Newsweek

June 12, 1944: p. 21

Invasion Armies Are Unleashed in Battle for the Continent

U. S. Army Signal Corps photo

Landing technique: Wadke, in the Pacific, was a forerunner to France

First Tipoff Comes From Nazis as Swarms of Ships and Aircraft Strike at Cherbourg Peninsula

D Day was June 6. That simple sentence summed up the opening of the grand climax of the greatest war ever fought.

In the early hours of this fateful day the full power of the Allied world was hurled against the northern coast of France. For this was the Battle of Europe. Rome had fallen two days previously and on all sides the Allies were at last assaulting Hitler's Festrung Europa itself.

The Germans broke the news first. For three hours on Tuesday morning they told of the descent of Allied parachutists—including explosive dummies which first threw the Nazis off balance—landings on the beaches from the mouth of the Seine through the Brittany Peninsula, a vast air attack and tremendous support from a great naval armada. At 3:32 a.m. Eastern War Time, Allied Supreme Headquarters made it official by issuing Communiqué No. 1: "Under the command of General Eisenhower, Allied naval forces, supported by strong air forces, began landing Allied armies this morning on the northern coast of France."

London correspondents were summoned to the lecture hall of Supreme Headquarters. There, NEWSWEEK's London Bureau head, Joseph S. Evans Jr., cabled, an officer simply told them: "Gentlemen, this is it." Later it was announced —as most reporters had suspected—that

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Gen. Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, the old scourge of Rommel, was commanding the assaulting army group, Americans as well as British and Canadians.

The focal point of the attack apparently was aimed at Le Havre, the fine port at the mouth of the Seine. Nazi reports indicated a series of drives to cut the Brittany Peninsula with the center of gravity at Caen. It seemed certain that the Reich was awaiting news of other attacks, (see maps, pages 24 and 25).

At once the hidden cohorts of the underground, who called the day not D Day but V Day, were summoned to rise in aid of the liberating armies. Gen. Charles de Gaulle arrived in London and spoke to the French people. The Norwegians, the Dutch, and the Belgians were addressed by their governments in exile. And General Eisenhower broadcast a special message to the underground: "To members of resistance movements, whether led by national or outside leaders, I say, 'Follow the instructions you have received.'"

Hour of Decision: So it had come at last—the hour of decision in the west. In placid little Channel ports, men from the far reaches of the United States and the shires and towns of Britain clambered aboard the infinite variety of transports and landing craft. They were not told anything until the last minute—just that they were going to the seashore and to relax. In a special order of the day, Eisenhower had told them they were embarking "upon the great crusade toward which we have striven these many months."

The armada that seemed without end—there were 4,000 ships, plus thousands of other craft—sailed under a full moon. As the early dawn crept up the coast of Europe, from the rocky cliffs of Brittany to the dunes of Holland, Allied warships began throwing salvo after salvo into the defenses of the Atlantic Wall. Far behind that wall parachutists and glider-borne troops came down on the green, checkerboard fields, battalion after battalion. They had the often suicidal job of cutting German rail and highway communications and seizing vital installations. And Prime Minister Churchill told the House of Commons on Tuesday that "massed airborne landings have been successfully effected behind the enemy lines."

The landings on the beaches were the crucial point of the first operations Midget submarines had marked the channels of approach. Mine sweepers had cleared them of obstructions. Down from the bows of the LST's, and out lumbered the tanks. Assault boats ground on to the beaches, and the infantry poured ashore.

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Above all and over all, Allied planes swung through the skies in the greatest fleets ever seen. There were 11,000 first-line craft alone. They bore a new insignia —alternate stripes of black and white on the wings and belly to prevent any confusion with the vengeful Luftwaffe.

Grimmer Tests: But the events of all this dramatic day were only the overture for still grimmer tests to come. At Allied Supreme Headquarters, Eisenhower and his staff of high aides anxiously watched the movement of reinforcements and supplies—the vital lifelong against a Nazi counter-thrust.

Somewhere in France, Marshal Karl von Rundstedt peered with Prussian exactitude at maps of Northern France, behind the battle lines his armored forces were moving swiftly along the roads for the decisive blow to force the Allies back into the sea. And somewhere on those battlefields was Marshal Erwin Rommel, a man with a grudge to settle.

There was little doubt that the real test would come with the Nazi counter-attack. The Germans themselves have admitted that the Allies would undoubtedly be able to make good their landings and crack through the defenses of the Atlantic Wall. What they pin their hopes on is the inherent superiority of land over water communications. Due to this factor, they think they can concentrate more troops more quickly at the decisive point than the Allies can.

In any such counterthrust tanks, used in mass, will probably play the vital role (see General Fuller's Invasion Tides). Capt. Ritter von Schramm, military commentator of the Berliner Boersen-Zeitung, frankly outlined the German plans last week. He said the Wehrmacht would tackle the invaders with enlarged and improved Panzer forces far superior to the "1940 vintage of the Panzer arm. In fact, he claimed that 50 per cent of the forces the Germans would throw against the Allies would consist of tank units.

However, before the Nazis can ever strike this blow something may happen far to the East, past all German-held Europe. There, the world's biggest labor force was poised for action. The hundreds of divisions of the Red Army only awaiting the order of Stalin to throw themselves against the Wehrmacht. A few days previously the Soviet forces had been linked by air with the forces of the Western Allies, when a fleet of American bombers landed at Russian bases specially constructed for the use of the United States Air Forces. Stalin's signal to his army would do for it what the establishmenment shuttle bombing did for the air forces to coordinate the entire assault against the Reich.

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