

1994

The D-Day Encyclopedia [Review]

Michael Bechthold

Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, mbechthold@wlu.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh>

Recommended Citation

Bechthold, Michael "*The D-Day Encyclopedia* [Review]." Canadian Military History 3, 1 (1994)

This Feature is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian Military History by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

The D-Day Encyclopedia

David G. Chandler and James Lawton Collins, Jr, *The D-Day Encyclopedia*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994, 665 pgs, \$85 US.

D-Day, the sixth of June 1944, was a day of momentous proportions. Churchill referred to it as "the greatest amphibious operation in history," and "the most difficult and com-

plicated operation that has ever taken place." By the end of the day, 130,000 men along with their vehicles, equipment and supplies had been landed. On the choppy waters of the Channel, nearly 200,000 sailors in 1,200 ships comprised the armada that conveyed this force to France. In the sky overhead, the Allied Air Forces flew over 14,000 sorties in support of the invasion.

Unfortunately, amidst the catalogue of numbers used to express the operation's size, the true scale of effort tends to get

lost. One of the greatest contributions made by *The D-Day Encyclopedia* is to bring back into sharp focus the enormous endeavour that was Overlord. The editors, David Chandler and James Lawton Collins, Jr., have assembled a comprehensive 665-page reference book composed of 437 articles related to D-Day. In perusing this collection one becomes truly aware of the sheer scale of planning and effort that went into the mounting and execution of Overlord.

This book is sure to become the standard reference book on

D-Day. The editors have covered all aspects of the operation — political, strategic, operational, and technical. Each entry has been written by an expert in the field. For example, F.H. Hinsley contributed the articles on "Intelligence" and "ULTRA," Martin Gilbert wrote on "Winston Churchill" and Williamson Murray on the "German Air Force." The basic story of D-Day is told through articles on planning, airborne operations, the landing beaches, the navies, and air strategy. This is supplemented by accounts of more obscure topics such as "Chaplains," "Horses," "Seabees," and "Prisoners" among others.

Chancellor Helmut Kohl may not have been invited to the 50th Anniversary ceremonies in Normandy this summer, but *The D-Day Encyclopedia* shows no such victors' bias. Equal weight is given to articles dealing with German topics, and in many cases these have been written by German scholars making full use of German archival sources. Along with the major participants in Overlord (the U.S., U.K., Canada and Germany) entries are provided on the other nations who played a role, ranging from France and Poland to the ANZAC countries. It is notable that in covering France, specific (and detailed) attention is given to the question of civilian casualties.

Canada's contribution to D-Day does not go unnoticed in this reference book. John A. English, the author of *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign*, contributed articles on "Canada," "R.F.L. Keller," "W.L. Mackenzie King" and "3d Infantry Division." W.A.B. Douglas wrote the article on the "Royal Canadian Navy" and William Rodney covered the "Royal Canadian Air Force," "Six

Group" and its commander, "Clifford M. McEwen." In addition, the Canadian war effort is discussed in numerous other entries dealing with the landing beaches, naval and air matters and other assorted topics.

A great aid to the researcher is the comprehensive finding aids included in *The D-Day Encyclopedia*. Along with a detailed index, the book has an "Alphabetical List of Entries" and a "Directory of Contributors" which list the articles by author. The most useful aid, buried near the back of the book, is the "Synoptic Outline of Contents." This finding aid lists the entries under headings such as army, navy and air force, places and biographies. Other useful extras in the book are a "Glossary of Acronyms, Code Names, and Special Terms," a "Guide to German Military Units" and a "Table of Comparative Ranks." The addition of an index to the many excellent maps and a complete bibliography to supplement the short list of citations after each article would have rounded out a very well-designed book.

The D-Day Encyclopedia is not the last word on Operation Overlord. It is, however, a great place to start when seeking background information on the invasion, or general information on the individuals, formations and weapons used in the early stages of the campaign in Northwest Europe. So, the next time you need a little snippet of information, details on a particular unit or perhaps simply a name, try this book first before spending an hour (or more) searching for that crucial bit of knowledge.

Mike Bechthold
Wilfrid Laurier University
