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We Observe D-Day

JUNE 6th marks the 20th Anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy. On that day in 1944 a vast armada departed Great Britain and discharged on the beaches of Normandy the largest invasion force in history. Among the U.S. forces were many thousands of National Guardsmen. On the ground or in fighters and bombers overhead there was ample representation of the National Guard of every State.

On June 6th of this year, a representative group of the National Guard Association of the United States, with members drawn from nearly every State, will participate in Anniversary ceremonies on the Beaches of Normandy.

One of the first Divisions to be offloaded at Omaha Beach was the 29th, which in those days included National Guard units from Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. In the group returning to Normandy are several officers who served on the beach with the "Blue and Gray" Division.

Our purpose in returning to Normandy, as a representative group of the Association has done each five years commencing with the 10th Anniversary, is not only to honor all those who participated in the assault on Fortress Europe—and especially members of the National Guard—but to remind the Nation that not only in World War II but in every war this Nation has fought since its founding, State forces have made significant contributions.

In 1941 not only did the National Guard more than double the size of the standing Army, but it provided a base for the tremendous expansion that followed so rapidly. Vast numbers of enlisted Guardsmen gained commissioned status and became the leaders of the expanded force with which we won World War II. Nearly every National Guard organization was called upon to cadre new units that it was necessary to activate. Some of our best officers were transferred from their units to important staff positions throughout the Army. Great numbers were accepted for service as pilots, bombardiers and navigators in the then Army Air Corps.

All of these things must be considered when one attempts to evaluate objectively the contribution of the National Guard in that great conflict. Thousands of Guardsmen gave their lives, not only in combat in Europe, but in the jungles of the South Pacific, on the hot and bloody islands of the Central Pacific, and, finally, in regaining the independence of the Philippine Islands. All these we honor as we stand in silence on the beaches of Normandy which knew for a few weeks in 1944 the fury of Hell, but where the quiet now is broken only by the breaking of a wave on a deserted coastline and by the movement of the flag that flies over the American Cemetery where rest so many of our comrades-in-arms whom we return to honor on that day.

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In the Active Army and the Army Guard, the crossed arrow insignia is respected as the emblem of its masters of unorthodoxy—Special Forces!

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