

THE ADMIRAL'S VIEW

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D-Day

Last month I spoke about the importance of winning the Battle of the Atlantic, the hard-fought six-year campaign to defeat the U-boat threat in the North Atlantic during the Second World War. One of the primary reasons that we needed to prevail over the enemy in the North Atlantic was to enable the build-up of troops and supplies in England that would be used to launch the invasion of Europe and open up a much needed second front against the Nazi war machine.

And so it was that Canada joined our Allies in the largest amphibious assault in history against Fortress Europe on June 6, 1944, some 67 years ago this coming Monday. Although we do not normally celebrate this seminal day in our history, I would like to focus my remarks on the important contribution that Canadians made in this battle and the legacy that endures to this day.

Operation Overlord, as the D-Day Campaign was called, involved all elements of the Canadian military. Canada, in collaboration with our other Allies, was given a specific objective to achieve - ours was to gain an initial foothold through the capture of Juno Beach and subsequently break out of Normandy. More than 14,000 soldiers in regiments from East to West, including the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, stormed the beaches under intense gunfire and bombardment, while another 450 dropped by glider and parachute behind the enemy fortifications. The Royal Canadian Air Force flew Lancaster bombers and Spitfire fighters and joined with our Allies to provide air support over the coastal skies. The Royal Canadian Navy was also present on that day, with ships and 10,000 sailors providing protection for the flanks of the flotilla, and delivering naval gunfire on the German coastal batteries, as the invasion force navigated across the English Channel in the early morning hours.

Despite the strength of the German defences and the ferocious nature of the battle, Canada and her Allies prevailed and gained the vital foothold on European soil that eventually led to the defeat of the German forces in a little less than one year later on May 8, 1945. Many Canadians fought with distinction on D-Day and Canadian troops were the only ones to reach their final objectives for the first day by penetrating some 15 kilometres inland. The gains were not without



casualties as 340 soldiers paid the ultimate sacrifice, while another 574 were wounded in the D-Day battles.

What was significant about D-Day for Canadians is that we were included as a contributing partner in the planning and preparation of the Operation as well as having responsibility and operational command of our own Canadian soldiers in achieving our own objectives within the larger overall mission. That tradition and practice of collaboration in a unified effort with our Allies continued through the Korean Conflict and the Cold War and carries on to this day. In fact, our presence today in Afghanistan and most recently in the Mediterranean, with our Air Force fighter and surveillance assets and HMCS CHARLOTTETOWN, is the modern-day evolution of our willingness and ability to join with other like-minded nations in the protection of freedom and prosperity.

What was true in 1944, on the beaches of Normandy, remains true today - the preservation of our freedom and prosperity will often be decided by conflict in far-off lands and seas. We must act upon those events that may endanger this freedom, and those of our Allies, and be prepared to defend those in need.

D-Day. As Canadians, we must hold this day in our memories as a milestone. It speaks of the code of ethics that we strive to maintain in our military institution and is reflective of Canadian values and ethos at large: truth, duty, courage, loyalty and integrity. These words are not ideological terms crafted from a comfortable vantage point; instead, they are values inherited from those who acted upon them, such as the brave men and women of that momentous day. With them in mind, we have a true image of this code of ethics; and thanks to those like them, our country is strong and free.

