



The Americans on D-Day and in Normandy: Rare Photographs from Wartime Archives by Brooke S. Blades.

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Review by Donald Lateiner, Ohio Wesleyan University (dglatein@owu.edu).

Archaeologist and historian Brooke Blades's subject is D-Day, Operation Overlord, on Omaha, Utah, and other beaches, and the following weeks in bombed and ravaged Normandy—in short, the most ambitious amphibious invasion in history. Black-and-white photographs of relevant locations taken at the time require and receive helpful maps here. But the cartography lacks adequate legends to follow their detail.¹ Blades's eleven chapters take us from the British embarkation sites to the French beaches to the hedgerows and American break-outs directed toward Avranches.

The author has selected pictures from the American military photographic archives, though a few precious German Wehrmacht supplements are arresting. He surveys preparations, airborne landings, beach-landings, coastal defenses, advances inland, POWs, civilians, the wounded, and the dead and their cemeteries. One exceptional chapter presents the photographs of Sgt. Richard Taylor, who landed on the extreme eastern end of Omaha Beach (Fox Red Sector). Another photographer, identified only as "Todd," took an interest in a squad of African-American infantry, whether because they happened to be in front of his lens (126–29) or because of some interest (or their rarity) we are not told. Blades does note elsewhere the resentment of African-American troops in the still segregated American armed forces (14).

Most chapters feature photographers grouped by theme. Oddly, the author tells us little about most of them. Captions usually offer only last names.² They were members of Signal Corps units attached to the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard.³ Not included are famous names like Robert Capa (of *Life* magazine), the only civilian photographer who hit the beaches on D-Day.⁴ Sgt. Taylor's fourteen photographs show exhausted and wounded troops after the ferocious fighting and heavy first-day losses. One wishes for more cross-references between images and text, and for more on the relationship of cameramen to infantry and sailors directing landing ships into heavily defended German coastal positions.

In an age when memories are often manipulated, Blades's further visual documentation of what was achieved during Overlord is most welcome. (His few notations about US military censorship deserve elaboration.) Blades vividly describes landings on the beaches in "cramped assault

1. E.g., the map on 85 does not identify WN 68, which signifies an enemy gun emplacement defending D-3, an exit from the beach near Les Moulins. And what are "L/116," "els," or "G/116 on Dog Red"? Civilians need better guidance.

2. E.g., the first photo's caption reads "A practice jump by the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment near Newbury, photographed by Runyan on 16 November 1943. He would accompany the division to Normandy. (NARA)." Who is Runyan and will readers see more of his work?

3. Peter Maslowski's *Armed with Cameras: The American Military Photographers of World War II* (NY: Free Pr, 1993) offers a history of many of these units with pictures of the photographers as well as their own work.

4. Capa, a Hungarian Jewish refugee, in his memoir, *Slightly Out of Focus* (1947; rpt. NY: Modern Library, 1999), recounts his career chasing wars from Spain to China, from Omaha Beach to Israel and Indochina, where he died at age forty after stepping on a land mine.

craft such as LCVP [landing craft, vehicle, personnel] that were open to the wind and sea” (53). Soaked in the cold Atlantic waters, often seasick, attacked by artillery, and hitting mines, many heavily laden troops had to swim and wade two thousand yards to reach dry land. High seas sank many tanks offshore. Allied air and naval bombardments had little effect. The engineers could not penetrate the many frightening and effective German obstacles. American generals disdained Hobart’s “Funnies” (armored vehicles) that the British used to excellent effect against barbed wire and mines.⁵ Strong currents dispersed the Americans all over the five-mile-long Omaha Beach. Many officers were killed right after landing; this left their units leaderless. Omaha was a disaster; only American superiority in men, equipment, and determination saved the bloody day there. Less resistance was met at Utah Beach. Few of Blades’s selected images show actual combat conditions (108–9, 154).

The second half of the book shows American soldiers marching or resting in the Normandy countryside, where the (in)famous hedgerows (*bocages*), ditches, and high stone walls flanking narrow roads heightened the risk of ambush (172). Many photographs show surrendering or surrendered German POWs, mostly a mix of very young and rather old combatants, looking more cheerful than sullen in their new status. Images of GIs exchanging friendly looks with small children must have warmed hearts in Europe and back in the States (e.g., 138, 143). More distressing pictures of humiliated French males parading shamed, shaven-headed *collaboratrices* expose the angry cruelty of the now liberated but long defeated and subjugated inhabitants (142, 158). While the images are certainly newsworthy, what exactly were the motives and feelings of the American cameramen who captured them? Incidental shots of the destruction of French towns in summer 1944 attest to the firepower of German and American artillery, tanks, and tank destroyers—one Sherman tank is visibly named “Hun Chaser” (166–70, 176).

The injured found better treatment than in earlier wars, but wound-making projectiles often rendered any medical remedy null and void. The 82nd Airborne waited three days for effective medical assistance (183), because paratroopers had landed far from their intended targets. Psychiatric trauma complemented physical wounds. The use of blood plasma, which did not need refrigeration, saved many American lives—photographs show prostrate soldiers with IV tubes running up to plasma bags (194–95). One picture shows a large group of impressive First Army (female) nurses helping to save lives, often coping with sudden surges of wounded soldiers arriving behind the lines (193).

The book concludes with the dead and their deposition. From untended corpses on the beach and alongside roads, Blades progresses to corpses covered, or elaborately shrouded, and then interred. In some temporary cemeteries early on, German and American dead occupied neighboring plots. One photo shows Private Ortega from Los Angeles painting a large batch of crosses for grave markers “on 7 July” (219). The rarer Star of David stands above Hyman Barash of the 336th Engineer Combat Battalion (223). Pictures of roads and beaches, both then and now, and well-engineered German gun bunkers (112, 239) enrich the selection. At least one concrete emplacement has been converted into a memorial for US National Guard troops of the 29th Division (238).

Blades provides neither a comprehensive narrative nor a photographic survey of the June landings and lodgments, the slaughter of comrades, and ultimate success of the complex operation. For instance, there are no images of the British and Canadian landings on Juno, Sword, and

5. See Patrick Delaforce, *Churchill’s Secret Weapons: The Story of Hobart’s Funnies* (1998; rpt. Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2006), with thirty-three instructive illustrations.

Gold beaches or of the French and the Polish divisions that took part. But this merely bespeaks the author's admitted reliance on the rich trove of photographs from a single American archive.⁶ The result is a rewarding but partial picture of an overwhelmingly complex invasion, subsequent advances, and finally liberated Paris.

6. The National Archives Record Groups in College Park, MD, with supplements from the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz and pertinent images from Google Earth and Blades's own recent photography.