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**Memories Haunt the  
Beaches of Normandy**

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On warm days children frolic on the beach at Arromanches-les-Bains on the Normandy coast of France. When the tide is out, horsedrawn carts race up and down the flats.

Nearby the hulk of a warship rusts in the sand. Offshore the tumbled remains of an artificial harbor named by Winston Churchill, "Mulberry", lies in wreckage.

This peaceful fishing village was at the center of the most massive amphibious military assault in human history.

Onshore facing the English Channel a museum commemorates the apocalyptic events of D-Day, June 6, 1944, the Allied invasion of Hitler's "Fortress Europe."

The battle which began that day has taken its place beside Waterloo, Hastings, Thermopylae Pass and some others, as a major turning point in human affairs.

At precisely fifteen minutes past midnight on that fateful date Operation Overlord began. At that moment a few specially chosen pathfinders stepped out of their planes into the moonlight over Normandy.

They marked the drop zones for American and British paratroopers and infantry in over a thousand planes and gliders that quickly came behind them.

Airborne troops fought desperately in the darkness that night. St. Mere Eglise on the Contentin Peninsula became the first French town liberated by the Americans. In the battle there one paratrooper's chute caught on the church steeple and he dangled for two hours in full view of the fierce fighting going on around the town square below.

In the British sector, two paratroopers landed in error on the lawn of a German general who demanded of them, "Where have you come from?" One of the captured British replied calmly, "Awfully sorry, old man, but we simply landed here by mistake."

During the hours before dawn over 2400 U.S. and Royal Air Force bombers pounded ground installations. A naval bombardment rocked shoreline gun placements.

Simultaneously, over 5,000 ships, the greatest armada the world has ever witnessed, maneuvered offshore. They carried a quarter of a million soldiers and sailors.

East of Arromanches for twenty-five miles were the three British and Canadian zones-- Gold, Juno and Sword. Westward for thirty-five miles were the two American zones -- Omaha and Utah.

At 6:30 AM the first wave of troops waded ashore through artillery and machine-gun fire, through beach "hedge-hogs" and land mines.

The 1st and 29th American Divisions at Omaha Beach fought desperately during the day and reported that they were "hanging on by their toenails."

At St. Laurent, Vierville-sur-Mer, and Colleville the issue was often in doubt. Monuments there today memorialize the heroism of the invaders. Allied casualties were more than 10,000 in the first 24 hours.

All along the coast are formidable limestone cliffs which were topped by German coastal guns. At Pointe du Hoc where the cliffs rise to dizzy heights stands now a granite spire honoring a group of American Rangers led by Lt. Col. James Rudder who scaled the precipices with hooks and ropes to get at the German pillboxes at the top. The scars of battle here are still quite visible throughout the area.

Farther west, the 4th American Division landed on bloody Utah Beach to link up with the 82nd and 101st Airborne troops.

Behind the first waves of troops the Allies had ready 39 divisions with nearly three million troops and 16,000 planes.

The Germans had 65 divisions including reserves extending back to Germany, and a Luftwaffe which had been virtually driven from the skies.

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the German commander of the "Atlantic Wall", had said to an aide on April 22, "The first twenty-four hours of the invasion will be decisive...it will be the longest day." He was exactly right. The battle was grim, but decisive. The days of Nazi rule were numbered. At the end of June Rommel reported that his casualties for the month were "28 generals, 354 commanders and approximately 250,000 men."

Eleven months after D-Day Hitler committed suicide in the rubble of Berlin and the vaunted "Thousand Year Reign" of Nazism was over.

But much death and destruction lay in wait along the way to Berlin.

The visitor to this beautiful quarter of France is continually sobered by reminders that thousands of men on both sides died too young in the apple orchards and green pastures of Normandy.

The feeling hits you when you see an LCI rusting in the sand at Port-en-Bessin

It creeps into the marrow of your bones when you ride through the Bocage country with its hawthorn hedgerows and sunken roads. These picturesque embankments of earth, shrubbery and trees helped stall the Allied armies for six weeks only a few miles from the coast.

In St. Lo where the breakthrough finally came in late July, bombs and artillery virtually obliterated all vestiges of earlier days. Vire all but disappeared. Coutances saved its cathedral, but little else. Mortain has risen from grey ashes. The old culture in the city of Avranches, within sight of the rock of Mont St. Michel, is largely a memory.

Cherbourg has a lot of new buildings today, a sure sign in these old cities that wartime damage was severe. It was here, incidentally, that Frenchmen gathered on June 19, 1864 to cheer in vain for the Confederate ship Alabama in its offshore duel with the armored Union gunboat Kearsarge during the American Civil War. From his sinking vessel, Captain Raphael Semmes threw his sword into the sea.

At Le Havre, bombs and shells wiped out 12,000 buildings, damaged 5,000 others and left 40,000 homeless. It now looks new.

Caen, nine miles up the Orne River from the coast, was three-fourths wiped out, killing 2,000. Nine hundred years ago William the Conqueror and his wife, Matilda, built two churches there. They were used as bomb shelters in the summer of 1944.

The old city of Lisieux was almost completely destroyed by fire during the bombardment of June, '44. Its cathedral begun in 1170 was untouched. Rouen, where Joan of Arc was buried in 1431, was torn apart. Sunken ships, tangles of steel and concrete clogged its harbor and the city center was a flattened wasteland. Many other places were made into rubble heaps.

The battle for Normandy was over by August 21. The cost was frightful for the Allies, worse for the Germans. They lost 640,000 men--dead, wounded, or imprisoned.

Normandy's rolling fields and farmlands seem too peaceful and benign now to have ever been battlefields.

This is a place of slender streams and little rivulets freshening the landscape of poplars and willows. It is a peaceful, smiling land of apples, lace and old world style s.

Huge, sleek Percheron horses pull high two-wheeled carts, and women go into the pastures to milk the squarish white-and-brown dairy cows.

There are fields of flax and yellow mustard, and odd corners are bright with camelias, tulips, lilacs, and banks of primroses. The region is full of obscure roads and hidden valleys. On warm days it is softly fragrant.

Normandy is a place of half-timbered houses, thatch roofs, medieval churches and religious pilgrimages. There are narrow old world streets showing the patina of age. Provincial towns still exist where evening has a soothing stillness.

May and June in Normandy evoke the essence of La Belle France. A native son, Jean Francois Millet, captured this rural timelessness in his paintings. "The Gleaners," for example, portrays three peasant women bending to their task of harvesting. The famous painting hangs in the Louvre in Paris.

But these peaceful villages were deathtraps in the summer of '44. The gentle slopes and pleasant valleys clattered with tanks and rattled with machine-gun fire and raged with the holocaust of war. Normandy became a crackling hell of flame, smoke and death.

On June 7, the day after the invasion began, the British took Bayeux. Only five miles behind the beach at Arromanches, it sustained little damage. Credit for this good fortune was due to a Benedictine monk who pedaled his bicycle out to the advancing troops to alert them to the fact that only a token German force was left in the city. When the British moved up, the Germans fled without fighting. Bayeux cathedral bells clanged and jangled, out of tune, for the first time in two years.

Carentan fell on June 13. U.S. troops took Cherbourg June 27. British and Canadians took Caen on July 9, after desperate fighting.

In late July the American forces broke through the hedgerow country. Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr. and the U.S. 3rd Army attacked south and west of St. Lo on August 1. Canadians took Falaise August 17. A pincer movement by the U.S. 3rd Army closed the Argentan gap in terrible fighting, trapping twelve to fourteen German divisions in the Falaise pocket.

On August 14 and 15, 1944, the Allies landed a thousand ships on the south coast of France east of the Rhone River. On August 25 the 2nd French Armored Division and a token USA force entered Paris.

The pace increased. A German counter-attack in December brought on the Battle of the Ardennes Bulge. By late January, 1945, Nazi forces were retreating again.

March 7, 1945, saw the capture of the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen and five U.S. divisions poured across the Rhine.

On May 4 German armies began surrendering. On May 6 at 8:41 AM (EWT) at Rheims unconditional surrender was signed. All fighting ceased at 6:01 PM (EWT), May 8. The war in Europe was over.

The roads from the Normandy beaches were strewn with death and destruction. (Three months later, following the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese surrendered on August 14, 1945 and World War II was over.)

Battle fields are places of tragedy. Anywhere, they speak of man's failures, not his successes. They mark in carnage and blood the breakdown of civilization itself. They testify to some monstrous deficiency in the affairs of men.

On the Normandy coast at St. Laurent there is a 150-acre site given to the USA by France. It is a cemetery where rest 9,300 young Americans who died in the early days of the Allied invasion. Crosses and stars of David in Carrara marble stretch out in long, neat, symmetrical

rows. The place is quiet and peaceful. Bird songs ride in on the gentle breezes. Seeing it, a nameless, visceral sadness fills the heart.

On June 6, 1944 radios around the world crackled with the electrifying news that the long-awaited invasion of Europe had begun. Like many other groups throughout the earth, the congregation of Carlisle Avenue Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky gathered for prayer. Every day thereafter until World War II was over, members of the congregation gathered at the church building at 5:00 PM for a few moments of prayer. They prayed daily for loved ones and friends and for an end to the immense tragedy and incredible waste of war.

Maybe we need such a concern today for the strengthening of a very fragile peace.

This time of year Normandy is in full blossom once again. On the Channel coast and in the hill country life goes on. Fishermen in wooden shoes clip-clop their way to the waterfront. Housewives in carpet slippers sweep the sidewalks. Old women under black shawls shuffle along. Boys with long loaves of hard bread tied to their bikes move carefree through the narrow streets and roads. Priests in long black robes hurry to their devotions. And life goes on.

But the Normandy coast of France will forever haunt the memory of man. The world should have learned a lesson there.

In war everyone loses!

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(Photo of Arromanches sent to Baptist State Editors. Available to others on request.)

Baptist Board to Handle  
Spanish Literature Sales

5/22/73

EL PASO, Tex. (BP)--The Baptist Spanish Publishing House here is scheduled to transfer its U.S. retail business to the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board effective Aug. 1.

To facilitate its new responsibilities, the board is establishing a Spanish-English Baptist Book Store here. The store will handle Spanish mail-order business as well as over-the-counter sales.

According to V.L. McGlocklin, manager of Baptist Book Stores, Western Division, Spanish periodical literature will be ordered and billed through the new bookstore.

Since its move from Mexico to El Paso in 1916, the publishing house has served Spanish-speaking Baptists in the U.S. on a retail basis as well as meeting Spanish-language literature needs in other countries. Under the new arrangement, it will limit its transactions to wholesale purchases.

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