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Roosevelts' D-Day Prayer of Hope

Cristóbal S. Berry-Cabán[1]

INTRODUCTION

It had been a long and grueling war. Beginning with the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939—and, for the United States, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941—the Second World War consumed nations in a brutal and continuous struggle. Every Allied victory demanded immense sacrifice; each step forward fiercely contested on the battlefield (Ambrose & Sulzberger, 1997).

Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States since March 4, 1933, had guided the nation through some of its darkest days. Born into privilege in Hyde Park, New York, Roosevelt was the son of James and Sarah Delano Roosevelt, descendants of prominent Hudson Valley landowners. Privately educated, he graduated from Groton School and earned his degree from Harvard University in 1904. A year later, he married Eleanor Roosevelt, a distant cousin who would become an extraordinary political figure in her own right and the most active First Lady in US history (Smith, 2007).

Roosevelt's political aspirations nearly ended in 1921 when he contracted polio. The disease left him unable to walk unaided, but it did not diminish his resolve. Defying the challenges, he returned to public life and won the presidency in 1932. His New Deal programs revitalized the US economy during the Great Depression, and his leadership became even more vital during World War II as he took on a central role among the Allied leaders.

The tide of the war shifted dramatically on June 6, 1944—D-Day. This historic day marked the Allied invasion of Normandy, France, then under Nazi occupation. Known as Operation Overlord, the massive amphibious assault united forces from the United States, Britain, Canada, and other Allied nations. The goal: to establish a foothold in Europe and begin the liberation of Western Europe from Nazi control (Ambrose, 1994).

The operation was unprecedented in scale. Over 160,000 troops were set to land along a 50-mile stretch of heavily fortified Normandy coastline. Supported by more than 5,000 ships and 13,000 aircraft, Operation Overlord represented one of the largest and most complex military endeavors in history. Its success would be critical to the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany.

The planning for an invasion in northwest Europe began several years earlier, although it was not until December 1943, when General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who would later become the 34th President of the United States, was appointed Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, that preparations for the future operation, code-named Overlord, intensified. The invasion area had been determined, largely by considerations of distance, tides, beaches, and shore defenses, as the Normandy coast at the hinge of the Cotentin Peninsula; the eastern sector of this was assigned to the British, the western to the Americans. The Allies had gathered a vast host of almost three million soldiers, sailors, and airmen. An armada of four thousand warships and boats of all kinds was ready to ferry the invasion army across the Channel and keep it supplied with the mountains of material necessary for a full-scale campaign; eleven thousand planes prepared to protect the invaders and pin the German Air Force to the ground.

As the days of May and early June 1944 passed, anticipation and anxiety gripped those awaiting the assault. Roosevelt's wife, Eleanor observed that everyone seemed to live "suspended in space, waiting for the invasion, dreading it and yet wishing it could begin successfully." In the tense quiet before the operation, President Roosevelt tried to maintain an air of normalcy, but as his secretary, Grace Tully, later remarked "every movement of his face and hands reflected the tightly contained state of his nerves (Goodwin, 1994)."

[1] The Geneva Foundation. E-mail: cbcaban@gmail.com

Roosevelt had worked tirelessly to prepare the Allied forces for the invasion. Factories in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, and New York supplied the vast majority of vehicles—trucks, tanks, armored cars, jeeps, and ambulances—now headed for the embarkation posts in southern England. Assembly lines in Ohio, Oregon, and California produced the bombers and fighter planes that would provide critical air support for the invasion. And from shipyards along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts came the largest fleet ever assembled: 900 warships, including nine battleships, 23 heavy cruisers, and 104 destroyers.

Perhaps most essential were the landing craft, produced in New Orleans by Andrew Higgins' factory. The versatile LCVP (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel), known as the Higgins boat, could carry 36 soldiers directly onto the beaches. By the end of the war, over 23,000 of these crucial craft had been built, playing a decisive role in the success of the Normandy invasion.

Every resource Roosevelt and the Allied forces could muster had been mobilized to ensure the operation's success. The fate of the war—and the liberation of millions—depended on it. So heavy was the stockpile of supplies in Britain that the balloon barrage alone, it was said, kept the island from sinking into the sea. "All southern England," wrote General Eisenhower in *Crusade in Europe*, "was one vast military camp, crowded with soldiers awaiting final word to go, and piled high with supplies and equipment awaiting transport to the far shore of the Channel. The whole area was cut off from the rest of England... Every separate encampment, barrack, vehicle park, and every unit was carefully charted on our master maps. The scheduled movement of each unit had been so worked out that it would reach the embarkation point at the exact time the vessels would be ready to receive it…. The mighty host was as tense as a coiled spring and indeed that is exactly what it was—a great human spring, coiled for the moment when its energy should be released and it would vault the English Channel in the greatest amphibious assault ever attempted (Eisenhower, 1948)."

As the target date drew near, there was little Roosevelt or Eisenhower could do but wait. Army historian Gordon Harrison, in the official history of the attack, noted, "The nearer H hour approached, the more heavily and exclusively responsibility for the invasion settled on the lower commanders (Harrison, 1993)." The responsibility for planning shifted from a select group of leaders—Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and U.S. Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, as well as Churchill, Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery ("Monty"), and Field Marshal Alan Francis Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff—to the countless individuals tasked with executing the plan. What had once been perceived as a unified strategic challenge now unraveled into a chaotic reality: a fragmented landscape of orchards, unfamiliar roads, hedgerows, villages, streams, and woods, each momentarily defining the entirety of the war for the soldier on the ground.

Once the order to "go" was given, the chief burden of the fighting would reside with the individual soldier; the advance of each unit depended in large measure on his courage and skill, on his willingness to jump from the landing craft into water that was sometimes up to his neck, or higher, to wade through the bloodstained waves onto the beach, amid bloated bodies and bullets; and then to walk or crawl up the hill where the vaunted German army was waiting with rifles, mortars, and machine guns. Months of training and experience on other fronts in North Africa and Italy had brought each soldier to this point (Ambrose, 1994; Fussell, 2003).

Eisenhower determined that only four days in June provided the combination of conditions necessary for the assault—a late-rising moon for the paratroopers, and, shortly after dawn, a low tide. The invasion was set for Monday, June 5, a month later than originally planned.

Roosevelt had intended to fly to England in early June so that he could be close to Churchill and Eisenhower as the invasion began. When his health prevented the trip, Churchill was sorely disappointed. Even at this late date, the prime minister was still anxious about the whole operation, still oppressed by "the dangers and disasters that could flow from Overlord if the landings should fail." If only Roosevelt was there; then at least some of the tension might be eased. "Our friendship is my greatest stand-by amid the ever-increasing complications of this exacting war," Churchill wrote Roosevelt on June 4, as he journeyed south to be near Eisenhower and the troops. "How I wish you were here (Meacham, 2003)."

Roosevelt chose to spend the weekend before the invasion in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the home of his military aide, Edwin Martin "Pa" Watson. A trusted confidant, Watson served as Roosevelt's appointments

secretary—a role similar to today's chief of staff—responsible for managing the president's schedule, correspondence, and access. His organizational skills, loyalty, and trustworthiness made him an indispensable figure in the Roosevelt administration.

Beyond his administrative duties, Watson was also a valued military advisor. Holding the rank of Major General, he acted as a crucial liaison between the president and the military during World War II, ensuring clear communication and coordination at pivotal moments of the conflict.

Watson's relentless dedication to his role came at a cost. On February 20, 1945, he suffered a fatal stroke while accompanying Roosevelt on a trip to Warm Springs, Georgia, just weeks before the president's own death. Watson's passing was a profound loss for Roosevelt, who had relied on him during some of the most challenging periods of his presidency. As a trusted gatekeeper and steady presence, Watson played a critical role in the effective functioning of the White House during the Great Depression and the Second World War

In the quiet of Watson's elegant Kenwood estate, Roosevelt hoped to prepare a speech to the nation to be delivered once the invasion began. Eleanor was invited to join her husband in Virginia, but she decided to stay in Washington instead, knowing perhaps that her own anxiety would only contribute to his. For weeks, Eleanor had been unable to sleep through the night. "I feel as though a sword were hanging over my head," she had written in mid-May, "dreading its fall and yet knowing it must fall to end the war."

Several months earlier, Eleanor had received a haunting letter from a woman whose favorite nephew had just been killed while serving in the navy. "It is too bad that you and your husband have not been punished by some deadly disease," the distraught woman wrote. "Maybe though you and your husband will have to look into the faces of the dead corpses of your four sons…. God always punishes the wicked in some way." Eleanor published the letter in her column, along with a simple reply. "Neither my husband nor I brought on this war," she wrote, but "I quite understood her bitterness." Now that the target date was drawing near, Eleanor could not free herself from monstrous thoughts of the battlefield, of the dead and the wounded. "Soon the invasion will be upon us," she wrote on June 3; "I dread it (Goodwin, 1994)."

Furthermore, Eleanor had little confidence that she could help her husband on his critical speech. The Office of War Information had asked her to prepare a radio speech of her own to be used after the invasion began, but she declined. It was supposed to be addressed to the mothers of the U.S.A., and she couldn't think of what she wanted to say, she explained to her close friend radical journalist Joseph P. Lash. "I only know I don't want to say any of the things they suggested! (Lash, 1964)"

In Eleanor's absence, his daughter Anna Eleanor Roosevelt Jr., and her husband, Lieutenant Colonel John Boettiger accompanied Roosevelt to Charlottesville, where the three of them worked together on a draft of the president's speech (Boettiger, 1978). Years later, Anna recalled with pleasure the role she and John had played in suggesting that the speech be in the form of a prayer instead of a regular speech. "We all started making our contributions. Father would take a little from all of us and then write it as his own (Goodwin, 1994)."

That same Saturday, June 3, Eisenhower met with his meteorologists in the Library of Southwick House at Naval Headquarters in Portsmouth, a port city and naval base on England's south coast. The news was not good. A marked deterioration had taken place in the conditions originally predicted for June 5. Now Group Captain J. M. Stagg, senior meteorologist for Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, was saying that June 5 would be overcast and stormy, with high winds and visibility so low that the air force could not be used. And the weather pattern was so unpredictable that forecasting more than a day in advance was highly undependable. With great reluctance, Eisenhower decided to postpone the operation for twenty-four hours.

News of the postponement threw Churchill into "an agony of uncertainty." If the bad conditions continued for another day, Overlord could not be launched for at least another two weeks. Unable to endure the tension, he decided to return to London.

In Charlottesville, Roosevelt remained calm, though he, too, returned to the White House. In Eleanor's judgment, her husband was better able to meet the tension than many of the others, "because he'd learned

from polio that if there was nothing you could do about a situation, then you'd better try to put it out of your mind and go on with your work at hand."

Late Sunday night, June 4, at 9:30 p.m., Eisenhower met with his meteorologist once again. This time, Captain Stagg reported a slight improvement in the forecast. The rain front was expected to clear within three hours, providing a brief window of favorable conditions that would last until Tuesday morning. However, by later that Tuesday, significant cloud cover was predicted to develop.

Eisenhower recognized that these conditions were far from ideal but "the question," he said, was "just how long you can hang this operation on the end of a limb and let it hang there." At 9:45 p.m., Eisenhower announced his decision. "O.K., let's go." The invasion would be launched at dawn on the 6th of June. "I don't like it, but there it is," he said. "I don't see how we can possibly do anything else."

On the eve of D-Day, a nervous Churchill went to his map room to follow the movement of the convoys as they headed toward the coast of France. "Do you realize," he said to his wife, Clementine, who had joined him before she went to bed, "that by the time you wake up in the morning twenty thousand men may have been killed? (Gilbert, 2013)"

On the evening of June 5, President Franklin Roosevelt took to the airwaves for a pivotal radio address and announced the fall of Rome. This marked a significant triumph, being the first major Axis capital to succumb, and hailed it as a major stride towards the complete defeat of the enemy (Roosevelt, 1944).

"The first of the Axis capitals is now in our hands," Roosevelt said. "One up and two to go!" The Allied struggle to capture Rome had been long and costly, with heavy loss of life. In January, the Germans had pinned downed more than 150,000 Allied soldiers to a bridgehead at Anzio on the Tyrrhenian Sea, preventing them from linking up with the main Allied force to the south. It took more than four months of fighting for the Allies finally to break out from Anzio on May 23 and link up with the Allied forces advancing on Rome. Things moved swiftly after that, leading to the capture of Rome in a matter of days. "How magnificently your troops have fought," Churchill telegraphed.

Roosevelt, however, tempered the celebration by acknowledging the daunting challenges that lay ahead. "There is much greater fighting yet to come before the Axis is vanquished," he cautioned. "We face a prolonged period of intensified effort and fiercer battles, especially as we advance towards Germany itself." Despite the obstacles, he reassured the nation that victory remained inevitable. "Though the road ahead is long, rest assured, we will traverse it in due time," he affirmed. Expressing gratitude to all involved in the Italian campaign, Roosevelt concluded with a solemn invocation: "May God bless and protect them, along with all our brave servicemen in the field."

Unbeknownst to his radio audience, the President knew American soldiers were crossing the Channel during his speech but focused on Italy instead. After the address, he went to bed.

As midnight struck in Washington, the first waves of young American soldiers plunged into the icy surf of Normandy. War correspondent Ernie Pyle noted that few had slept the night before, and many had lost their breakfasts as the grim anticipation of the invasion turned into a terrifying reality. Laden with gear—gas masks, grenades, TNT, satchel charges, and rifle ammunition weighing 68 pounds in total—some soldiers drowned as they leapt into the water. Others were struck by bullets as they waded ashore, while many more were hit during the desperate scramble across the beaches (Pyle, 1987).

Not all beaches were equally dangerous, but Omaha proved to be the most devastating. One infantry company lost a quarter of its men within just 45 minutes. Survivors recounted the experience in vivid, haunting detail. "I don't know why I'm alive at all," one soldier said. "It was truly awful. For hours on the beach, shells landed so close they sprayed mud and rocks all over you. It got so bad that you stopped caring whether you were hit or not."

By 3:00 a.m. Washington time, General George Marshall called the White House to update President Roosevelt. Most of the troops were advancing by then, pushing through the beaches and climbing the hills. Eleanor Roosevelt was still awake when the call came. Franklin had shared the invasion news with her earlier, but the

enormity of it kept her from sleeping. "To be nearly sixty and still rebel at uncertainty is ridiculous, isn't it?" she chided herself. When the White House operator asked Eleanor to wake the president, she entered his room to find him already preparing for the long night ahead. "He sat up in bed, put on his sweater, and from then on, he was on the telephone," she recalled (Goodwin, 1994).

At 3:32 a.m., the official announcement of the invasion was made, accompanied by General Eisenhower's stirring address to the troops: "Soldiers, sailors, and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force! You are about to embark upon the great crusade, toward which we have striven these many months... Much has happened since the Nazi triumph of 1940–41. Our homefronts have given us overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty, and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full victory! (Ambrose, 1994)"

Around 4:00 a.m., Roosevelt instructed the White House operator to summon every staff member to duty without delay. The only exception was Harry Hopkins, who was still recovering in an Army hospital in White Sulphur Springs. Hopkins, Roosevelt's closest advisor, had played a crucial role in preparing for this moment. Alone in his hospital room, he reflected on the monumental challenges America had faced and overcome since 1939 and 1940. The desperate shortages of materials, the production bottlenecks, and the lack of readiness had been transformed into surpluses and remarkable efficiency. By 1944, the United States had emerged as the most productive and powerful nation in the world.

As word of the invasion spread across America in the early hours of June 6, church bells rang out, school bells chimed, factory whistles blared, and foghorns resounded in harbors. "It is the most exciting moment in our lives," declared New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. Sporting events were canceled, stores closed, and people poured into the streets. Beneath the celebratory air lay a deep anxiety. "The impulse to pray was overwhelming," wrote historian Stephen Ambrose. Churches and synagogues filled as Americans sought solace and strength. The New York Times editorialized the next day: "We have come to the hour for which we were born. We go forth to meet the supreme test of our arms and our souls, the test of the maturity of our faith in ourselves and in mankind (Ambrose, 1997)."

Roosevelt spent the early morning hours of June 6 editing a speech for an Allied victory in France. With his blackout curtains drawn, the president kept vigil as detailed invasion reports trickled into the White House, informing the president of when the first vessels began their trips and later when the Allied forces first landed.

Roosevelt convened with congressional leaders at 9:50 a.m. and his military advisors at 11:30 a.m. The initial reports were still incomplete, but by midafternoon, as he lunched with his daughter Anna beneath a magnolia tree, the news was more encouraging than expected. While casualties were heavy—over 6,600 by the end of the first day—they were fewer than anticipated.

The main event of Roosevelt's day came at 4 p.m., during his regular press conference. Packed with 180 journalists, the room buzzed with the gravity and significance of the moment. By then, the president and the nation began to understand the scale and promise of what had been accomplished on the beaches of Normandy.

"The President was happy and confident," I. F. Stone recorded. "Our faces must have shown what most of us felt as we came in. For he began after an extraordinary pause of several minutes in which no questions were asked and we all stood silent, by saying that the correspondents had the same look on their faces that people all over the country must have and that he thought this a very happy conference (Stone, 1988)."

"I have just sat in on a great moment in history," a young reporter wrote to his mother later that day. "The President sat back in his great green chair calm and smiling, dressed in a snow white shirt with the initials FDR on the left sleeve in blue and a dark blue dotted bow tie. In his hand he held the inevitable long cigarette holder and when he held the cigarette in his mouth it was cocked at the angle they say he always has it when he is pleased with the world (Goodwin, 1994)."

Still, Roosevelt warned the press against overconfidence. "You just don't land on a beach and walk through—if you land successfully without breaking your leg—walk through to Berlin. And the quicker this country understands it the better."

Later that evening, Roosevelt took to the radio to deliver the straightforward prayer he had prepared in Charlottesville. It was, as Samuel I. Rosenman—the man who coined the term "New Deal"—noted, "a far cry from the kind of speech Hitler would have made if his troops were landing on the beaches of England."

Prayer held significant importance to Franklin D. Roosevelt, both personally and as a public leader. On a personal level, prayer served as a source of strength and resilience, particularly as Roosevelt faced the physical and emotional challenges of polio. He often turned to prayer for guidance and fortitude during difficult times. Publicly, Roosevelt recognized the power of prayer to unite the nation in moments of crisis. For example, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, he called for a national day of prayer, seeking divine help for strength and victory in World War II. His frequent references to faith in speeches and public addresses also reinforced his image as a morally grounded leader, committed to upholding American values. Roosevelt's use of prayer was not only a means of personal comfort but also a tool for inspiring hope and solidarity in the American people during some of the nation's darkest hours. In *The Simple Faith of Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, Christine Wicker shows that faith deeply influenced his life. His spiritual beliefs were fundamental to his vision for democracy, justice, and equality. He believed God expected him to serve others and drew strength from biblical stories. In difficult times, he inspired Americans with a call to their better nature (Wicker, 2017). This is reflected in his D-Day prayer.

Roosevelt's six-minute radio address to the Nation took the form of a prayer. Roosevelt had begun composing it the previous weekend with assistance from his daughter, Anna, and her husband, Boettiger. By morning, the 535-word prayer was finished and ready for distribution. President Roosevelt dispatched a copy of his prayer to Congress where it was read on the House floor and in the Senate; the prayer was also printed in newspapers across the country so the entire nation could pray along with the president during his radio address that evening. By noon newspapers across the country—big cities and small towns too—led with the same story and headlines: The war in Europe had begun.

Throughout the day, Americans learned that soldiers, airmen, and seamen had launched a massive invasion to liberate Europe from Hitler's war machine. They crawled out of the sea and dropped from the sky—160,000 Allied troops landed along a heavily fortified, 50-mile stretch of French coastline, supported by more than 5,000 ships and 13,000 aircraft. The previous night, paratroopers from the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions had dropped into occupied France, tasked with securing bridges, roads, and other strategic points to disrupt German defenses. As the invasion unfolded, Roosevelt monitored reports from the front, while across the nation, a solemnity settled over families gathered around radios, listening to crackling updates from London. They heard the steady voice of correspondent Edward R. Murrow reading General Eisenhower's message to the troops, and later, the King of England declaring, "We and our Allies are sure that our fight is against evil and for a world in which goodness and honour may be the foundation of the life of men in every land."

By that evening, a solemnity fell over the country. At 9:57 p.m., Eastern time on Tuesday, June 6, 1944, President Roosevelt began his radio broadcast to an anxious nation. To those listing at home the war wasn't an abstraction to them. Their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons—and so many family friends—were doing the fighting. And wives, mothers, daughters and sisters too were in harm's way while serving as nurses on the war front.

Roosevelt understood the gravity of it all. He understood that it would take more than just a mobilization of our industrial power to beat back the forces of Hitler. In this address to the nation, he hoped to harness the Nation's spiritual power too. Which is why his 535-word, six-minute radio address took the form of a prayer.

Roosevelt began. When Roosevelt addressed the nation, he felt compelled to explain his earlier silence regarding the landings. Just moments before going on air, he added several handwritten lines to the opening of his speech to clarify this point. They read:

> "Last night, when I spoke to you about the fall of Rome, I knew at that moment that troops of the United States and our allies were crossing the Channel in another and greater operation. It has come to pass with success thus far."

The president then asked the American people, "to join with me in prayer."

Roosevelt began:

> "Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our Nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavor, a struggle to preserve our Republic, our religion, and our civilization, and to set free a suffering humanity.
>
> Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith.
>
> They will need Thy blessings…. Success may not come with rushing speed, but we shall return again and again; and we know that by Thy grace, and by the righteousness of our cause, our sons will triumph."

Roosevelt then redirected his prayer acknowledging the inevitable suffering, loss, and grief that lay ahead.

> "Men's souls will be shaken with the violences of war… Some will never return. Embrace these, Father, and receive them, Thy heroic servants, into Thy kingdom."

Roosevelt then pleaded that the home front continue with their prayers and to make any and all sacrifices to support America's fight to liberate Europe.

> "Many people have urged that I call the Nation into a single day of special prayer. But because the road is long and the desire is great, I ask that our people devote themselves in a continuance of prayer."

His conclusion marked perhaps the most poignant and purposeful segment of any public address delivered by an American wartime president:

> "With Thy blessing, we shall prevail over the unholy forces of our enemy. Help us to conquer the apostles of greed and racial arrogancies. Lead us to the saving of our country, and with our sister Nations into a world unity that will spell a sure peace, a peace invulnerable to the schemings of unworthy men. And a peace that will let all of men live in freedom, reaping the just rewards of their honest toil. Thy will be done, Almighty God. Amen."

Families across the nation tuned in to the broadcast with heavy hearts. In Bedford, Virginia, a town of just 3,000 people, families gathered around radios, praying fervently, knowing their sons were part of the invasion—unaware that 19 of them had already fallen on Omaha Beach. In Philadelphia, the Liberty Bell was struck seven times, once for each letter of the word "liberty," marking the solemn occasion. In Southern Pines, North Carolina "Invasion Day was a day of quiet in Moore County, the only demonstrations being those of prayer for the boys' in the conflict, among whom Southern Pines and Moore County are well represented. Special church services were held and many churches were kept open the entire day for any who wished to drop in for prayer and meditation. Fewer people were seen on streets as all who could stayed close by their radios, listening to every bit of information that came in add being deeply impressed as the Liberty Bell proclaimed its message of Liberty ("Invasion Day," 1944)."

Over 100 million people worldwide listed to Roosevelt's prayer of hope over the airwaves, including many living in Nazi-occupied Europe. One was a teenage Jewish girl hiding in a secret annex in Amsterdam. When Anne Frank heard the American president's voice invoking "almighty God," it gave her hope. "The best part about the invasion is that I have the feeling friends are on the way," she wrote in her diary. "Those terrible Germans have oppressed and threatened us for so long that the thought of friends and salvation means everything to us." she ended the day's entry, maybe "I can go back to school in September or October (Frank, 1995)." She never returned to school. She died at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in February or March 1945.

The cost of D-Day was incredibly high in terms of human lives. More than 4.400 Americans never returned home from that first day of fighting with thousands more wounded or missing. The total casualties for both

sides during the Battle of Normandy, which followed D-Day, are estimated to be around 425,000 to 500,000 people. The sacrifice made by those who fought on D-Day and in the subsequent battles was immense, but their efforts played a crucial role in ultimately defeating Nazi Germany and bringing an end to World War II in Europe (Ambrose, 1994).

By July 25 the battle for Normandy was over. American forces isolated and captured the town of Cherbourg by June 27, while British forces secured Caen by July 9. Despite these victories, progress was slow. On July 24–25, American forces launched Operation Cobra, breaking through German lines near Saint-Lô. This marked the end of the Normandy Campaign and the beginning of the Allied push to liberate northern France and Paris.

During that summer, as Allied forces battled their way through Normandy, the two major political parties in the United States selected their nominees for the upcoming presidential election. The Democrats, unsurprisingly, renominated Franklin D. Roosevelt, the man who had already led them to three victories and was now spearheading the United Nations' efforts toward victory in the war. Roosevelt secured the nomination on the first ballot.

The Republicans nominated New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey, a party loyalist known for his moderately liberal domestic policies. Facing the pressures of the era, Dewey appeared to adopt a more internationalist stance. Although the campaign was fiercely fought, the result was largely anticipated. President Franklin D. Roosevelt secured victory by winning 36 states and 432 electoral votes, while Dewey captured 12 states and 99 electoral votes. Roosevelt also led in the popular vote by a margin of three and a half million votes.

In his fourth inaugural address, Roosevelt pledged not only to secure victory in the war but also to build a lasting international order. He declared, "We have learned that we cannot live alone, at peace; that our own well-being is dependent upon the well-being of other nations far away. We have learned that we must live as men and not as ostriches, nor as dogs in the manger. We have learned to be citizens of the world, members of the human community."

As the war's end neared, Roosevelt became increasingly focused on the challenges of peace and the establishment of international law. In February 1945, he undertook the arduous journey to Yalta in the Crimea, where he met with Churchill, and Joseph Stalin, and their respective advisors to discuss the war's conclusion and postwar arrangements. Upon his return, it was clear that Roosevelt's health had deteriorated; he delivered his report to Congress from a wheelchair for the first time. Shortly thereafter, he traveled to his retreat in Warm Springs, Georgia, to rest and prepare for the inaugural United Nations conference in San Francisco.

On April 12, 1945, while drafting an address to commemorate Thomas Jefferson Day, Roosevelt suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and passed away. His final written words were a poignant reflection on his vision for the future: "The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith." These words stand as a poignant tribute to his life and legacy.

Presidents must lead during challenging times, a responsibility that becomes even more critical in wartime. Few rose to this challenge as effectively as Franklin D. Roosevelt. His ability to connect with the American people through his "fireside chats" on the radio was unparalleled. Winston Churchill was once said to have "marshalled the English language and sent it into battle" during World War II. Yet, on the day of the greatest battle—the D-Day invasion of Normandy—it was not stirring rhetoric but heartfelt prayer that defined the moment, as countless men were sent across the waves into history.

President Roosevelt's D-Day prayer had a profound impact both at home and abroad, uniting the American people in shared resolve and moral purpose during one of history's most uncertain and pivotal moments. The broadcast offered solace and inspiration to a nation grappling with the immense challenges of the Normandy invasion, fostering unity and determination.

On the global stage, Roosevelt's words uplifted the spirits of Allied forces and reaffirmed the collective commitment to liberty and democracy. The prayer underscored the Allies' steadfast dedication to their cause and strengthened their resolve as they undertook one of World War II's most consequential military operations.

Having experienced war firsthand, C.S. Lewis was no stranger to its horrors. On his 19th birthday (November 29, 1917), he arrived at the front lines in the Somme Valley, France, where he endured the grim realities of trench warfare. The traumatic sights of battle haunted him for years, fueling his deep anxieties about the global conflict. Reflecting on the ongoing war, he wrote:

> *"In all of us, God 'still' holds only a part. D-Day is only a week ago. The bite so far taken out of Normandy shows small on the map of Europe. The resistance is strong, the casualties heavy, and the outcome uncertain. There is, we have to admit, a line of demarcation between God's part in us and the enemy's region. But it is, we hope, a fighting line—not a frontier fixed by agreement (Lewis, 2017)."*

D-Day was seen by Allied leaders not merely as a historic event but as a providential moment—a time when the hand of Providence seemed visible in the course of history. Roosevelt's prayer endures as a powerful testament to his leadership, offering courage, hope, and faith at a critical juncture in the struggle for freedom.

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