

DAY OF DAYS: JUNE 6, 1944

AMERICAN SOLDIERS
REMEMBER D-DAY



DAY OF DAYS: JUNE 6, 1944

Discussion Guide

For community screenings, panels, and workshops, and for college courses and seminars



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Facilitation Guidelines

Filmmakers use immersive storytelling to produce intense thoughts and emotions in the viewer. **Journeys in Film** uses this powerful medium as a springboard for meaningful dialogue around humanity's most pressing issues. In this guide, you will find suggestions for leading productive conversations that broaden perspectives, increase global competency, encourage empathy, and build new paradigms for education.

- When watching a film or having a powerful discussion, normalize taking breaks and exercising bodily autonomy. Acknowledge that conversations around complex topics can be vulnerable, complicated, and challenging. Encourage members to voice and do what is right for them without needing to explain or apologize.
- People do their best when they know what to expect. Start and end your meetings on time.
- Share or co-create your intentions for the meeting.
- Create your space. If possible, share snacks or find other ways to create an inviting, comfortable atmosphere.
- Create a trustworthy space. Maintain confidentiality and only speak to your own experience.
- Minimize distractions while you are together. Silence cell phones and devices so you can give your full attention to the conversation.
- Practice whole-body listening. Listen to words, tone, body language, and the feeling in the atmosphere.
- Acknowledge voices that may be absent. Is there a lived experience that isn't represented in your group? Who are the bridge people who might be able to connect you with other people in your community who might bring new perspectives to the table?
- Adopt an attitude of positive intent. If someone says something that bothers you, assume positive intent and ask for more information.
- Ignite your curiosity around other people's views and opinions. Listen to understand, not to respond. You don't need to agree with others in your group or make it known that you are "right" to have a worthwhile conversation.
- Words matter. Be open to learning and practicing new ways to communicate with others.
- Be clear, direct, and kind in your communication. Nobody benefits when you bottle your opinions.
- Everyone has blind spots and biases; cultivate a space of grace as you enter into new territory together.
- If a conversation gets heated, practice acknowledging the tension, pausing as a group, and taking a collective breath together before diving back in or taking a longer break to reset.
- Privilege your relationships with others over the content or agenda of the meeting. Show each other kindness.
- Create a closing ritual that celebrates the time you've spent together and either gives closure or gives members something to think about before your next meeting.

Introduction to the Film



They were the best the United States had to offer, and on June 6, 1944, their nation sent them through the gates of Hell in Normandy, France. They fought inland and on Utah Beach, facing murderous MG-42 machine-gun fire, mortars, and artillery on Omaha Beach. *Day of Days: June 6, 1944* is an opportunity to eavesdrop as one of the most important days in the history of the world is recalled by those who were actually there, fighting and witnessing the devastation.

The harrowing story of D-Day, recalled by the veterans who landed on the French shore and accompanied by archival footage, brings the event to life in dramatic and emotional ways. Most of the enlisted soldiers were young and scared as they dropped from the sky or arrived by boat at Omaha and Utah Beaches, unsure of their survival and the efficacy of their mission. Within days, Allied forces gained French land and turned the tide of the war.

Letter from the WWII Foundation

Storytelling is at the core of the WWII Foundation, an organization founded in 2011 with a mission to raise awareness and appreciation, through film, of the many sacrifices made by American men and women in securing our basic freedoms. Humankind is hardwired to respond to “once upon a time,” and the Foundation is singularly positioned to leaven the facts and statistics of history, bringing them to life through stories. Our goal is to instill the lessons the War taught us and make them accessible, relatable, and impactful at no cost to students, educators, veterans, or the public. We don’t produce World War II films. We produce documentary films on individual personal stories from World War II. I think there’s a significant difference.



We educate younger generations about the war. We do not approach this in the way WE think is best. We teach based on how students are learning and what tools they themselves are utilizing today to explore history, whether that be through strong visual storytelling in films that capture their attention and imagination or by utilizing new storytelling technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR).

We distribute much of this content through social media channels, as well as via traditional national and international television networks. We film all these documentaries, narrated by some of the biggest names in television, music, sports, and the movies, in the locations where the events unfolded during the war. Often, we bring back a veteran or survivor with us to where their own individual WWII story began and ended. Our studio is in Europe, the Pacific, and the Far East.

We hope these award-winning films, which rank among the top five most-requested programs nationally by PBS and its affiliates, will motivate not only students but also everyone to learn more about this critical period in world history. The lessons of which still strongly resonate today. We make all these resources available for free to anyone who wants to explore World War II’s impact on the lives of those who lived through it.

- Tim Gray, Writer, Producer, and Director, The World War II Foundation and Tim Gray Media

To learn more about the WWII Foundation visit <https://wwiifoundation.org/about/>

The Mission



<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/531217>

The Battle of Normandy, code name Operation Overlord, was a significant mission for the Allies to invade German-occupied Western Europe during World War II. In a speech to the troops, Eisenhower, the Allied commander, called it a “great crusade” and that “the eyes of the world” were upon the soldiers.

Allied forces trained for up to a year, including rehearsal landings on British beaches. Coordination between land, sea, and air forces was critical. A manufactured campaign, utilizing inflatable tanks, fake radio traffic, and a phantom army, was set up to deceive the German forces into thinking the invasion would happen at Pas de Calais instead of the Normandy beaches. In addition, a storm the night of the planned landing led the Germans to believe the attack would be canceled. However, the Allies’ meteorologist noticed a brief break in the weather, and the mission happened at 6:30 a.m. the following morning. This worked, and the Germans were caught off guard when the Allies landed. By nightfall, the Allies had secured the shore.

Despite the Allies’ advantage, the casualties were significant: Over 4,400 men died within the 24-hour period from landing, according to the National D-Day Memorial’s exhaustive research.



Eisenhower's Speech to the Troops

*Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force:
You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade,
toward which we have striven these many months.
The eyes of the world are upon you.
The hope and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you.
Your task will not be an easy one.
Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened.
He will fight savagely. But this is the year 1944! The tide has turned!
The free men of the world are marching together to victory!
I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle.
We will accept nothing less than full victory!
Good luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.*

—Gen. [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#), Supreme Allied Commander, 6 June 1944.

Discussion Questions

1. Analyze Eisenhower's speech. What phrases, images, and rhetorical devices stand out to you? Why was it important to deliver a speech that effectively motivated and inspired the soldiers, many of whom Eisenhower knew would die?
2. What do you think went through soldiers' minds when they heard Eisenhower's speech telling them, "The eyes of the world are upon you" during this "noble undertaking"? How might that significance and pressure have felt?
3. How do you think the anticipation of the landing felt to the soldiers after lengthy training and the storm delay? Were they prepared mentally and physically for what they were about to face?
4. After listening to the interviews in the documentary, compare the rhetoric of Eisenhower's speech to the lived experiences of the soldiers.
5. Imagine the feelings of relief and grief at the end of the day by the surviving soldiers. How do you think they reconciled the contradictory feelings based on what you can intuit from the interviews?

What Makes a Hero?



American assault troops of the 16th Infantry Regiment, injured while storming Omaha Beach, wait by the chalk cliffs for evacuation to a field hospital for further medical treatment, Collville-sur-Mer, Normandy, France

What is striking in the interviews is that the veterans express a complex mixture of pride in their service and haunting memories. There is no braggadocio or chest thumping; instead, they repeatedly describe their service simply as, “We had a job to do.” They followed orders, and when they returned home, they tried to move on and forget about the darker aspects of their experiences, rarely sharing with their families and friends.

This generation has been nicknamed “The Greatest Generation” because of their extraordinary personal sacrifices to protect and serve the interests of the United States. Yet their oral histories reveal a more nuanced experience than simple heroism: of ordinary people thrust into extraordinary circumstances, doing their duty despite fear, loss, and trauma. These testimonies challenge us to reconsider what heroism really is, and how its reality is much different than the glorified stories we see in the movies and pop culture.



Discussion Questions

- 1.** Based on the veterans' interviews, how would you define heroism? Why do you think they resist being called heroes and describe their missions in a matter-of-fact way?
- 2.** Do you think people need a guiding purpose to act heroically, or can heroism emerge in the immediate situation? How do you think having a clear mission ("stop fascism," "protect democracy") affects one's ability to cope with intense struggle and horror?
- 3.** While listening to the interviews, what did you learn about this generation that you may not have known before? What surprised you most about their perspectives and guiding values? How do you think this generation's approach to duty and sacrifice compares to attitudes today?
- 4.** Why do you think many veterans waited decades before sharing their stories? What changed that made them willing to speak?
- 5.** Why is it important to listen to and record authentic veteran voices? How might Hollywood portrayals or simplified historical narratives about war potentially harm veterans and our understanding of history?

The Lingering Effects of War Trauma



The soldiers who landed on D-Day witnessed unimaginable horrors and experienced transformative stress and fear. In the interviews with veterans, many insisted that the images of what they saw that day would never leave them. They watched their fellow soldiers being killed by enemy fire and explosions. Even more heartbreaking, some drowned the moment they exited the Higgins Boats, weighed down by heavy equipment and fighting post-storm waves.

The ongoing psychiatric effects from battle were known as “battle fatigue” during WWII, but similar conditions have been noted from the beginning of recorded history. The understanding of the causes, possible preventions, and treatments of what we now call post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, has evolved over time. While the military did not fully understand PTSD and often attributed it to underlying psychiatric issues, rather than to normal responses to battle, they did attempt to identify triggers in its development and explore potential treatments.

In an attempt to help soldiers cope in battle, the military began administering Benzedrine, a stimulant, before combat to help troops stay energized and focused. Before the D-Day landings, the soldiers were told they were being given a “seasickness” medication. Military leaders hoped the amphetamine would also prevent PTSD from developing after combat, as it was an increasing problem in modern warfare.

According to the National World War II Museum, “During the Normandy campaign, Army psychologists noted that the combat effectiveness of troops sharply declined after 30 days of combat. And after 45 days were in a near vegetative state. Military medicine finally conceded that it wasn’t a question of if a soldier would break in combat, but a question of ‘when.’”

This acknowledgment marked a shift in understanding combat trauma as a character flaw to recognizing it as a consequence of prolonged exposure to the horrors of war.



Discussion Questions

- 1.** Listening to the veterans' memories was deeply emotional. Which stories or images stood out as particularly powerful and haunting?
- 2.** The military gave soldiers Benzedrine to keep them alert in battle and possibly mitigate the onset of PTSD. What are the ethical implications of giving soldiers drugs without their full knowledge? How do you think military leaders justified their choice?
- 3.** How can we better track and acknowledge the lasting impact of combat trauma in the lives of soldiers and their families after war?
- 4.** What do you think the government's responsibility regarding the mental health of soldiers after the war should be?
- 5.** One of the symptoms of PTSD is a reluctance or refusal to discuss traumatic events. How does this impact recovery and our ability to understand what happened during the war? What is lost by the silence?

The Power and Importance of Personal Narratives



These interviews are so powerful because they capture firsthand accounts from people who lived through and participated in a defining moment in history. Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist who survived the concentration camps, wrote a seminal book about surviving trauma, *Man's Search for Meaning*. In it, he posits that meaning and purpose help us endure incredibly difficult times. When we understand the national importance of our trials or assign personal purpose to them, we have a better opportunity of surviving. He argues that ultimately it is within our power to create meaning from our life experiences, thus empowering ourselves.

Personal narratives and oral histories can be a critical part of meaning-making as subjects share their stories, extracting lessons and perspectives that help their audience and themselves understand these experiences. These accounts have the potential to transform individual suffering into collective wisdom.

Additionally, oral histories help preserve the voices and stories of a diverse spectrum of people who witnessed history. These records can be saved and passed on through digital archives, spreading a people's history far beyond the confines of a normal person's lifetime and ensuring impact on future generations.



Discussion Questions

1. What common themes emerge from these veterans' recollections, and how do their individual stories contribute to our broader understanding of this historical period?
2. How do you think the passage of time has shaped these veterans' memories and the way they tell their stories? What might be gained or lost as memories age?
3. Why is it crucial to collect and preserve soldiers' remembrances, and what insights do these personal accounts provide that traditional historical records might miss?
4. How important is it for archives like those at the Library of Congress to make these interviews available to all Americans and researchers? What role does public access play in understanding our shared history?
5. Spend time reading through the Library of Congress or National Park Service oral history archives linked in the Additional Resources page. What do you notice? Are these stories similar to the interviews in the documentary?
6. On a personal level, how can you contribute to preserving history by recording the memories of ordinary people in your community or family who have lived through significant events?

Additional Resources

Timeline of WW2

<https://wwiifoundation.org/timeline-of-wwii/>

Library of Congress D-Day (June 6, 1944)

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/veterans-history-project-collection/serving-our-voices/world-war-ii/d-day-june-6-1944/>

The National D-Day Memorial

<https://www.dday.org/>

National Archives D-Day Collection

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/d-day>

Secrets of the Dead: World War Speed (S17E5)

Documentary about the use of amphetamines by the Allies in WWII

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/secrets/preview-world-war-speed/4337/>

National Park Service WWII Oral Histories

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/worldwarii/oralhistories.htm>

Library of Congress Veterans History Collection

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/veterans-history-project-collection/serving-our-voices/world-war-ii/d-day-june-6-1944/d-day-on-the-beach/>

“History of PTSD in Veterans: Civil War to DSM-5”

Article by the US Department of Veterans Affairs

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/what/history_ptsd.asp

“WWII Post-Traumatic Stress”

Article by the National WWII Museum

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/wwii-post-traumatic-stress>

Viktor Frankl’s website

<https://viktorfranklamerica.com/viktor-frankl-bio/>

“The Power of Personal Narrative”

Article on Psychology Today

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-of-personal-narrative/201806/the-power-of-personal-narrative>

Portraits of Honor

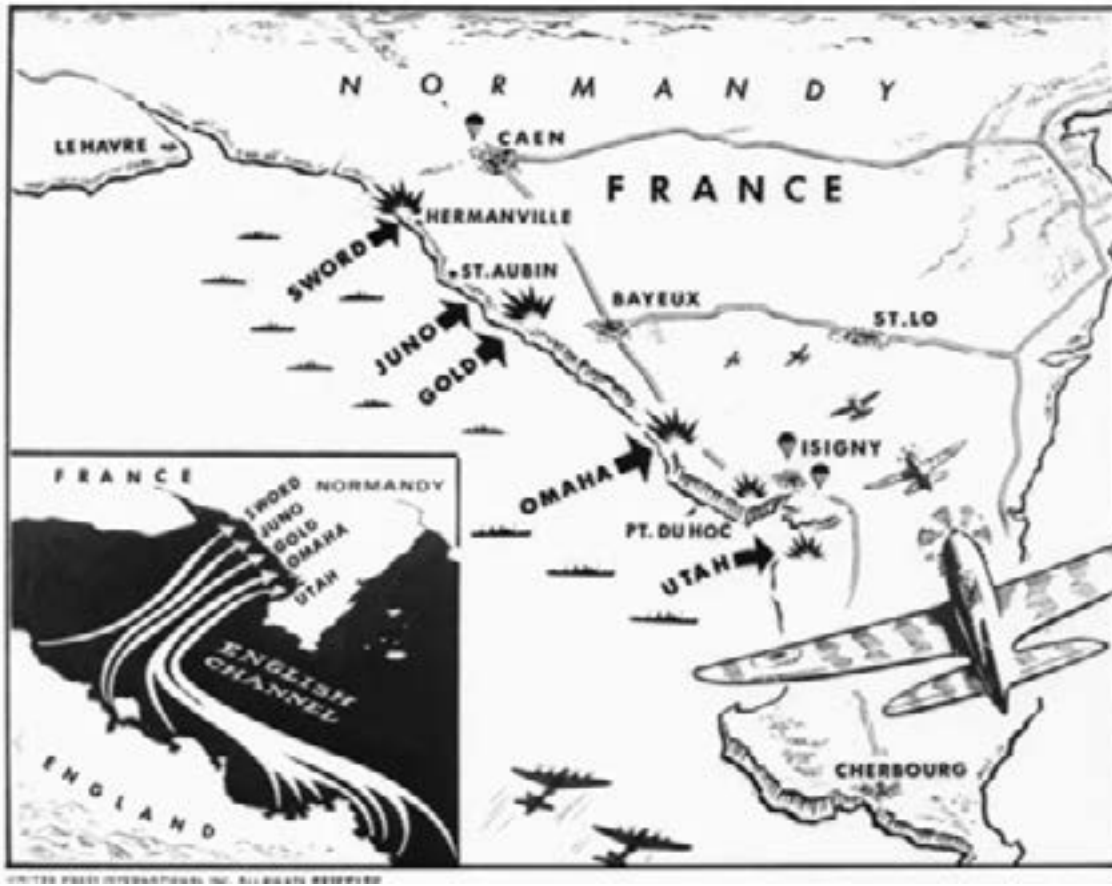
Project that has made over 300 portraits of the last surviving WWII veterans and their stories

<https://www.portraitsofhonor.us/>



Map of Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword Beaches

The target 50-mile stretch of the Normandy coast that was divided into five sectors: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword.



Bettmann Archive/Getty Images



Film Credits

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Educating for Global Understanding

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