

**ADDRESS OF
MAJOR GENERAL RICHARD MILLS (Retired)
65th Anniversary of D-Day
6 June 2009
WWII Veterans Memorial
Oak Ridge Cemetery
Springfield, Illinois**

The veterans of America, what kind of people are they?
General of the Army Douglas MacArthur answered this question in his famous speech before the U.S. Military Academy's corps of cadets in May 1962.
"Yours is the profession of arms, the will to win, the sure knowledge that in war there is no substitute for victory, that if you lose, the nation will be destroyed, that the very obsession of your public service must be duty, honor, country."

The May 22, 1941 edition of Army Field Manual (FM) 100-5, Field Service Regulations: Operations, which was republished a few years ago by the U.S. Government Printing Office, spells out the battlefield doctrines used to fight and win World War II. Here is what it says:

"Man is the fundamental instrument of war; other instruments may change but he remains relatively constant. In spite of the advances in technology, the worth of the individual man is still decisive."

World War II was the most important and far reaching event of the twentieth century.

It began on September 1, 1939, when Germany attacked and invaded Poland and finally ended on September 2, 1945, with the surrender of Japan. WWII killed more persons, cost more money, damaged more property, affected more people, and caused more far-reaching changes than any other war in history.

The total number of people killed, wounded or missing can never be calculated. More than 10 million Allied servicemen and nearly 6 million military men from the Axis countries lost their lives. More than 50 countries took part in the war and the whole world felt its effects.

America suffered nearly 300,000 U.S. forces and merchant seamen killed and almost 700,000 wounded. We had 157 navy ships and submarines sunk and 866 merchant ships sent to the bottom.

At Pearl Harbor, the heart of the U.S. fleet -- 18 ships -- was destroyed in about 100 minutes. Thus was the United States swept into the largest war of all

time, "fought across six of the world's seven continents and all its oceans," as historian John Keegan wrote, "It killed 50 million human beings, left hundreds of millions of others wounded in mind or body, and materially devastated much of the heartland of civilization."

On the other side of the world, most of civilized Europe fell under the sway of fascist power, as did North Africa. Hitler was already dreaming of concentration camps and planning the extermination of the Jews, Gypsies, Slav elites and other "undesirables."

World War II became a war of liberation after four decisive turning points: Midway, North Africa, and Stalingrad and Normandy.

By autumn 1942, the Allies also were on the offensive in the European theater, successfully landing in North Africa and beginning the trek toward Rome. "Now this is not the end," Winston Churchill said as 1942 closed. "It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

The Allies invaded Sicily. Then came Anzio Beach and the terrible bloody battle for Monte Cassino, and on up through Italy. The greatest naval armada of all time was assembled for the invasion of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944 - - 65 years ago today - - where we suffered 14,000 killed in action and 63,000 wounded.

Just prior to the invasion, General Eisenhower transmitted a now-historic message to all members of the Allied Expeditionary Force. It read, in part, "You are about to embark upon the great crusade, toward which we have striven these many months." In his pocket was an unused statement to be read in case the invasion failed.

On that June morning in living memory, soldiers poured from Higgins boats onto enemy-held beaches, beginning the final chapter of humanity's deadliest conflict. More than 150,000 troops crossed the English Channel on Day 1 of the Allied invasion of France.

May 1944 had been chosen as the time for the invasion. Difficulties in assembling landing craft forced a postponement until June, but June 5 was fixed as the unalterable date by Eisenhower on May 17. As the day approached and troops began to embark for the crossing, bad weather set in, threatening dangerous landing conditions. After tense debate, Eisenhower and his subordinates decided on a 24-hour delay, requiring the recall of some ships already at sea. Eventually, on the morning of June 5, Eisenhower, assured by chief meteorologist Group Commander James Martin Stagg of a break in the weather, Ike announced, "O.K. We'll go." Within hours an armada of 3,000 landing craft, 2,500 other ships, and 500 naval vessels - escorts and

bombardment ships - began to leave English ports. That night 822 aircraft, carrying parachutists or towing gliders, roared overhead to the Normandy landing zones. They were a fraction of the air armada of 13,000 aircraft that would support D-Day.

The operation was the largest single-day amphibious invasion of all times, with 160,000 troops landing on June 6, 1944. Nearly 200,000 Allied naval and merchant navy personnel in over 5,000 ships were involved.

By the end of June 11 (D+5), over 325,000 troops, 55,000 vehicles and 105,000 tons of supplies had been landed on the beaches.

Omaha was the most heavily fortified beach, with high bluffs defended by funneled mortars, machine guns, and artillery, and the pre-landing aerial and naval bombardment of the bunkers proved to be ineffective. Difficulties in navigation caused the majority of landings to drift eastwards, missing the assigned sectors and the initial assault waves of tanks, infantry and engineers took heavy casualties. Of the 16 tanks that landed upon the shores of Omaha Beach only 2 survived the landing. The official record stated that “within 10 minutes of the ramps being lowered, [the leading] company had become inert, leaderless and almost incapable of action. Every officer and sergeant had been killed or wounded. It had become a struggle for survival and rescue”. Only a few gaps were blown in the beach obstacles, resulting in problems for subsequent landings. The heavily defended draws, the only vehicular routes off the beach, could not be taken and two hours after the first assault the beach was closed for all but infantry landings. Commanders (including General Omar Bradley) considered abandoning the beachhead, but small units of infantry, often forming ad hoc groups, supported by naval artillery and the surviving tanks, eventually infiltrated the coastal defenses by scaling the bluffs between strongpoints. Further infantry landings were able to exploit the initial penetrations and by the end of day two isolated footholds had been established.

American casualties at Omaha on D-Day numbered around 5,000 out of 50,000 men, most in the first few hours, while the Germans suffered 1,200 killed, wounded or missing. The tenuous beachhead was expanded over the following days, and the original D-Day objectives were accomplished by D+3. Four men received the Medal of Honor on D-Day.

To the veterans here today that we honor, – I salute you. You stood tall, you did your duty, you survived, you returned. And we remember with heavy hearts those of your comrades that paid the supreme sacrifice, that were wounded, that were prisoners of war. Those who are here are the fortunate ones. It has been truly said: “In war there are no victors, only survivors.”

Americans of World War II understood that to bring down a form of tyranny, it was necessary to sacrifice lives. In liberty and in prosperity, the world after 1945 became a far, far better place than it had been in 1939. World War II was worth fighting, after all. To have lost would have brought unimaginable sorrow amid slavery.

A grateful nation salutes every one of you!

(U.S. District Judge Richard Mills is a Major General in the Illinois Militia and a retired Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve. He served 14 months in Korea with the 3rd Infantry Division, and was in charge of counterintelligence for the 65th Infantry Regiment and the Greek and Belgian Battalions attached to the 3rd Division. Among his decorations are the Bronze Star, Meritorious Service Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal and Korean Service Medal with battle star. General Mills retired after 33 years in the military, active and reserve.)