are going to build you a house...when you get back. Well, that is a good idea. I had rather have one outside of town myself. I might do it, I don't know... I hope it won't be very much longer until we will be back."

Dec. 30 (D-157)

Secret reconnaissance work by Combined Operations Pilotage Parties (COPP) is underway to identify potential landing beaches in Normandy. Using canoes and mini subs, they take geologic samples from the beaches to determine their composition and ability to support the weight of trucks and armored vehicles in an amphibious assault.

Dec. 31 (D-156)

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill gives General Montgomery the plan drawn up by the Chief of Staff – Supreme Allied Command for the Normandy invasion. This is the first draft of the invasion plan to be released to an Allied commander for revision. Montgomery realizes a complete revision and significant expansion of this plan will be needed.

Late Dec.

British civilians are evacuated from a coastal community called Slapton Sands near Dartmouth. Slapton Sands is geographically very similar to the Normandy landing beaches and therefore will be used for D-Day rehearsals in the coming months. Civilians are relocated to other areas beyond the practice grounds to preserve the secret of the invasion's destination.

1944

- Jan. 1 (D-155) Lt. John K. Stonnell of the 390th Fighter Squadron, 366th Fighter Group, boards the "Empress of Australia" out of Boston bound for Europe. "I hope I will be with my wife next year at this time. It is a new day, new month, new year, and I am possibly headed for a great adventure."
- Jan. 2 (D-154) Lt. Stonnell of the 390th Fighter Squadron is still at sea in an Atlantic convoy bound for Europe. He writes "We are now in the danger area. The gun crews were told all planes sighted were hostile."
- Jan. 3 (D-153) Lt. Stonnell of the 390th Fighter Squadron continues his journey to the war in Europe via an Atlantic convoy. He writes "Can't for the life of me imagine all of these immense things and their use on this big boat...Looks like we might be headed to Scotland instead of England."
- Jan. 4 (D-152) *Operation Carpetbagger begins, an effort to provide airborne supply to resistance forces in France and Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands to distract the enemy with regard to the destination of the coming invasion.***
- Also, Exercise Duck takes place, the first major amphibious exercise for American troops at Slapton Sands. Similar exercises in the coming months will serve as rehearsals for the D-Day landings.***
- Jan. 5 (D-151) *D-Day planners are told to overhaul the invasion plan to include five divisions and two airborne drops along a 50-mile front from River Orne to the Cotentin. This is a significant change from the original three-division assault drawn up by COSSAC.***
- Jan.7 (D-149) *The German High Command in western Europe struggles to cope with the transfer of experienced German units to the eastern front against Russia. Such transfers leave the Atlantic front dangerously short of experienced troops against an Allied attack there.***
- Jan. 9 (D-147) Lt. Stonnell with the 390th Fighter Squadron arrives in Scotland from the U.S. He writes "The green and brown hillsides and the perfectly blue water filled with all kinds of ships was a sight that will not be forgotten."
- Jan. 10 (D-146) Lt. Stonnell with the 390th Fighter Squadron writes "I'm on a train headed south to England (from Scotland). Last night we boarded a train for a 15 hour ride. No sleeping facilities of course." Stonnell's unit is newly arrived to England to support the upcoming invasion.
- Jan. 11 (D-145) Lt. Stonnell (390th Fighter Squadron) writes "Arrived at our destination. Muddy and damp and cold. The fires went out in the night and we nearly froze to death. Found out I am in the 9th Air Force."
- Jan. 12 (D-144) *Operation Overlord ground, air, and sea forces commanders meet for the first time. A critique of Exercise Duck (the D-Day dress rehearsal of January 4th) finds American forces underprepared, overequipped, and disorganized.***

Jan. 13 (D-143) *Eisenhower arrives in England to set up headquarters for command of D-Day.*

Lt. Stonnell (390th Fighter Squadron) writes in his diary "Went to the PX and obtained my week's ration: 7 packs cigs, one box of matches, 5 razor blades, bar of soap, 3 candy bars, gum, and a box of tobacco. Cost was darn small compared to U.S." Stonnell is an American pilot newly arrived to England in support of the upcoming invasion.

Jan. 14 (D-142) Lt. Stonnell of 390th Fighter Squadron, newly arrived to England, writes "Brigadier General Queasda gave us the big picture. We are going to be in the biggest battle ever in the world, flying every kind of mission in P-47s. Says we will fly missions with heavies and strafe as practice for the big invasion."

Jan. 15 (D-141) *COSSAC (Chief of Staff for Supreme Allied Command) ends operational control of Overlord and SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force) takes control. General Eisenhower and his lieutenants are now in command of D-Day's planning and execution.*

Jan. 16 (D-140) Lt. Stonnell of 390th Fighter Squadron writes in his diary "Had intelligence lecture on what pilots are to know...Plenty of work ahead. Learned about evading the enemy if shot down and what to do if captured. It is really a neat outfit, and what intelligence does not know is not worth knowing. Lectures on air-sea rescue with raft demonstrations." Lt. Stonnell's outfit will be flying missions in support of Operation Overlord in the coming months against targets in western Europe.

Jan. 17 (D-139) *Two Combined Operations Pilotage Parties (COPP) swimmers return to Normandy beaches to take geological samples for further analysis; it is crucial that the beaches be able to support the weight of amphibious trucks and tanks. General Eisenhower appoints Omar Bradley commander of US 1st Army; he will take control of American forces once the beach landings are complete and beachheads secure.*

Jan. 18 (D-138) *18,000 men with the 4th Division depart New York for England. The 4th Division will land at Utah Beach on D-Day.*

Jan. 19 (D-137) *The French Resistance formally appeals to the Combined Chiefs of Staff for an increase in supplies and arms being dropped if they are to help with the upcoming invasion of France.*

Jan. 20 (D-136) *General Eisenhower attends the first meetings to discuss Operation Fortitude/Bodyguard. These two operations are designed to deceive the German high command about the location of the invasion of western Europe.*

On the same day, Lt. Stonnell of the 390th Fighter Squadron writes "Left this AM for London with Bertza and Sylvester...Talked with two little fellows of the high English type who had the most unbelievable speech I had ever heard...one 9 and

the other 11. ...After stumbling around in the blackout for awhile, we went to bed around midnight.” Stonnell is a relative newcomer to England and awaiting training to fly P-47s in the coming invasion.

Jan. 21 (D-135)

The first conference of senior commanders for Operations Overlord and Neptune takes place.



The newly revised invasion plan is presented by Allied Ground Commander General Montgomery. Both the navy and air corps express concern that they do not have the resources for a five division/2 airborne division assault on five landing zones. Accommodations are eventually made, including moving the date of the attack from May 1st to early June, but Eisenhower agrees that Montgomery’s plan will be submitted for final approval by Combined Chiefs of Staff.

Later that night, Lt. Stonnell on leave in London writes in his diary “At 9PM, the air raid sirens blew and I witnessed my first air raid. The flak barrage was terrific. Could see them burning and search lights all over the sky. Heard the bombers and the bombs fall. Very exciting.”

Jan. 23 (D-133)

General Eisenhower and Chief of Staff Bedell Smith relay the revised invasion plan for Operation Overlord to the Combined Chiefs for approval. They stress the need for the Combined Chiefs to commit firmly to providing the resources (ships, planes, and landing craft) needed to ensure the operation’s success.

Jan. 24 (D-132)

Lt. Stonnell, part of the 9th Air Force in England, writes in his diary “My parachute box arrived and I sewed on my squadron insignia. Still no planes to fly and don’t know what they will be. Whittled out a very small P-47 from fireman’s woodpile and painted it camouflage color. Stuck it up on the big map in operations.” Stonnell has been informed his unit will be flying missions as part of the coming invasion but for now he waits for planes and further training.

Jan. 26 (D-131) *The 4th Infantry Division arrives in England from New York – the tenth US Army Division to arrive to date. They join the 29th, 1st, 2nd, 5th, 8th, 9th, 28th, the 101st, 2nd armored and 4th armored divisions already in England.*

General George Patton is told by Eisenhower that he will command FUSAG (First US Army Group) as part of Operation Fortitude, a combined effort to deceive the German command with regard to the invasion's destination. FUSAG is a bogus army of 11 divisions said to be preparing for the invasion of Calais, France.

Jan. 27 (D-130) *All Allied cross-channel raiding stops to avoid drawing attention to potential invasion beaches or the need for stronger Atlantic coastal defenses by the Germans. Only Combined Operations Pilotage Parties work will continue (landing beach geological and geographical analysis).*

That same day, Lt. Stonnell writes "Had Geography lessons on French coast. Have covered down to Paris." Lt. Stonnell's training is gradually taking turns that indicate an amphibious assault in France is in the offing.

Jan. 28 (D-129) *Eisenhower is approached about using US companies to help convert Sherman tanks to DD (duplex drive) tanks. None of the DD tanks have arrived from British plants since order was placed in July 1943. These tanks are crucial to Operation Overlord's success, as they will allow tanks to "float" to shore along with the first waves of infantry and provide close fire support.*

Jan. 29 (D-128) Lt. Stonnell of the 390th Fighter Squadron writes "Col. Williams instructed us in our coming role in this war. I will be escorting both heavy and medium bombers, strafing, skip bombing, and dive bombing in the P-47. He said we were really going to have fun, just like hunting big game, everything furnished and paid for. We will be moving along with the invasion."

Jan. 31 (D-126) *Eisenhower receives word that the Combined Chiefs have approved General Montgomery's plan for Operation Overlord. German Field Marshal Rommel begins work on strengthening beach defenses along the Atlantic coast (including creating minefields, placing tank obstacles, and especially increasing the number of beach obstacles.)*

On the same day, Lt. Stonnell, stationed in England with his fighter squadron, writes "One half year ago I married the dearest, prettiest girl. What a great day and night that was, shopping in the morning, married at 7PM, and off to the time of our lives. I shall never forget a moment of that, the greatest day of my life. My only wish is that I return to her unharmed."

Feb. 1 (D-125) *SHAEF issues the Initial Joint Plan for D-Day, as approved by the Combined Chiefs.*

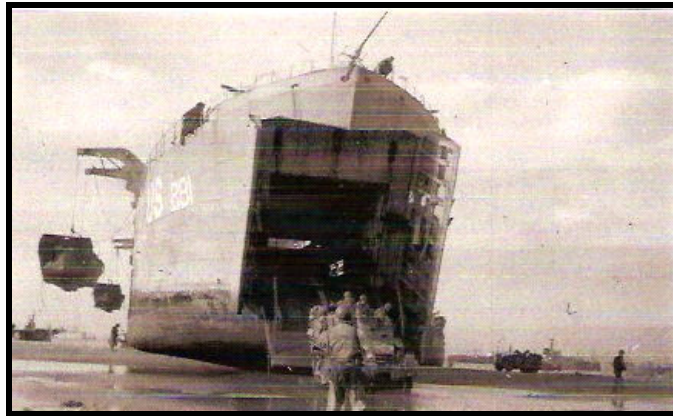
Lt. Stonnell, an American airman in training in England, writes "So doggone

many requests and regulations. Got to wear this, do that, comply now, expect this and that... Sent Louise a cablegram for our 6 month anniversary, which was late, damn it. I cannot get any time off."

- Feb. 2 (D-124) In England with his fighter squadron and still waiting for aircraft, Lt. John K. Stonnell writes in his diary "These are trying days now. The weather remains wet and cold. We are waiting to fly, waiting for combat, and waiting for mail. Been feeling pretty darn bad."
- Feb. 3 (D-123) Warrant Officer Tommy McKnight of North Carolina writes to his sister Alice from England about her upcoming graduation from nursing school: "Am proud of you Sis for doing such a good job... Expect you often felt like quitting but you have stuck it out." McKnight belongs to the Service Company of the 116th Infantry Regiment in training in England for D-Day.
- Feb. 4 (D-122) *American factories begin converting Sherman tanks to DD (duplex drive) amphibious tanks for the coming beach invasion at Normandy.***
- Feb. 6 (D-120) Lt. Stonnell writes "After a week, I finally got to fly... Made about 10 practice dives. Had a time with my ears and blacking out. We have about 2 weeks before going operational." Stonnell has been waiting for weeks for an airplane since arriving in England. He belongs to the 366th Fighter Group.
- Feb. 7 (D-119) *Eisenhower pushes to add more airborne divisions to the invasion plan to help hold the areas behind the landing zones, especially in the Cotentin peninsula, but Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory says he has too few air crews to move three divisions in 2 days.***
- In his diary, Lt. Stonnell of the 366th Fighter Group writes "Our big boss, Maj. Gen. Brehton, spoke about the coming invasion and these devilish German glider bombs. Ray and I got a flight together, our first since we got here. We dive bombed and then went on deck strafing. Really had fun."
- Feb. 8 (D-118) *Royal Navy intelligence issues the bleak news that nearly 200 German U-boats are still operating in the area of the English Channel and could pose a serious threat to the invasion unless dealt with.***
- Lt. Stonnell writes in his diary "Capt. Lee left for his first combat mission with the Col. and 2 others. A plane was assigned to me while I was in the hospital...It will be B2H letters on the side, last 3 numbers are 701. So I am looking forward to old 701 carrying me a long ways and to see a lot of things." It has taken almost four weeks for him to receive an airplane since arriving in England.
- Feb. 9 (D-117) *Eisenhower receives a proposal from Air Chief Marshal Leigh Mallory to target the French railway system to debilitate the Germans' ability to move troops and supplies to the invasion areas. Despite Churchill's misgivings about civilian losses among the French population, Eisenhower approves the plan.***

Feb. 10 (D-116)

The Allied Combined Chiefs order all available LSTs in Mediterranean theater moved to Britain. This will hopefully provide enough large landing craft to move all the trucks, jeeps, and tanks needed in the attack.



Finally in possession of a plane, Lt. Stonnell writes "Old 701 is getting in good shape...While flying around here, I think so much about what I will see through that same windshield. Wondering all of the time if I am going to get through it OK. What a future. What chances there are ahead. Life is but a gamble every day, but I'll get through, just got to."

On the same day, Cpl. Harry Hale in England writes to his brother Roger, who is still stationed in the states, "Well, how did you like your furlough home? I guess you liked it, didn't you? I know I would. Sure wish I could have gone home on one before I came across but that's my luck.... Juanita sent me some pictures of [Patricia]. Juanita says when you do something she doesn't want you to do she says 'stop,stop' and when she gives her something to eat she says 'thank you.' She is getting smart, isn't she?" Hale's wife Juanita and daughter Patricia are at home in Tennessee. Patricia is not yet two years old.

Feb. 11 (D-115)

The US 5th and 6th Armored Divisions sail for Britain.

Lt. John K. Stonnell writes "I have been picked to fly Ray's wing in combat, so we fly together all of the time. ...Looking back over all of those training days and wondering how I ever made it and here I am just about ready for real combat in such a small amount of time. It is my golden aim in flying to prove that I can fight and live too." Stonnell's training in dive-bombing and strafing is preparation for the Normandy invasion, now just a few months away.

Feb. 13 (D-113)

The final conference is held to determine numbers of vessels needed for Operation Neptune and Overlord.

Lt. Stonnell, an American pilot stationed in England, writes "Not much to do so worked on Carter's jacket, painting 'Excalibur' and the sword on the back. I put a yellow, black, and white insignia on mine. Started work on Capt. Smith's 'girl' for

his plane, enlarging a Varga girl...I love working on that kind of stuff, painting, drawing, creating something.”

Feb.14 (D-112)

The US 82nd Airborne arrives in England from the Mediterranean campaign. Training for Operation Overlord gets underway almost immediately.

Lt. Stonnell writes in his diary this day “Lt. Joseph McCurdy was killed while on a routine training flight only a few miles from the field. It seems so cruel and unreal, a fellow pilot I’ve known personally for 6 months is here one minute and 30 minutes later he is dead.”

Feb. 16 (D-110)

German Naval Commander Admiral Doenitz moves 10 subs from France to Norway, where Hitler is convinced the Allied invasion is coming.

Lt. Stonnell writes in his diary “We are planning on sending [McCurdy’s] helmet to his folks, bronzed, as a memory of his squadron. We also decided to fix a system beneath our squadron insignia for all of the unfortunate. May there be no more.” The day before, Lt. McCurdy had died when his plane crashed on a routine training flight.

Feb. 18 (D-108)

Germany begins a new series of air raids on London in the “Little Blitz” which lasts until late March. The US Navy now has 18 major bases in Britain, mostly along the southern coast.

Lt. Stonnell writes “My ship [plane] had to be painted, so Sgt. Huntley went to work. Really did a nice job on names, especially ‘Darling Louise’ [the name of Stonnell’s wife].”



Feb. 19 (D-107)

Exercise Crackshot, the first training exercise for medical troops and hospitals for the coming invasion, gets underway.

Lt. Stonnell continues training and practice with the 390th Fighter Group for D-Day. He writes "Much practice... Flew a mission for the first time and I did not hit the damn target, overshooting it with 100 lb. sandfilled bomb....Ground gunnery was awful... Don't think I hit the devilish target over 2 or 3 times.... Disgusting." Stonnell finds out later "I got 27 hits in gunnery – top man!"

Feb. 22 (D-104)

American airman Lt. John K. Stonnell writes in his diary from a base in England "Flight changed which separates Ray and I... Good news about Major Holt getting two halves in combat which makes a whole victory, first in our group...Bad news was Capt. Orsinger got shot down on the same mission. He went down with 4 ME108s on his tail."

Feb. 23 (D-103)

The 30th Infantry Division arrives in England from Boston. They will follow lead units into Normandy in the weeks following D-Day.

Lt. John K. Stonnell with the 366th Fighter Group in England writes "Went to London from Hungerford.... Went shopping and bought a good atlas to keep up with world events.... The sirens let loose. We figured we would watch it from the roof of the [hotel]. There we saw a Hun in lights but flak fell close. We went to a window and no sooner than we did a bomb fell darn close. What hell that was. We had to go to another Red Cross club."

Feb. 24 (D-102)

US 5th Armored Division arrives in England

On the same day, airman Lt. Stonnell writes in his diary from leave in London "Still shaking this morning after last night (air raid). It was the most terrifying thing that ever happened to me. We actually had our heads out of the window watching flares come down and then saw this blinding flash just in time to turn our backs. Several bomb fragments hit so close that we were knocked onto the floor. The dust was so thick that flashlights were of no use. Ray was so stunned I had to help him down the stairs.... There was glass for 3 blocks in every direction."

Feb. 25 (D-101)

Select pilots from the Royal Navy begin training for spotting and targeting work for naval gunfire in support of ground troops in Operation Overlord. Their skill will be crucial in ensuring that fire is directed over the heads of Allied craft and troops to land on target against German fortifications. Fire that falls too far inland or short of the beaches will be disastrous for the ground troops.

Still waiting for an air combat assignment, airman Lt. Stonnell contents himself with recording combat by others at his base. He writes this day "Maj. Holt got 14 flak holes and got credit for one victory, helping shoot a 190 on deck and a JU 88 on ground.... Maj. B was shot down. I had little to do except censor mail."

Feb. 26 (D-100)

Allied naval headquarters moves from Norfolk House in London to Southwick House near Portsmouth Dockyard to oversee embarkation for the invasion.

Word finally comes for the 366th to move to its operational base. Lt. Stonnell writes "We are to move next week, I reckon. The waiting is awful and now Ray and I have been split up."

Feb. 27 (D-99) Lt. Stonnell writes "No ships to fly so no flying for us....Moving to Thuxton about 20 miles south of here. It is an RAF field and they say it is really a mess. They are trying to get this outfit mobile so we will be ready when the invasion comes to hop over to France. Our part is going to be a bloody one it seems.... No mail. I miss Louise so much." Louise is Lt. Stonnell's wife of 8 months.

Feb. 28 (D-98) *Hitler cancels transfer of 2 experienced armored units to France to shore up The Eastern Front. The shortage of armor and experienced troops makes it extremely difficult for Rommel to plan an adequate defense of the western coast of France.*

Feb. 29 (D-97) *The British Chiefs of Staff are shown scale models of the mulberry harbors being built. These modular harbors will be towed into position off the coast of Normandy and connected to create an artificial harbor for Allied ships to offload supplies and troops following the invasion. The British government also imposes a press ban regarding speculation about the timing and destination of the invasion.*

Readying for combat flights, Lt. John Stonnell writes "I will be flying [Vic] Grisanti's wing now. He is a very fine pilot. We call ourselves 'the old man and the kid.' He is 32 years old. Got paid \$275 and sent Louise \$200. No mail but my sweet wife has been so good about writing. Will I ever see her again?"

March 1 (D-96) *British Prime Minister Winston Churchill holds the first weekly meeting of the Operation Overlord Preparation Committee. Among committee recommendations are clearing civilian hospitals of patients to handle anticipated D-Day casualties.*

In his diary, American airman Lt. Stonnell writes "Flew 10 ship formation to Thuxton... Found out we are to go operational in 7 days. Look out Jerry, the 366th is practically there!"

March 2 (D-95) *SHAEF now revises D-Day plan to include a second airborne drop in the Cotentin peninsula. Air Chief Marshall Leigh-Mallory now believes sufficient air crews should be available for this change.*

March 3 (D-94) *Operation Bodyguard plans are agreed upon between Soviets and Allies. The Soviets will start their summer offensive in the east against Germany after Operation Overlord and they will appear to be preparing to attack Norway, Romania, and Bulgaria. This will force Germany to prepare for attacks in this area and divert troops from the western front to eastern front instead, reducing enemy strength in Normandy.*

Lt. Stonnell, waiting to go operational in fighter combat from England, writes in

his diary "Another accident in our squadron. Fraser didn't get off the ground and washed his ship out. Ran through a hedge and a fence, belly crash. He was not hurt, but ship is no good. Runways are awful short around here."

March 4 (D-93)

SHAEF (the Allied command group responsible for planning and executing the Normandy invasion) begins to move from Norfolk House to Southwick House near Portsmouth and the embarkation area.

P-47 pilot Lt. John K. Stonnell writes in his diary in England "Still waiting for a cylinder for my plane so can't fly, damn it.... Carter came back from a test hop with a hole knocked in his wing and doesn't even know what happened."

March 6 (D-91)

Operation Fortitude North kicks off with the phantom British 4th Army (30 men) generating enough radio traffic to convince Germany that a force of 250,000 is heading across the North Sea to Norway from Scotland. Such diversions will be crucial in the coming weeks to protect the secret of the Allies' true invasion plans.

Lt. John K. Stonnell writes "Still trying to run down a cylinder but no luck.... Went to have my picture taken for passport used for evasion tactics if forced down in occupied country." Stonnell is waiting for a cylinder for his P-47 in order to go operational and provide fighter support to bombers over western Europe as part of the D-Day air campaign.

March 7 (D-90)

The London Evening News reports that the Canadian prime minister is predicting major Allied operations will take place within the next three or four months. Churchill reminds the minister that leaders are not to make any reference to the timing, scope or direction of operations.

Motor Mechanic (MotorMac) Paul Krug begins keeping a small diary of his service with the US Navy. He writes in his diary about leaving New York in the rain and cold on his way to deployment overseas. "At Penn Station, they put us in an open truck and we start out for Bayonne. It was drizzling rain and I sure felt miserable."

March 9 (D-88)

MM Paul Krug writes about being on liberty in Boston with friends and a total of \$2.00 – "we looked over what we could. That wasn't much as our pockets were practically empty."

March 10 (D-87)

German Field Marshal Rommel moves his headquarters closer to the coast of France. Churchill finally agrees to ban civilian travel to and from the south and east coasts of Britain, where Allied embarkation bases are located.

MM Paul Krug gets underway from Boston for Europe thought he doesn't know it, writing in his diary this day "destination unknown... There were subs reported but they didn't do us any damage. There's scuttlebutt going around that we're going to Halifax."

March 11 (D-86)

At sea on his way to Europe, MM Paul Krug writes in his diary “wiping down bulkheads in the engine room. It’s so damn noisy down there you can’t hear yourself think....My general quarters station is in the auxiliary engine room. I’d have to climb a ladder 3 decks high in order to get out on topside but there’s no use in worrying about climbing up because if she does get hit we’ll all be blowed up.”

With the 366th Fighter Group in England, Lt. John K. Stonnell writes “Even though it was cloudy and a low ceiling, I finally flew my plane once again. Slow-timed it for an hour and ended up with oil all over the windshield. Almost cracked up landing. Saw some guys I went through basic with... they have lost 4 planes and 2 pilots. Cogan was killed. I knew him.”

Cpl. Harry Hale of TN writes from England to his brother Roger “Yes, I still have it pretty easy but you never can tell for how long, you know the army, here today and gone tomorrow. Boy I sure will be glad when this thing comes to an end for I sure would like to go home. It will be nice when we all get back home together again, won’t it? And I sure hope we will all be together, don’t you?”

March 12 (D-85)

MM Paul Krug lands in Halifax (“Well, the scuttlebutt was true...but no liberty”)

March 13 (D-84)

SHAEF’s insignia patch comes into use. Worn by Eisenhower and his lieutenants, it features a flaming sword set against a black background with a rainbow arching across the top, strong symbols of the “Great Crusade” Eisenhower envisions to restore peace in Europe.



March 14 (D-83)

P-47 pilot Lt. John K. Stonnell writes in his diary from England “All of a sudden at 4:30AM we were practically thrown out of bed. Big mission this morning. ...I was not on the operation by the board but at the last minute Maj. Holt told me to go as a spare. I got halfway across the English Channel and was not getting oxygen so I had to come home. What an empty feeling!”

MM Paul Krug leaves Halifax in a storm: "It sure got rough as soon as we got out of the harbor. At night chow we had a hell of a time keeping out trays on the table." He is part of a convoy of 74 ships, 5 corvettes, LSTs, tankers, and freighters.

March 15 (D-82)

Sgt. John Schenk of Bedford, Virginia, stationed in England with the 29th Division, writes to wife Lynn "Did I tell you that I received a letter from Mother Schenk and enclosed was a picture of George in his army uniform? He looks real nice. Not as cute as I do in kilts though...Lynn, if you can find some sort of pocket book over there I wish you would send it to me. Nothing expensive just one that doesn't leak. My old one is coming to pieces. It's getting late so I will say good night. I love you, darling."

Fighter pilot Lt. John Stonnell writes in his diary "I went on my first mission today! A fighter sweep 478 miles into France. ..It was awfully exciting but hard on the nerves, sweating out that plane... The tension is terrific flying over enemy lands. Found an airdrome and 8 of our ships divebombed it with hits... There was flak but I never saw it.... I don't have the confidence I should have yet. There is still some fear in my mind."

MM Paul Krug, at sea en route to a base in England, writes in his diary "I didn't sleep as well last night as she was rollin and pitchin pretty bad and I kept hitting up against the bulkhead all night. It was rough all day today, some of the boys are pretty sick and she's still going strong. I was out on topside and the bow looks like it's going to submerge every time and goes down and comes up and throws water on the deck and as soon as it hits it freezes."

March 16 (D-81)

MM Paul Krug records in his diary "Rough all day. Wiped down bulkheads in escape trunks. Scuttlebutt is we're going to England."

Lt. Stonnell, fighter pilot with the 366th, writes this day "Had heavy escort into France. We lost the group and ended up with hundreds of bombers and flew nearly to Paris expecting to catch up with the group. Old Squires cracked up and will be in the hospital 8 months."

March 17 (D-80)

MM Paul Krug writes of calmer weather after two days of heavy seas and freezing temperatures in the North Atlantic. He is en route to England.

Lt. Stonnell writes in his diary "Fate struck at us again. Smith and Hair went down in France after being attacked by FW-190s. We had an escort mission with B-26s. We got off course and ended up right over Paris. The flak was terrific. I got separated from the rest of my flight for a few minutes over the city. I saw 11 enemy aircraft east of us. So neither Smith or Hair returned. They are missing in action." Stonnell is a fighter pilot flying bomb support missions over western Europe with the 390 Fighter Squadron.

March 18 (D-79)

MM Paul Krug records "Wiped down bulkheads in auxiliary engine room. Subs

reported, no damage.”

The day after losing two comrades over France, Lt. John K. Stonnell writes “It is hard to believe Smitty and Hair are down. Ray and I packed all of their clothes. What a painful job.... Afraid I am sort of homesick, definitely lonesome. I would give anything to be with Louise. Escorted B-26s over Calais area.”

March 19 (D-78)

Hitler meets with Field Marshals Rommel and von Runstedt to solve the issue of how armor will be used and available for defense of the French coast against invasion. He gives Rommel three panzer divisions but still holds three divisions in reserve under another leader. This divides the chain of command in the west between two leaders. Hitler also orders the invasion of ally Hungary, following a successful diversion ploy by the Soviets in the east to distract attention from Allied intentions in the west. To invade Hungary, though, Hitler has to move forces from the western front, stripping Rommel of needed forces yet again.

March 20 (D-77)

Hitler issues his assessment that the Allied attack will come in the west and the French Atlantic ports will be of importance. He designates them as “fortresses” to be held “to the last round.”

This same day, Cpl. Harry Hale of Tennessee writes to his brother Roger “Well I might go on furlough for seven days but I am going to wait until about June, I think. I don’t want one now.”

March 21 (D-76)

In a lighter moment, MM Paul Krug records in his diary at sea “I had a good job today helping to make ice cream and I sure got my fill. Weather fair.” Both are welcome news to Krug who has been at sea for a week and endured two storms during that time.

March 22 (D-75)

German admiral Doenitz establishes a group of 15 U-boats to patrol the western approaches to the Channel. This is in response to Hitler’s recent statement that the Atlantic ports must be turned into fortresses to be defended at all costs.

MM Paul Krug writes from his station aboard an LST bound for England “The waves look as if they’re going to cover us. By the way this tub is rollin I think she’ll turn over before we reach England. Getting warmer.”

March 23 (D-74)

Eisenhower and Churchill embark on an inspection of US troops based in England.

Flying bomb support missions from England, Lt. John K. Stonnell writes “The mission outlined seemed impossible. Withdrawal support for heavies from beyond Dutch Islands back to East Anglia – 660 mile trip....I saw Holland and Belgium for the first time... Major saw 4 Jerries so Blue section went after them... Flak was pretty accurate...I blew a cylinder. Major and I flew alone for a while and patrolled. All returned OK. I won the Air Medal.”

Vincent Kordack, a Navy corpsman training with the 6th Naval Beach Battalion in England, records in his diary that the unit was lectured this day regarding the coming invasion. General Hoage, Commander of the 5th Engineer Special Brigade, told them "Just because a man is scared he is not a coward." Kordack writes that Hoage told them that they were going over soon "and that he knew we would make our countrymen proud of us. Success meant that the war would be over sooner so we could go home sooner." Though few know it, D-Day is about 10 weeks away at the time of Kordack's entry.

March 24 (D-73)

MM Paul Krug writes of rough weather at sea in the North Atlantic: "I tried to play cards but it was rollin so bad the cards wouldn't stay on the table. Contacted subs but they didn't give us any trouble." Krug is aboard an LST en route to England in support of the invasion.

March 25 (D-72)

Despite his statements about importance of defense in the west, Hitler moves two more panzer divisions east to Hungary to shore up the German invasion there. There are now no fully operational armored divisions in France.

March 26 (D-71)

300 B-26s attack E-boat (torpedo boat) bases along Dutch coast. E-boats pose a serious threat to Allied operations in the English Channel. Air efforts are directed both west and north of the Seine to throw off German suspicion about the invasion's destination.

March 28 (D-69)

A few days after Churchill and Eisenhower set out on a joint inspection of American troops in England, pilot John Stonnell writes "The generals came in full strength. General Eisenhower was here with his staff. Air Marshall Mallory of the RAF. General Quesda and a horde of other stars came also. General Ike gave us a mighty nice talk... What a job he has."

March 29 (D-68)

P-47 pilot Lt. John Stonnell writes "We learned that we will be top cover in the invasion. It is bound to be soon.... What will be the circumstances of my career one year from now? To date, I have 9 missions to my credit, 17 sortie credits, and the Air Medal applied for, but no kills. It has been great work but a lot of worry and sweat. It is all in the game. The idea of not coming back from these missions is always so evident and vivid... This part of the war really makes me think a lot about my life, both past and future."

March 30 (D-67)

After two weeks at sea, MM Paul Krug records in his diary "Arrived at base here in Scotland at 2030, the name of the place is Rosneath. The scenery around here is beautiful, with its old houses and castles."

March 31 (D-66)

Aerial reconnaissance over French coast reveals a surge in number of gun batteries at Normandy (from 16 to 49) since Field Marshal Rommel's arrival.

Seaman 1st Class Clifford Porter writes to his mother in Pittsburgh "This morning I noticed the sun peeping over the hills and I said to myself 'maybe Mother will see that same morning sun in about 5 hours.'" Porter, like Motor Mechanic Paul

Krug, is in England aboard an LST (Landing Ship Tank) that will be part of the invasion fleet at Normandy.

April 1 (D-65)

The Mulberry harbor components undergo their first sea trials, withstanding 8 foot seas for 10 hours. These artificial harbors will be crucial to the Allies' ability to resupply troops and send replacements to Normandy, which has no natural harbor.

MM Paul Krug, ashore in Scotland and on liberty in Glasgow, writes "We went to a pub and had some beer. It sure is lousy. They call close at 2100 (9PM)."

April 2 – Palm Sunday (D-64)

The Chiefs of Staff and Churchill agree to move certain gun batteries from civilian defense to embarkation ports to protect invasion forces gathering there. This is controversial as German air raids over English cities continue; there have been more than 800 civilian casualties in the month of March alone.

Cpl. Harry Hale with the 93rd Station Complement Squadron in England writes to his brother Roger stationed in Miami "This is Sunday and no where to go or nothing to do but I am going to the show tonight I guess. Herman said you bought you a lot out there close to Johnson. I bet you will be glad when you get home so you can build that house, won't you?...I hope you get to stay there at Miami. Boy I sure wish I was there now. "

Seaman First Class Clifford Porter aboard LCI 516 writes home to his mother in Pittsburgh: "Next Sunday will be Easter, the children will be hunting their baskets and then getting sick with the bellyache. I'm terribly sorry I couldn't get you anything for your birthday although I've got you something very foreign. It's not English but it came from an island we hit on the way over here. Well, come Easter I'll be thinking of you and all my sweet brothers and sisters that mean so much to me, and I owe so much to you and them I now realize."

April 3 (D-63)

Operation Fortitude deliberately "leaks" information that Soviet spies have arrived in Scotland to plan an Allied invasion of Norway. The German command responds by reinforcing the Norway occupation to total 13 divisions and 6000 SS troops.

Following a two-day liberty in Glasgow, MM Paul Krug writes "The only thing you can get to eat is fish, chips, and sausage. I had my picture taken in kilts...I got all my gear packed as tomorrow we're shoving off for south England."

April 4 (D-62)

With D-Day now only two months away, Eisenhower writes of the tension at the Supreme Headquarters, "A sense of humour and a great faith, or else a complete lack of imagination, are essential to sanity."

April 5 (D-61)

MM Paul Krug, en route to a navy base in England, writes in his diary "Shoved

off at 1400 by train. We arrived here at 1600 in a little town by the name of Fowey. By the looks of the country around here it sure took a beating by bombs.”

Flying bomber support missions from England, Lt. John Stonnell writes “After a week without a mission, they call one today in the very worst weather – an escort, dive-bombing combination. At 8 AM they lined up and took off not even being able to see the end of the runway. Then they started wandering on deck and could not find each other. Most of 89 landed right away. They were running in all directions, nearly colliding... Captain Ferguson and Whitten never came in. They both went in south of here. Just a few pieces of metal left... I aged 10 years standing on the ground.”

April 6 (D-60)

Hitler, frustrated by lack of intelligence about true Allied intentions with regard to the invasion, declares the whole scheme to be “play-acting.” Calmer later, he orders reinforcements at Normandy with the bulk of forces to be concentrated at the Pas de Calais, mere miles from the English coast.

Following the loss of two comrades in a blundered mission the previous day, Lt. John Stonnell writes “Dive bombing mission. I managed to go as a spare. Went to St. Andre south of Souen... Nobody aborted so I came back with Merz. Then at 1:30 another briefing for a fighter sweep. I could not go because my ship was out. I sweated them out, the longest mission thus far. Lt. Collins bailed out of a spin right after take-off and broke both legs.”

April 7 - Good Friday (D-59) Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory and Admiral Ramsay undertake Exercise Thunderclap, a two-day ground forces briefing with senior officers on the complete Overlord picture.

MM Paul Krug records in his diary his trip to retrieve his week’s rations “ 1 carton cigarettes, 1 bar soap, 1 chocolate bar, 1 box hard candies, 1 razor blade.” He also notes “The chow on the base here is lousy.”

April 8 (D-58)

Exercise Thunderclap continues with Overlord being war gamed, including worst case scenarios. SHAEF also issues the Joint Fire Plan, the schedule of naval and air bombardment leading to the landings.

Lt. Stonnell writes “Unusual mission. Escort for B-26 and dive-bomb same target. We followed one box, got to target, and blasted the hell out of it. I shot 555 rounds on the way down... Longest mission for me, 3 hours 25 minutes.”

MM Paul Krug records “We started out on maneuvers but had to come back as it was too rough. Went into town (a small place with not much to do) had a couple of drinks (tasted like water). The pubs close at 2100 (9PM).”

April 10(D-56)

Admiral Ramsay’s office begins issuing Operation Neptune Naval Orders, some 1100 pages worth of exhaustive instructions and plans for the naval component of the Normandy invasion.

Allied air command continues to order the bombing rail centers close to western coast of France, but now also includes gun batteries in the assault area.



This damages German defenses in the invasion area and impairs the enemy's ability to send supplies and replacements to the coast.

April 11(D-55)

Admiral Doenitz issues orders to his U-boats in France that the utmost effort is needed during the coming invasion, even if it means losing their ships and lives. There is a growing sentiment among elements of the German command that the coming Allied invasion will turn the tide of the war, one way or the other.

April 12(D-54)

Churchill cables Roosevelt with regard to anticipated D-Day casualties "It is the Germans who will suffer very heavy casualties when our band of brothers gets among them."

April 13(D-53)

MM Paul Krug stationed at Fowey with the navy records in his diary "Received my first mail from the states. They were old but they sounded good to me anyway. " Krug left the states on March 10th.

Sadly, Lt. Stonnell with the 366th Fighter Group records today "Missions to Rouen and Ruhr, Germany last several days. Chandler flew my plane today. The engine conked but he managed to get back. Buckled wings landing so my old standby 701 is gone." Stonnell had christened 701 "Darling Louise" after his wife back home in Virginia.

April 14(D-52)

Eisenhower declares that the Allies have air superiority over Europe. Nonstop

attacks on German aircraft industry and synthetic oil production facilities has led to this, along with the loss of nearly 2000 German pilots. Allied air superiority is one of the prerequisites for the success of the coming invasion.

April 15(D-51)

Naval Commander Admiral Ramsay's Operation Neptune plan reveals that over half of Britain's coastal vessels will be needed for the initial assault on D-Day. This will mean shortages of vessels for shipping civilian items, such as coal.

8th Air Force and RAF Bomber Command switch from German urban centers to railroads in France and Belgium for upcoming invasion.

April 16(D-50)

Churchill sends a personal message to Chief of Staff Marshall, asking for help in procuring enough LSTs for the invasion. The shortage of LSTs is a crisis, with 7 weeks to go before D-Day.

Pilot John K. Stonnell writes "The group got its first medals for combat.... My medal did not come today. It was late getting applied for and I have just made 10 sorties. Wish they didn't have to make a show for them though. I despise to have to be out in front of a bunch of men for a thing like that. Why don't they just mail them?"

April 17(D-49)

The Royal Navy begins laying mines off the Channel coast to keep German e-boats in their ports.

MM Paul Krug writes about his LCTR (Landing Craft Tank – Rocket) "got the rudder fixed and put on a new screw. Had trouble with the throttle, fixed it up. We named her the 'Ramblin Reck' because there's always something going wrong with her."

April 18(D-48)

A serious security breach occurs when a senior air force commander declares in a London hotel dining room that the difficulty in getting personal goods will ease by June 15th when the invasion "would have taken place." The officer is stripped of command and returned to the US by Eisenhower.

Stationed in England, Cpl. Harry Hale writes his brother Roger stationed in Miami "I sure was sorry to hear about Grandpa being dead. Boy, I sure would like to have been there. I don't guess I would have known anything about it if Juanita hadn't told me. So far nobody else has told me. ...You said you had bought you a lot to build you a house on when you get out of the army. Well boy that is a good idea. I am going to remodel our house when I get back and fix it up...I sure will be glad when we get back home together, won't you? ... How long did you get to stay at home when you went? Boy, I sure would like to go home."

April 20(D-47)

MM Paul Krug records "No pay today. Hope to get some soon. Stood sentry watch in a gale." Krug has been overseas since March 10th with the US Navy in England as part of the buildup of ships for Operation Neptune.

April 21 (D-46) Sgt. John Schenk of Company A, 116th Infantry Regiment, writes to wife Lynn "Three air-mail letters. Two from you and one from Mother Schenk. The pictures you sent were real nice. Daddy doesn't look a bit well. Seems to have aged ten years since I last saw him. Don't tell him I said so. His illness last winter must have been pretty bad."

April 22 (D-45) MM Paul Krug records in his diary this day that he got food poisoning and went to the hospital. Krug is assigned to a rocket-launching LCT in southern England.

April 23(D-44) *Rommel pleads again for control of the armored reserve, explaining that Allied bombing attacks have had little effect on concrete installations, and if he can deploy armor in those areas not under concrete, he can halt the invasion on the beaches.*

April 24(D-43) *Britain bans all civilian travel overseas. To protect invasion plans, England is now a closed country.*

Tommy McKnight, stationed in England with the Service Company of the 116th Infantry, writes to his mother "Am so glad you enjoyed the flowers for Easter. Most of the credit goes to Dad who did such a good job for me... By the time you get this I will have completed three years in the army and that again raises my pay by 5%. It has been a long time, hasn't it?"

April 25(D-42) *Germany uses 40 aircraft in a raid at Portsmouth to disrupt invasion preparations. More bombers will come the following evening. D-Day is now less than 6 weeks away – unknown to almost everyone except the Allied Supreme Headquarters.*

April 26 (D-41) *Exercise Tiger, the largest rehearsal for D-Day to date, gets underway at an English seashore known as Slapton Sands.*



Sgt. John Schenk writes to his wife Lynn in Bedford, Virginia "The price you were

offered for the car was very good but you need the car yourself and it would be hard to get another at this time... Annie May tells me that Steve has taken up poker as a hobby and is quite lucky due to the evidence he brings home. He promised his Mother he wouldn't do it again." New cars were all but impossible to obtain during the war years, as auto makers converted their facilities to military production.

MM Paul Krug is discharged from the hospital following an attack of food poisoning. His diary indicates he is being sent by train to Teignmouth for a brief stay before being transferred to his port of embarkation for the invasion.

April 27(D-40)

Exercise Tiger continues but communications break down and only two infantry companies get ashore in first wave. Ramsay describes the exercise as a "flop."

Sgt. John Schenk writes to wife Lynn from England "Today has been real pleasant. So warm I got a little sunburn... How is Daddy getting along? Wish it were so that he could stay at home with Mother. They love each other so much. I can understand now how he feels being away from his wife so much... Wish I could be home about this time of year and help you with the garden. Spring is my favorite season." John's wife Ivyllynn is a teacher in Bedford and also keeps up a very large vegetable and flower garden.

April 28(D-39)

German e-boats attack the Allied convoy en route to Slapton Sands in Exercise Tiger, the dress rehearsal for D-Day. 200 sailors and 500 soldiers are killed. Some units are so decimated that they must be replaced in the invasion plan.

MM Paul Krug writes in his diary "Shoved off in our boats for Weymouth at 1100. Arrived here at 2300, picked up 32 dead soldiers on the way that were victims of a torpedoed LST." (These are Exercise Tiger casualties from either LST 289, 507 or 531)

April 29(D-38)

It is realized that among the lost from Exercise Tiger are 10 officers carrying some of Overlord's most closely-guarded secrets. Their bodies must be recovered and identified to ensure security of the invasion plan.

P-47 pilot Lt. Stonnell writes "Worked on my belly-tank footlocker to carry my belongings to France. We are practicing invasion tactics, patrolling, dive-bombing near troops, smoke missions. Never saw so many planes. All kinds and plenty of them." Stonnell's commanders have made it clear that his unit will support the invasion of France, and training now focuses on this effort.

April 30(D-37)

Tommy McKNight with the 116th Infantry in England writes to his sister Alice "Yesterday, I received a letter from my sweet wife and in it was the clipping with the grades of the nurses in it. You really did fine Sis and I'm really proud of you. Do you plan to stay in Dr. Carter's office or go out on something else? Please keep me posted on all the doings – May Day, graduation, and the coming wedding." D-Day is now 5 weeks away.

Lt. Stonnell writes "My BIG DAY! I shot at enemy planes. They were on the ground but nonetheless I got to shoot at them. I got some good hits on a FW-190 on an airfield near Paris... We really got shot at but were not hit. What a show!"

Louis Mervis, Pharmacist's Mate with the 6th Naval Beach Battalion, writes home to his mother in Pittsburgh, PA "I want you to know Mom that I am always thinking of you...I hope I could send you something for this day but I guess I will make it up to you when I get home. Please Mom don't worry too much about me." Mervis indicates his letter is intended for Mother's Day and he is writing in advance to allow the letter to arrive on time.

May 1 (D-36)

Reconnaissance shows a massive increase in beach obstacles in the landing zones.



The buildup in beach defenses will force the landing date back from May 31 to sometime in June. Intelligence also reveals 44 U-boats still able to operate in Channel waters.

Lt. Stonnell with the 366th Fighter Group writes "I celebrate my 20th birthday

today.... So I am 20 and have already lived 40 years it seems. Combat is OK but damn hard on a guy's system. I have 22 missions, 41 sorties, and an Air Medal, plus being a pilot and having the best and prettiest wife in the world!"

May 2 (D-35)

SHAEF sets date and time for D-Day at June 5th, 6:30AM following careful consideration of lunar schedules and tide charts. The British Daily Telegraph crossword today includes "Utah" as one of its puzzle terms – a disturbing coincidence, as "Utah" is the code-name for one of the landing beaches in Normandy.

Lt. Stonnell writes this day from an air base in England "The best news of all is M.L. Smith is back. He's in London. Gosh that is wonderful. We are all so happy. He went down March 17 and is back already.... Hair is our only combat loss now. I am getting tired of the war now. My nerves are cracking and I have been having the worst dreams. It is bad enough being shot at on missions, but to be shot at all night in dreams is too much."

May 3, 1944 (D-34)

Frank Draper of Company A, 116th Infantry from Bedford, VA writes the following original poem in a small book during his training in England for the Normandy invasion:

"Can't Say"

I can't tell you from where I write
I can't tell you the day
I can't tell you for whom I fight
There's nothing I can say.

I can't tell you the moon is brite
I can't say rain is falling
I have to write by candle lite
Till I hear a bugle calling

I can't say what we're going to do
I can't say where we're going
I can't say much to interest you
So don't ask what we're doing.

I can't say what we have to eat.
I can't say whether it's good.
I can't say how I have to sleep
On dirty ground or wood.

I can't say when my day is thru
Or where I'd like to be
I can't say much at all to you
So just say a lot to me."

May 4 (D-33)

MM Paul Krug with LCTR (Landing Craft Tank – Rockets) writes of maneuvers

this day “Got to the line of departure too late, other boats had already gone into the beach and were firing their rockets. I wish they’d pull the real thing. I’m getting tired of these dry runs.”

May 6 (D-31)

Hitler suddenly turns his attention to Normandy and orders two panzer divisions into the area, but remains convinced the Allied spring invasion will come at Calais, just miles from England by sea. The invasion is now four weeks away.

May 7 (D-30)

Air attacks on bridges over the Seine commence. This will further isolate Normandy from the rest of France and hinder German troop movements to the area.

John Schenk with Company A, 116th Infantry, writes to his wife Lynn “The box came yesterday just at the right time. I was hungry as a bear so one of the boys and I lit the little oil stove we have in the tent and heated the chicken and it was wonderful... The pocket book was just right. I get wet quite a bit and that would ruin an expensive one... I haven’t been able to write any one but you for the past few weeks and it may be the same for some time.”

MM Paul Krug writes of going on liberty in the town of Plymouth “but everything all closed up. Packed all our gear in boat and shoved off the ship at 0800. Arrived at Salome at 1300. Expect to stay here until Friday and then move on to Portland.” Portland will be the port of embarkation for Krug’s craft and thousands of others in the coming invasion.

May 8 (D-29)

Exercise Fabius, the last full-scale rehearsal before D-Day, concludes with a “go” for D-Day.

Sgt. John Schenk writes wife Lynn “This damn long war is beginning to get on my nerves. Even my hair is turning grey. Will you love me when I come home with grey hair and shattered nerves?”

May 9 (D-28)

D-Day Naval Commander Admiral Ramsay informs Eisenhower that plans for Operation Neptune are complete and no further changes will be made

May 10 (D-27)

Sgt. John Schenk of Bedford, Virginia writes to wife Lynn from England “Sorry to hear about you being sick... Now matter how little you think it is you must consult a doctor... Glad the little donation was so greatly appreciated. Anything you want to use it for is OK with me. The washing machine idea sounds fine. I know it would be a lot of help.”

May 11 (D-26)

Sgt. John Schenk, in England with the 116th Infantry, writes to wife Lynn “Glad to know that you are feeling much better... You seem to be doing quite well with the chicken raising. How many eggs are you getting and what are the prices of eggs? What is all this about you shooting hawks and rabbits with the gun? You

never told me that you were a great hunter. We will have to get better acquainted after the war is over.”

P-47 pilot Lt. John Stonnell writes in his diary this day “More missions. I was hit in the elevator near Cherbourg and had to hold forward on stick with both hands all the way home. Ayers led me home. Got a hole in my flap also. 8 ships hit one way or another.... Am packing my footlocker for home.” Stonnell’s mission over Cherbourg and his news about packing his footlocker are clear indications that the invasion is almost at hand.

May 13 (D-24)

From England with the 366th Fighter Group, Lt. John Stonnell writes “We bombed a bridge near Brussels, an airfield on the coast, then flew up and down the channel. The devils really shot at us, too.”

MM Paul Krug records in his diary “Took the boat to Portland to get the mail. Took all our gear in our boat and left Weymouth. Run out in the harbor and boarded the LST 317 for permanent duty. Deutsch, Bowen, and myself helped clean ducks for tomorrow dinner (getting in good with the Boss.)”

May 14 (D-23)

Sgt. John Schenk writes to wife Lynn from England “I am so pleased that we can help out Mother... Tell her to buy herself a real pretty dress and have her picture taken and send one to me. Remember the picture of you we took at Arcadia? You were at the edge of the falls. That is my favorite of all and I still have it.”

MM Paul Krug in the harbor at Portland writes “Had an air raid at 0200. Just some Jerries having a little target practice.”

May 15 (D-22)

Montgomery makes the final presentation on the Overlord plan to the largest Allied command gathering yet, including King George and Churchill. Churchill approaches Admiral Ramsay to come up with a plan to allow him to sail with the opening assault on D-Day. Eisenhower strongly objects to the idea.

May 16 (D-21)

Assigned to a rocket-firing landing craft, MM Paul Krug writes “We got some water in our fuel; have to clean out engine tomorrow.” It will take the crew three days to get the engine running again, after which they will hoist the small craft aboard an LST for transport to Normandy.

May 17 (D-20)

Supreme Allied D-Day Commander General Eisenhower announces that all plans for the invasion of Normandy must be completed by June 1st.

Sgt. John Schenk writes to his wife Lynn back home in Bedford, Virginia “We have been quite busy for the past week. Sorry to hear about Mrs. Sam Saunders’ death. Don’t guess Tommy will have to go to the army now.”

May 18 (D-19)

Supreme Headquarters – Allied Expeditionary Force issues order for assault units to travel from training areas to marshalling areas for embarkation from England for invasion.

Company A of the 116th Infantry Regiment (the company that John Schenk, Frank Draper and more than 30 other Bedford boys belong to) moves from Ivybridge to assemble in Plymouth and Falmouth. The camps are sealed off and patrolled by military police.

May 19 (D-18)

Sgt. John Schenk writes from a marshalling area on the English coast to his wife Lynn "One of the grandest letters of the year came yesterday from you... You expressed my sentiments better than I could do myself. And I think it is wonderful how we have always had a complete understanding between the two of us."

Krug writes of getting valves adjusted, injectors "got her running OK and hoisted her aboard" (Krug's craft is a rocket-firing LST #368 that will be part of Force Uncle for D-Day)

May 20 (D-17)

MM Paul Krug stands inspection and gets a tetanus shot as preparation for the invasion enters its final stages. Krug has spent the last five days making final adjustments to the engine on his rocket-firing landing craft, firing its twin 50-caliber machine guns at towed targets, and at last hoisting the craft aboard an LST bound for the invasion.

May 21 (D-16)

Bomb damage to French rail system is now so complete that the only traffic moving is German military. As a consequence, the decision is made to now allow attacks on moving trains.

Lynn Schenk of Bedford, Virginia writes to her husband John, in England with Company A of the 116th, about her constant thoughts of him, how his letters are like "sunbeams on long winter days." She has been sick and very busy with housework, meetings at the school where she teaches, and tending the large garden. "Mother can walk better than she has for a long time." She offers to send John another cooked chicken to share with his comrades and reassures him "You were asking if I'd love you if you had grey hair and shattered nerves. Why shouldn't I? I meant it when I said 'for better or worse, through thick and thin.' I hope that I shall grow ever more capable of loving you and being your wife."

May 22 (D-15)

Today's British Daily Telegraph contains another code word from the invasion in its crossword puzzle (Omaha – the code name for one of landing beaches) making the second such incident in three weeks. Suspicions at Supreme Allied Headquarters about a security leak begin to grow.

MM Paul Krug awaiting the invasion aboard an LST in southern England, continues with diary entries about preparations for the attack: "Washed some gear. Stood a twelve to four watch in the main engine room. Fired at sleeve with twin 50s." Target practice with fabric sleeves towed by aircraft allowed navy

personnel the opportunity to practice hitting aerial targets without jeopardizing aircraft.

May 23 (D-14) *Intelligence reveals a German mine-laying effort in the Bay of the Seine. Royal Navy craft are dispatched to halt it.*

MM Paul Krug writes in his diary this day "The ship pulled into docks and loaded supplies and ammunition. Cleaned twin 50s. Pulled out and moored in bay." There are some 5000 individual craft to be loaded with troops and/supplies before the invasion gets underway, an effort that means weeks of nonstop ship traffic moving into and out of moorings in southern English ports.

May 24 (D-13) *All invasion units are now in the assembly areas and sealed off. Admiral Ramsay announces to all holding Operation Neptune orders that they are to be opened and read at 11:30PM on May 25.*

May 24-26 MM Paul Krug writes in his diary "drained fuel out of engine and tanks in boat. Worked on engine." The draining of fuel from the craft, which will be hoisted aboard a larger craft for the invasion, is a fire precaution. Krug's entry about engine work is typical of his assignment as motor mechanic for the craft. It is his job to keep the engine maintained and operable, and the engine of his particular landing craft has been very temperamental.

May 25 (D-12) *All mail of personnel taking part in Operation Neptune is impounded until after D-Day. War correspondents for the invasion are taken to London, briefed to be ready to go at a moment's notice, and returned to London to avoid suspicion that an attack is imminent.*

Sgt. John Schenk, confined to an embarkation area in southern England, writes to wife Lynn back home in Virginia "Haven't been doing much lately but just waiting around. I should be doing more writing but just can't seem to get in the proper mood. Haven't heard from George Jr. lately. Has he sailed or is he still at Camp Jackson? Hope he never has to come over here. Guess Mrs. Coffey is tickled to death about the new baby. Tell her hello and not to get too much start on us."

May 26 (D-11) P-47 pilot Lt. John K. Stonnell writes in his diary "Carter and I went to London. Finally got my picture taken... Stayed at the Jules Club, the same place I was bombed out of last time." Stonnell was in London in February with a fellow pilot watching an air raid from their hotel window when a bomb went off nearby and nearly killed them both.

May 27 (D-10) *Yet another Overlord term shows up in the crossword of the Daily Telegraph – "Overlord." Security forces make inquiries about who makes up the crossword, but find no security leak – only a remarkable series of coincidences.*

The German air force sends 15 bombers over Portland harbor inflicting damage on two LSTs and a warship.

MM Paul Krug mentions the air raid in the diary he has been keeping: "Big air raid before midnight but no damage. Went up topside and the sky all around was lit up with tracers."

Sgt. John Schenk writes to wife Lynn "I am feeling mighty happy tonight for some reason. May be because I got a nice letter from you last night... I hope (censored) is safe and not MIA. That would be the end of Sara's romance. She has had more trouble than anyone I know. So Calvin Schenk finally got over here. Don't expect I will be able to see him for quite some time.... All that will save us now is God, Luck, and a Foxhole."

May 28 (D-9)

D-Day Naval Commander Admiral Ramsay issues order "Carry out Operation Neptune". Despite earlier concerns about the number of landing craft, Ramsay does have adequate quantities for the invasion: 229 LSTs, 245 LCI, and 900 LCT. The initial craft depart, including old merchant craft which will be scuttled for a breakwater at artificial harbor locations off the Normandy coast.

Seaman 3rd Class Paul Krug writes in his diary in southern England, awaiting orders for the invasion to get underway, "a VP got blown up by a mine dropped by Jerries last night... I don't see how they missed last night as it's just full of amphibious craft transports and warships around here."

May 29 (D-8)

SHAEF orders all ground force units to have a white star on the sides and top of vehicles to avoid friendly fire losses.

John Schenk, in England with Company A of the 116th Infantry, writes to his wife "Several of the boys and I have just been discussing the nice things we are missing at home. Have been discussing D-Day in America and over here. They seem to think it is going to be quite a show."

Seaman 3rd Class Paul Krug records a German air sortie over the harbor in Portland: "Had General Quarters at 0100. A few planes went over but didn't drop any bombs at the ships. I went out on topside and the smoke was so dense you can't see anything and it chokes you up."

May 30 (D-7)

Concerns about the drop zones for Utah Beach lead to the landing zones being moved 6 miles closer to the beach, away from flooded areas and around the village of St. Mere Eglise.

One week before D-Day, P-47 pilot Lt. John Stonnell notes in his diary "Well today was quite a day. This night I spend in Weston-Sur-Mere after being forced down due to weather after one of the navy missions. Never been in such a spot in my life. Mery was with me... Storm moved in 5 minutes after landing...Stayed with ack-ack boys in converted hotel. Bobby Duke went down today in same place as Vic." Stonnell has been flying dive bombing missions and bomber support over western Europe for months, targeting aircraft industries and

railways as part of the buildup to Normandy. He has flown 13 missions since May 1st – roughly 1 mission every two days.

May 31 (D-6)

Royal Navy boats lay 10 sonic buoys to become active on D-1 that will guide motor launches to help the minesweepers clear approaches.

Seaman 3rd Class Paul Krug reports “All liberty cancelled. Landing craft pulling into docks one by one and loading up. It looks as if this is going to be the real thing.”

At an airbase in southern England, Lt. John Stonnell writes “Last day I will have to write in here for quite a while. The invasion is close, really close... As I have to end this for now, I am glad I have written 5 months in the ETO. I have 33 missions and 60 sorties to date, and have been presented with the Air Medal. My hopes and wishes and prayers are that I may get through this coming invasion and back to the grand old USA to my wife...Here’s hoping I can look over this someday.”

June 1 (D-5)

Eisenhower begins hearing morning and evening weather forecasts for the invasion. Ramsay assumes operational control of the invasion fleet and persuades Winston Churchill and King George not to sail with the fleet to the invasion. A coded message is broadcast to the French Resistance warning that the invasion is imminent.

Vincent Kordack (Navy Corpsman with the 6th Beach Battalion) writes of boarding the USS Henrico for the Normandy invasion “We... boarded trucks for the port of Weymouth where our ship was moored. I did not think I would make it for the weight of my pack and litter must have exceeded 60 pounds. As we were marching, people would wave at us and some girls blew us kisses, for they knew this was what they had been waiting for 5 years.”

Seaman 3rd Class Paul Krug writes “Took a VP and got our supply of 48 rockets. I had a money order made out for \$264. Our ship pulled into dock and loaded up with ambulances, jeeps, ducks, etc.” Krug’s craft is a rocket-launching landing craft, one of a handful directed to fire rockets against German fortifications in support of the floating tank landings.

June 2 (D-4)

Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory shares the pre-invasion bombing plan with Eisenhower and it is clear that French civilian losses will be inflicted in targeting towns and villages along the invasion beaches. Two Royal Navy midget submarines embark for Normandy to surface and guide assault forces to Juno and Sword beaches, which have few landmarks.

June 3 (D-3)

Company A of the 116th Infantry Regiment moves by truck from staging area to Weymouth and boards Empire Javelin. Company A includes nearly 3 dozen men from the small town of Bedford, Virginia – among them are John Schenk and Frank Draper.

Frank Draper makes notes in a small book following a briefing about the details of the coming landing:

“Hit by 6:30

Up at 0145

Sleep in trousers, LB (life belt) close by

Breakfast 2:30

Ready to go 0400

Hit water 4:30”

These notes indicate Company A is to hit its sector of Omaha Beach by 6:30 AM, having gotten up at 1:45AM and eaten breakfast at 2:30AM. The men will go over the side of the ship at 4:30 and climb down cargo nets into their landing craft. They will then have to make a two-hour trip by boat to the landing beach.

Later June 3

Captain Stagg has to report to the Allied chiefs that Channel weather conditions are deteriorating and will continue to worsen, with heavy seas, high winds, and rain. Eisenhower delays the attack for 24 hours. D-Day, originally set for June 5th, is now potentially on for June 6th.

June 4 (D-2)

Seaman 3rd Class Paul Krug writes in his diary “There’s a pretty strong gale and the water is really choppy. This old piece of tin is sure rollin.”

Captain Stagg informs Eisenhower that the weather will clear slightly Monday evening on the 5th. The 6th should be clearing as the day progresses.

June 5 (D-1)

At 4:15AM, Eisenhower gives the order for the attack to proceed with June 6th being D-Day. At 9AM on the 5th, the fleet gets underway.

En route from England to Normandy, Seaman 3rd Class, Paul Krug writes “We’re underway and it’s still rough as hell. Our destination is 10 miles off the coast. We’re to be lowered over the side sometime early tomorrow morning and our job is to support some DD tanks onto the beach... and when we’re about 200 yards off the beach we fire our 48 barrage rockets. The name of the town where we’re hitting near is Colleville.”

Vincent Kordack, a Navy medic with the 6th Beach Battalion, recorded of the crossing this day to France “Many seemed the least worried about what was going to happen next. They played cards and dice, joked about the trip, or talked about what they would do after the war....With all my gear, getting ashore would not be too easy. Men were gathered around talking about the invasion as if this were a game of some sort. After chow, the ship’s captain...read us a message from General Eisenhower...”

Elsewhere, Pharmacist’s Mate Louis Mervis with the 6th Naval Beach Battalion receives his copy of the Order of the Day from General Eisenhower and carefully folds it and places it in his wallet. It will survive D-Day with him. Given to every soldier, sailor, and airman participating in Operation Overlord, the Order reads in part:

“Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force:

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade towards 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.”

June 6 – D-DAY

Seaman 3rd Class Paul Krug writes “got lowered over the side at 3:30AM. You could see large fires in the distance which meant our bombers were really going to town... The Jerries kept firing on us but we couldn’t see their positions....some of the tanks went down before they could reach the beach. We got two survivors into the boat and I went in after a third but when I got him to the boat he was too far gone. We then went on in and fired our rockets on the beach and the Jerries really made it hot for us with their 88s.” His craft returned to LST 309 afterwards for other escort duty.

Navy corpsman Vincent Kordack , landing at Omaha Beach, records in his diary later “Our second wave went in around 10AM. Our craft hit the beach and as the ramp went down the Germans opened up...When I left the craft I had to wade in water up to my waist for about 25 yards. On the beach, the firing was so close I could feel and hear gravel hit my helmet and body. That was the first time I realized our danger.... I found 2 Army packs, made a barricade and started to take care of casualties. Every time I took a few steps, I would trip over a body, for they were scattered all around us.”

Flying air support over Omaha Beach, P-47 pilot Lt. Stonnell writes later “We flew in a solid overcast toward France and let down using time and distance navigation over the Cherbourg peninsula. We broke out of the overcast at less than 1000 feet and began patrolling Omaha Beach with two 1000 lb. bombs on each P-47. We flew back and forth over the beachhead with the overcast at 500 to 800 feet, experienced moderate flak, lots of small arms fire and no sign of enemy aircraft... My flight leader Steve Van Buren was shot down and was fished out of the Channel by some good-hearted Navy people who were anchored in the midst of hundreds of boats and ships supporting the invasion. Another of our pilots (Krause) was shot down and burned on the ground near the Channel.”

D-Day ended with more than 12,000 Allied casualties; in the early hours of the invasion, there was ample reason to believe it a failure. Naval and aerial bombardment had largely been ineffective, thanks to heavy cloud cover from poor weather conditions. Fearing that their fire might fall on their own troops headed towards shore, many ships and planes had erred on the side of caution and directed their fire further inland. The result was that in many areas, German fortifications remained largely intact and operational. High seas and shifting sand bars caused further loss of life and equipment as men left their landing craft

and struggled toward shore. Casualties in first and second wave companies were horrific – in some cases, running as high as 90%.

The tide was turned by Allied soldiers who found themselves far from their intended landing zones, without much of the gear and many of the leaders they were supposed to have. Gathering the supplies and men at hand, they rallied and pursued the missions they were given as best as possible. Initiative, courage, faithful service, selflessness – these were the qualities that turned the tide of D-Day and history.

The National D-Day Memorial today stands in Bedford, Virginia – the town sustaining the highest per capita D-Day losses in the nation. On a concave wall at its heart hang more than 200 plaques, bearing the names of more than 4400 Allied servicemen who were killed in action on June 6th, 1944. The Memorial exists to preserve the legacy of valor, fidelity, and sacrifice that was the hallmark of D-Day. For all those who served the cause of freedom and peace at Normandy's sands, shores, and skies, it is the least we can do.

POSTSCRIPTS

Vincent Kordack survived D-Day and WWII with the 6th Naval Beach Battalion. His battalion stayed in Normandy for 3 more weeks, losing some 20% of their 400-man unit.

Paul Krug survived D-Day and WWII with the US Navy. After D-Day, he participated in the landings in southern France in August 1944 and was subsequently sent to Naples, Salerno, and Oran. He returned to the states in October 1944 just short of his 20th birthday. His sons found his diary in his personal effects following Krug's death in 2005 and they donated a copy to the archives of the National D-Day Memorial.

Tommy McKnight survived D-Day and WWII with the Service Company of the 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Division and returned to his wife Margaret in 1945. McKnight died in 1984. His V-mails were donated to the Memorial by his sister Alice McKnight Kelley in 2007.

Louis Mervis, 6th Naval Beach Battalion, survived D-Day and WWII. In 2003, he donated his copy of Eisenhower's Order of the Day for D-Day to the National D-Day Memorial, along with a poppy which he picked in Normandy on June 16, 1944 close to the beachhead.

Sergeant Harry Hale participated in the Normandy campaign with the 93rd Station Complement Squadron. He sent a birthday card to daughter Patricia on her second birthday in August 1944 following the Normandy campaign. His wife Juanita worked in 1945 packing K-rations at Patten Food Products in Chattanooga, Tennessee for 37 cents an hour. Hale survived the war and returned home to Tennessee in November 1945 after more than 2½ years' service.

John Schenk (Company A, 116th Infantry Regiment) of Bedford, Virginia was killed in action shortly after landing in the first wave at Omaha Beach on the morning of June 6, 1944. Schenk was one of 19 Bedford boys from Company A killed at Omaha Beach. His wife Ivylyn (Lynn) continued to write to John for weeks after D-Day, not knowing he had been lost. Her final letter to John, dated July 16, describes her packing for a trip to Mother Schenk's for a visit, wishing John "could be done with all that and come home to

enjoy a few months of quiet and calm.” It was upon Lynn’s arrival at Mother Schenk’s that the telegram from the War Department arrived. The letters John and Ivylyn exchanged were donated to the National D-Day Memorial in 2006. Ivylyn passed in May 2008.

Frank Draper (Company A, 116th Infantry Regiment) of Bedford, Virginia was killed in action shortly after landing in the first wave at Omaha Beach on the morning of June 6, 1944. The small notebook containing the poem “Can’t Say” and his final notes on the landing were returned to his family in Bedford. Draper’s remains were returned to Bedford in 1948 and he was buried in Greenwood Cemetery.

Lt. John K. Stonnell, 390th Fighter Squadron, 366th Fighter Group, survived D-Day and went on to fly a total of 98 missions over Europe before returning home to his beloved Louise. He was recalled to active duty in the Korean War and retired from the Air Force Reserve in 1973. He lived the remainder of his life in Virginia and died at age 71.

Clifford Porter (US Navy – LCI 516) survived D-Day and WWII and returned home to Pittsburg, PA. His V-mails to his mother and other items were donated to the National D-Day Memorial in 2004 by his daughter Kathleen.