



JAMES F. CANTWELL
President

National Guard Association
of the United States

D-Day and the Guard

ONE has only to utter the phrase "D-Day" and the whole spectacular panorama mentally unrolls, even after a quarter of a century—of the mightiest armada in history carrying the invading force to France—of the confusion and hideous carnage of the assault itself—and of those first desperate hours on the beach when there was still doubt that a lodgment could be made. One still sees hedgehogs protruding from the tidal sand, sunken landing craft, and the bodies of heroic American soldiers strewn along the water's edge.

To those who actually were a part of that dramatic battle, World War II was that cataclysmic event in their lives from which all else henceforth would date, and D-Day was the single spectacular episode that over-shadowed all that went before and after.

Allied forces landed on several of the Normandy beaches, but it was Omaha Beach that Americans remember most vividly. Two American combat Divisions landed there, one of which was the 29th "Blue and Gray" Infantry Division, a National Guard organization from Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Later on that fateful day, New Jersey's 102d Armored Cavalry Regiment followed the assault forces ashore on Omaha Beach, and Guardsmen also were scattered, individually, through the other Army units that came ashore. The Guard, no less than the rest of the Army, can claim D-Day as "its finest hour."

In the days that followed, other landings were made, and additional Guardsmen and Guard units were fed into the massive American Army in Europe until they composed an appreciable portion of the force which finally linked up with the Russians on the Elbe. By VE day, nine of the combat Divisions, and hundreds of smaller organizations, were mobilized Guard organizations.

The combat record amassed by those units was outstanding. Who can forget the 30th Infantry Division, from the Carolinas and Tennessee, at Mortain—or the 28th of Pennsylvania and its determined stand in the Hurtgen forest—or the 35th of Kansas, Nebraska and Missouri in Alsace-Lorraine and the Ardennes—or the 45th of Oklahoma which became a legend in Sicily and Italy before it joined the final drive across the Rhine? I only wish that I could recite the full list—Division by Division, Battalion by Battalion, even man by man—with their magnificent feats of valor and splendid records of performance.

This year, a large group of National Guardsmen will make the trek to Normandy to participate in ceremonies marking the 25th Anniversary of D-Day. They will attend the dedication of the Guard's own memorial, a monument which looks down on Omaha Beach but which honors all of the 500,000 Guardsmen, or more, who fought in two World Wars to liberate the peoples of Western Europe. The monument was erected by the National Guard Association of the United States atop an old enemy bunker, overlooking what the World remembers as Omaha Beach, in the tiny village of Vierville-sur-Mer. From the bunker, enemy guns raked men of the 29th as they clawed their way ashore.

Into the monument is carved a summary of the Guard's gallant service in the cause of freedom in 1918 and again in 1944-45.

May it serve as a tribute, in perpetuity, to the citizen-soldiers of the Guard who fought so courageously that the lights might go on again all over the World. ♦



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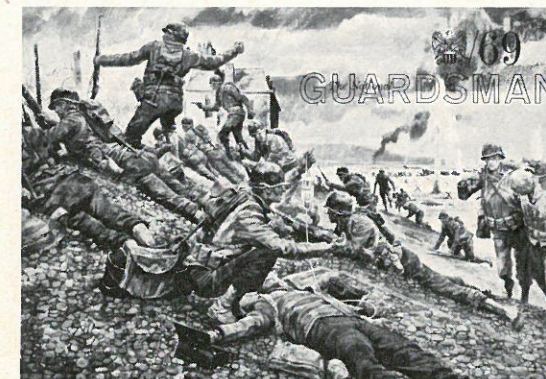
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The Allied armies had barely established a foothold—much less a foothold—in "Festung Europa" in the early hours of D-Day—6 June 1944. This scene in the National Guard Bureau's latest "Heritage Series" painting, by Artist Ken Riley, depicts one tense episode of many as troops of Virginia's 116th Infantry in the 29th "Blue and Gray" Infantry Division hung onto blood-stained soil. The Regiment's tenacity despite heavy losses won for it the Distinguished Unit Citation.

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