

William H. Wessel, D-Day Diary June 5 - 8, 1944
(Verbatim from his Diary.)

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Invasion Day June 5, 1944

Am very nervous, but proceeded to get into my equipment which weight is one hundred and twenty pounds, extra.

The time boarded planes, 9:52 pm. We are all tense as we sit in our seats. The motors are now warming up. The boys are lighting smokes and some look very pale. I have checked my harness of my parachute. We are now on the runway. The motors of our planes are at top speed

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and we are starting to roll. Our plane has a load of 5,580 lbs. and half is ammo and the other high explosives. We are in the air and we all give a sigh of relief. We will fly for two hours to get into formation. Aw we near the southern coast of England ready to cross the channel we are alerted that we will be over water twenty minutes and in case of a forced landing to sit on the floor and take off our equipment. All is well. We are

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ten minutes out. We meet our sub which flashes a light and from that light a certain azimuth is taken to lead us to our destination. I am No. 3 man and can see the channel very clear. I just hear a loud noise, an another and another. The flak is peppering the sky around us. we are all over the coast of France and each minute things are getting hotter. We are about 2500 feet and we hit

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dense clouds. Plane is now getting out of formation and at any moment there might be a collision in mid air. Our pilot dove and came out of it about 150 feet above the ground. Boy those tree tops sure looked close. We still had ten minutes to go to our drop zone and we stood willingly so if anything happened to the plane, most of us could get out.

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Oh did that equipment every get heavy. The red light went on we all knew that in a few minutes we would be on the ground completely surrounded by the enemy. There - the green light went on and Major Hagan, our jump master hollers LETS GO and out we went. My chute opens with a crack. Checked everything and then looked toward the

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ground. I was at least 1500 feet if not more. Golly, I thought I'd never get down. I spotted a good sized field and start slipping towards the middle of it to prevent tree landing. My judgment was very good cuase after you get below tree level at night you can see nothing. I landed point blank in the middle of that field. I hit like a

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ton of shit, being my equipment was so heavy. I didn't get a scratch and my chute was still deployed and was dragging me across the open field. I managed to reach my trench knife which was tied to my leg and cut my risers which deflated the chute and layed still for a few seconds listening. I heard something, which really made my blood chill. All at the same

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time trying to get out of my chute harness. I got it off in thirty seconds and my rifle together ready for action. That noise I heard a few seconds ago was just cattle. I then made a mad dash for a near-by hedge row, which I nearly practically dove into. Then changed my position a little farther down the row and laid and listen for about five minutes. All of the sudden I heard clanking of a metal heel

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on the near by road. I knew by instinct it was the enemy. I reached for a grenade, pull the pin and waited a second and let it go in the direction of the foot sound. There was a terrific explosion and heard a few moans. I got the hell out of there. Moved quietly down the hedgerow about 200 yards, where I heard some more noise. This

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time it was a padded sound like a rubber heel. I knew it was one of the troopers. I challenged him with the word "flash" and in reply he said "thunder" though at the time I came out of the bushes. He had a silver revolver pointed at my head. He turned out to be a captain from another outfit. We teamed up and proceeded down

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the rock road, where we ran into other troopers. By this time the Gerrys were sure using their m/guns and bullets were flying plentiful. I later ran into Col. Kraus, our [Br] Commander and by 5:30 am had about 150 men and hit the town of St. Mere Glease on the south side. There was a little activity. The Jerries had cleared

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out of town. There was a shot now and then from a sniper. At seven o'clock we captured three Germans, just young kids about 17. By the

time the rest of the company had got together and set up defense for counter attacks at about three in the afternoon. They attacked in little force and were beaten back. They trained their 88s and mortars

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on us and sure gave us the works. By not it was getting dark and we knew they were going to hit us again that night. No body slept and about three am they sure hit us. They got with in forth yards of us and we all thought our time was up. but it seemed as though we put out more lead than they and by 6 am

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they were on the run. We had held off the reinforcements which were supposed to have stopped the beach land that was made the morning before. June 7. They were snipping at us all the day and pound us with 88s but they couldn't break through. One sniper almost got me to day. I heard that bullet flick through the bushes

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just above my head and it got Col Kraus in the leg. Our crew were getting it left and right and the Hospital was full. That afternoon we were reinforced the gliders were coming in and it was a beautiful sight to see them cause we sure needed the men and ammo. That night was pretty quiet. A few shots here and there.

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June 8. The morning started with a band and old Gerry hit us again an even shelling our hospital. We were getting prisoners left and right. That afternoon the beach land forces and tanks come up and we were sure glad to see them. They said they sure had a tough time at the beach. About two thousand killed.

End of quote.

Names mentioned in Billy's Diary:

Francis Haines Cincinnati, OH

PM Markward APO 307 US Army

John Frohn Cincinnati, OH

Billie Burton Atlanta, GA

Edna Edwards Columbus, OH*

E Corrada Washington, DC

Jack Keating New River, NC

Walter Duas, Lafayette, LA

WB Workman Ft. Benning, GA

Martha Mahaffey Houston, TX*

Blanch England Cynthiana, KY*

A Ackle Camp Wheeler, GA

Verdnee Harwell APO 981 San Francisco, CA

Clifton Lessons Camp Wheeler, GA

Betty Purdy Washington, DC