



Destination Normandy: Three American Regiments on D-Day (Studies in Military History and International Affairs)

G. H. Bennett

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Bennett collects oral histories from men of three United States regiments that participated in the invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. The 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment was the most widely scattered of the American parachute infantry regiments to be dropped on D-Day. However, the efforts of 180 men to stop the advance of an SS Panzer Grenadier division largely have been ignored outside of France. The 116th Infantry Regiment received the highest number of casualties on Omaha Beach of any Allied unit on D-Day. Stationed in England through most of the war, it had been the butt of jokes while other regiments did the fighting and dying in North Africa and the Mediterranean; that changed on June 6, 1944. And the 22nd Infantry Regiment, a unit that had fought in almost every campaign waged by the U.S. Army since 1812, came ashore on Utah Beach quite easily before getting embroiled in a series of savage fights to cross the marshland behind the beach and to capture the German heavy batteries to the north.

Each participant's story is woven into the larger picture of the assault, allowing Bennett to go beyond the largely personal viewpoints yielded by traditional oral history but avoiding the impersonal nature of studies of grand strategy. In addition to the interviews and memoirs Bennett collected, he also discovered fresh documentary evidence from American, British, and French archives that play an important part in facilitating this new approach, as well as archives in Britain and France. The author unearths new stories and questions from D-Day, such as the massacre of soldiers from the 507th at Graignes, Hemevez, and elsewhere. This new material includes a focus on the regimental level, which is all but ignored by historians, while still covering strategic, tactical, and human issues. His conclusions highlight common misperceptions about the Normandy landings. Questions have already been raised about the wisdom of the Anglo-American amphibious doctrine employed on D-Day. In this study, Bennett continues to challenge the assumption that the operation was an exemplary demonstration of strategic planning.

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