

Name:

Date:

## D-Day and the “Good War” Part II

### Objective:

Students will evaluate popular memory of D-Day and the validity of the Good War narrative by analyzing source material and constructing their own narratives about D-Day.

### Background:

June 6, 1944 is considered a hallowed day by many Americans. Indeed, this larger than life image of the D-Day landings in Normandy, France has been reinforced in our collective memory by popular representations of the event, including movies like *Saving Private Ryan* and video games like the “Medal of Honor” series. D-Day has also served as a way of defining national identity, as in President Clinton’s remarks during the 50th anniversary commemoration of the landings in 1994. But when subjected to greater scrutiny, how valid is this “Good War” narrative as a way of remembering D-Day?

### Directions:

Below are a series of primary and secondary sources that each pertain, directly or indirectly, to the D-Day landings. Examine each source individually before being placed into groups. Once in groups, briefly answer the questions that follow the last source with your group members.

Finally, respond to the prompt at the end of the packet. Ideas should be discussed together in groups, but each student should produce his or her own response.

For the purposes of this activity, consider the Clinton speech as representative of the Good War narrative about D-Day. Use the Summary of the War in Europe and the attached timeline for context.

### Sources:

#### 1. Letter to Henry H. “Hap” Arnold

*Background: This letter, addressed to the commander of the Army Air Corps and architect of the bombing campaigns in Europe, was written by the mother of a newly-trained pilot on May 3, 1943. The response is a form letter sent in response to such inquiries.*

Dear Hap:

Last month my son Ted won his wings at Randolph Field. He is now going through a bombardment school, and in a short time expects to go to the front.

Will you tell me- has he become what our enemies call him, "A Hooligan of the Air?" Is he expected to scatter death on men, women, children-to wreck churches and shrines- to be a slaughterer, not a fighting man?

Very sincerely,

Katherine A. Hooper

## **2. "Suggested Reply to Letters Questioning Humanitarian Aspects of Air Force"**

*Background: This response to the letter above is a form letter sent in response to such inquiries by the Army Air Corps. This was sent in 1943.*

War, no matter how glorious the cause, is horrible by every civilized standard. Clothing it in shining armor does not hide the blood and suffering except from him who would be blind; neither does changing the vehicle of destruction alter the fact that death and destruction form the inevitable body and face of war.

...

It has always been recognized that armies can be defeated through the killing of men; but are not modern armies futile without weapons and equipment? ... [through the use of air power] we can hit the tank where it is built, the steel plant where the armor is made, or the refinery from where it gets its fuel. We do not mean cities containing the factories, but by exercising the precision which is the keynote of America, we mean that we carefully select and, to the best of our ability, hit the precise spot which is most vital to the enemy. We hold no brief for terror bombing...

With the understanding cooperation of you and thousands of others like you, we will prove... that air power is the most powerful urge for peace.

## **3. Dresden Photos**

*Background: During February of 1945, American and British planes bombed the German city of Dresden as part of larger bombing campaign put in motion in 1944. The city, which had little military value, was almost completely destroyed, with casualties numbered near 25,000. Below are two images of the city's iconic church, the Frauenkirche.*



Dresden, 1945



Dresden, 1947

#### **4. “Military Events in German Defeat as Perceived by Captured Members of the German High Command”**

*Background: German commanders related to General George Marshall of the US Army what they believed led to their defeat. The summary was produced by the US military in 1945.*

1. *Failure to invade England...* The German General staff was unprepared for an invasion of England.
2. *The campaign of 1941 in the Soviet Union.* The Red Army defense, a terrific snow storm, and extremely unseasonable cold in the Christmas week of 1941 precipitated the strategic defeat of the German armed forces... It was the turning point of the war.
3. *Stalingrad.* Even after the reverse before Moscow in 1941, Germany might have avoided defeat had it not been for the campaign in 1942 which culminated at the in the disaster at Stalingrad.

4. *The Invasion of North Africa*. Allied landings in North Africa came as a surprise to the German High Command...

5. *The Invasion of France*... [The generals] believed that the invasion could be repulsed or at worst contained, and named the Allied air arm as the decisive factor in the German failure.

## **5. Description of Omaha Beach**

*Background: Ernie Pyle, a war correspondent, wrote this as he walked along Omaha beach the day after the landings. This was published in June of 1944.*

The wreckage was vast and startling. The awful waste and destruction of war, even aside from the loss of human life, has always been one of its outstanding features to those who are in it. Anything and everything is expendable. And we did expend on our beachhead in Normandy during those first few hours... [But] men and equipment were flowing from England in such a gigantic stream that it made the waste on the beachhead seem like nothing at all.

But there is another and more human litter. It extends in a thin little line, just like a high water mark, for miles along the beach. This is the strewn personal gear, gear that will never be needed again, of those who fought and died to give us our entrance into Europe. Here in a jumbled row for mile on mile are soldiers' packs. Here are socks and shoe polish, sewing kits, diaries, Bibles and hand grenades. Here are the latest letters from home, with the address on each one neatly razored out- one of the security precautions enforced before the boys embarked. Here are toothbrushes and razors, and snapshots of families back home staring up at you from the sand.

The strong, swirling tides of the Normandy coastline shift the contours of the sandy beach as they move in and out. They carry soldiers' bodies out to sea, and later they return them.

## **6. Account of D-Day**

*Background: This account of D-Day was written by historian Norman Davies in 1994 in his book, Europe. In April and May 1944, the Allied air forces lost nearly 12,000 men and over 2,000 aircraft in preparation for D-Day. The Allied casualties for the D-Day landings have generally been estimated at 10,000, including 2500 dead. About 6000 of those casualties were American.*

In the West, the Second Front was finally opened on June 6, 1944, D-Day, when British, Canadian, Polish and American troops landed on the beaches of Normandy. Operation Overlord undoubtedly involved the greatest technical feat of the war. It demanded the safe disembarkation of hundreds of thousands of men and their weapons on a heavily fortified coast, who defenders had been preparing the reception for four years. It succeeded because of good planning matched by good luck. Deception measures, which included the bombing of false targets in the Pas-de-Calais, confused the German Staff about the location of the landings... Air

supremacy ensured close support on the beaches and, still more importantly, the interdiction [stopping] of the Germans' powerful armored reserve. The technological marvels included the huge floating dock yards called 'Mulberry Harbors' that were towed into position off the Normandy Coast, and Pluto (Pipeline under the Ocean) which guaranteed an unlimited supply of petrol.

[The invasion itself consisted of] 156,000 men, 2,000 warships, 4,000 landing craft, and 10,000 warplanes... then, in the grey dawn, the steel doors of the landing craft were thrown open and the main force waded ashore into five code-named beaches. Seventy three thousand men of the US 1st Army hit Utah and Omaha; 83,000 men of the Second British and First Canadian Armies stormed on to Gold, Juno and Sword. The shocked German defenders lay low in their bunkers, bombarded by heavy shells from unseen warships and mercilessly strafed from the air. Only at 'bloody Omaha' did they manage to raise a screen of fire to pin the attackers down. There, the US Army Rangers heroically scaled the cliff under fire, only to find the gun position on the top had been dismantled. But the setback was local. D-Day worked. In addition to their toehold in Italy, the Allies had won their finger hold in France. The Reich could be pincerred from both sides.

## **7. Assessment of Stalingrad**

*Background: Taken from Stalin's Wars (2006), historian Geoffrey Roberts discusses the toll taken by the battle of Stalingrad, which lasted from August of 1942 to February of 1943.*

Contemporary observers in the allied world were quick to grasp the significance of Stalingrad. In Britain the Soviet Victory was hailed in the press as the salvation of European civilization... At the time the Soviets themselves had a more restrained view of the significance of Stalingrad. Naturally, the battle was hailed as a great victory, but there was no assertion that the war had been won... It had been a very hard-won victory for the Soviets, with casualties far in excess of those publicly admitted. Soviet casualties during the course of the Germans' southern campaign were in the order of 2.5 million. These casualties came on top of the colossal losses of 1941, not to speak of the hundreds of thousands incurred elsewhere on the front in 1942...

**Questions to consider:**

You do not need to produce written answers to these questions, instead use them to inform the movie posters you make.

1. Are there any themes present in the source material that support the Good War narrative? Explain with reference to the sources.
2. What themes are present in the source material that are not expressed in the Good War narrative? Try to identify at least three themes. Explain with reference to the sources.

## War in Europe Timeline

1939	August: The Russians and the Germans sign a non-aggression pact. Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin agree not to invade each other's borders. The two leaders secretly plan to divide Poland and other parts of Eastern Europe between them.
	September: Employing blitzkrieg (literally, "lightning war") tactics, Germany invades Poland. Polish military forces are unprepared for the ferocity of Germany's attack. When efforts to negotiate a withdrawal fail, Britain and France declare war on Germany. World War II begins.
1940	June: Germany captures Paris.
	July 10: The Battle of Britain begins. A three-month battle fought in the skies over Britain will include destructive bombing raids on London and other cities, but by the end of October, the British will hand Hitler his first defeat.
1941	March: President Franklin Roosevelt convinces a largely isolationist Congress to pass the Lend-Lease Act, allowing the U.S. to sell or lend war materials to "any country whose defense the President deems vital to the defense of the United States."
	August: Emerging from secret meetings conducted on warships off of Newfoundland, Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt unveil the Atlantic Charter. The charter outlines goals concerning "the final destruction of Nazi tyranny," and a pledge to support "the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live."
	December 7: The United States is thrust into war when Japan launches a devastating surprise attack on the U.S. Naval fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. President Franklin Roosevelt will ask the Congress to declare war on Japan the following day, December 8th.
	December 11: Germany and Italy declare war on the U.S.
1942	January: U.S. troops arrive in Britain.
	August: Germany begins its assault on the Russian city of Stalingrad. In a battle that will rage for six months, and take hundreds of thousands of German and Russian lives, the Red Army finally defeats invading Nazis. The long, bloody battle proves to be a turning point in the war, as Germany begins a retreat from the Eastern Front.
1943	May: U.S. troops led by Generals Dwight Eisenhower and George S. Patton join forces with British troops under the command of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery to defeat German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel in North Africa.
	June: Eisenhower is appointed commander of the U.S. forces in Europe.



	July - September: Allied forces capture Sicily and key spots in southern Italy.
<b>1944</b>	<p>February: German aircraft production centers are the target of a massive bombing campaign by the U.S. Army Air Corps. Shortly thereafter, more than six hundred U.S. bombers raid Berlin.</p> <p>June: The Allies capture Rome, Italy.</p> <p>May 30: The Allied invasion of France commences; troops based in England begin their mobilization to cross the Channel, in a massive effort code-named Operation Overlord. Eisenhower will wait for a good weather forecast to determine the exact day of the invasion.</p> <p>June 5: Overlord is set into motion. An advance wave of paratroopers flies to drop spots over France late in the evening, and descends into enemy territory.</p> <p>June 6: D-Day. Over 160,000 Allied troops and 30,000 vehicles are landed along a 50-mile stretch of fortified French coastline and begin fighting on the beaches of Normandy.</p> <p>August : After four years of German occupation, the Allies liberate Paris with the help of French resistance troops led by General Charles de Gaulle.</p> <p>December 16: The Battle of the Bulge begins. Hitler sends a quarter million troops across an 85-mile stretch of the Allied front, from southern Belgium into Luxembourg. In deadly cold winter weather, German troops will advance some 50 miles into the Allied lines, creating a deadly "bulge" pushing into Allied defenses.</p>
<b>1945</b>	<p>January: By the end of the month, the Battle of the Bulge ends. Over 76,000 Americans have been killed, wounded, or captured. The Allies regain the territory they held in early December. Meanwhile, Soviet forces continue to press the Germans in Eastern Europe.</p> <p>March: U.S. forces cross the Rhine River. The Germans retreat into Germany.</p> <p>April 30: Soviet forces take Berlin.</p> <p>May 7: General Dwight Eisenhower accepts Germany's unconditional surrender at Reims, France. Germany likewise surrenders to Russia in Berlin.</p>

Adapted from: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dday/timeline/>