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Olivier Wieviorka, *Normandy: The Landings to the Liberation of Paris*. Translated by M.B. DeBevoise. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008. xvii + 446 pp. Abbreviations, illustrations, notes, archival sources, select bibliography, index.\$29.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-674-02838-8.

Review by Hilary Footitt, University of Reading, UK.

“D” Day and its aftermath in France is a well-worked academic area. The scholarship to date has shown a sharp demarcation between studies by Anglo-American and French historians. For the former, action tends to be focused on the landing beaches and the Normandy *bocage* in June and July 1944, and the main actors are the Allies themselves—politicians, commanders and soldiers.[1] For French historians, the Liberation has generally been conceived within a much broader frame, both temporally and geographically. Here, the main actors are the French themselves, as resisters in regions all over France, and as a civilian population living through the events, and often traumatised by them.[2] Olivier Wieviorka’s work, now translated into English, resoundingly breaks this historiographical apartheid.[3] Wieviorka’s optic is firmly on the Allies, on their preparations for “D” Day, and on their conduct of the landings and the Battle of Normandy. His sources are overwhelmingly drawn from American and British archives.

Wieviorka argues that it is time to “recover” the 6<sup>th</sup> of June from the legends that have surrounded it, to see it not as a singular epoch-making event, but rather as an integral part of the long and essentially human business of waging war. Rather than a dramatic epilogue to war in the West, his “D” Day develops out of a complex juggling of strategic, geopolitical and economic issues which need to be resolved among the Allies, and within the separate Allied governments and military: “Stripped of the glorious trappings of a legendary exploit, the invasion of Normandy can now be seen as a supremely human event” (p. 361). The legends that have surrounded the 6<sup>th</sup> of June and given it a particular moral resonance include, for Wieviorka, its so-called inevitability—the victory of massive troop and *matériel* deployment—and the portrayal of its fighters as uniformly resolute, determined and heroic. Whilst some of the “D” Day myths that Wieviorka identifies as ripe for demolition have already been the subject of separate questioning and reappraisal—one thinks of Fussell’s study of the young American soldiers in battle[4]—the attempt to confront several elements of the legend together is unusual and ambitious.

As the subtitle of the original French edition, *Des origines à la libération de Paris, 1941-1944*, suggests, Wieviorka contends that we can only understand the 6<sup>th</sup> of June in the light of what went on before, and indeed in his study the troops do not actually land on the beaches until chapter seven, just over halfway through the book. Wieviorka’s judicious and fluent dissection of what led up to “D” Day is a remarkable achievement, replacing some of the well-worn tropes of Allied strategic disagreements and Churchill/Roosevelt arguments with a considered assessment of different geopolitical visions and economic contexts and varying approaches to troop mobilisation and war production. He is particularly good at helping us to see what preparations for the operation actually meant for those on the ground charged with producing the equipment for victory, and for the men who would end up by doing the fighting. Getting soldiers off the ships and onto the beaches, for example, would require a huge number

of landing craft. In Britain, this alone necessitated a massive reordering of war production priorities. In order to build the necessary tank landing craft (LCT) the British had to hire 75,000 unskilled workers and delay building an aircraft carrier, four destroyers, and fourteen frigates. Attempts to enthruse ordinary soldiers for the battle ahead were partial and often unsuccessful. Despite propaganda efforts by the US government, the ordinary American seemed to resist attempts to make him hate the German enemy: "very little hate for the Germans...The attitude toward the enemy seemed to be one of intense rivalry, very much like the attitude towards an opposing college football team just before a big game" (p. 55). Many of the British soldiers were already becoming war-weary: numbers court-martialled for being absent without leave rose from 1,488 in the early years of the war to 14,167 in 1943-44.

In what is in many ways the most original contribution of this book, Wieviorka examines the psychological toll of the June/July battles on the young soldiers involved. The acceptance of psychological trauma as a possibly legitimate war injury was marked by the British allocating a psychiatrist to the medical command of each military region, and the Americans deciding to use the term "exhaustion" in order to forestall any pejorative representation of what the men were suffering. There was however no real pre-"D" Day agreement as to how this sort of trauma should be treated on the actual field of battle. The Canadians and Americans argued for battlefield treatment. The British favoured evacuating the men back to the UK. The Manual of Therapy of the European Theater of Operations stipulated that, "The treatment objective is twofold: to return to duty as many men as possible and to minimize the consequence of disability" (p. 265). With the post-"D" Day battle of attrition in Normandy, the Allied Command found itself confronted with a loss of troop strength through psychological trauma on a scale that it had scarcely expected. Men unable to continue fighting because of psychiatric disorders accounted for an additional 25 to 33 per cent of those physically wounded.

To deal with this haemorrhaging of manpower, some American corps assigned a medical attaché to each company, and he monitored troop reactions, ready to pull out, and talk to, any men who showed disturbing psychological symptoms. If the symptoms persisted, soldiers received twenty-four hour attention near the battle lines, in collecting stations where they could rest, have a hot meal and wash. Those who recovered quickly were returned by stages to the front. Those who still appeared to be psychologically fragile however were sent to division clearing stations where psychiatrists prescribed a cure of seventy-two hours. Men were given sedatives and the difficulties they were experiencing were discussed with sympathetic staff. Only the most severe cases were referred on to hospital and exhaustion centres. In July 1944, the US Army treated over 9,000 such cases, and 77.8 percent were returned to the front line. The British, seeing the efficacy of these methods in the field, jettisoned the evacuation policy from July 1944 onwards in favour of treatment in the theatre of operations: "Rightly or wrongly, the impression grew that the incidence of psychiatric disabilities was exorbitant, and that evacuations across the channel constituted an easy means of escape for those of poor morale...Psychiatrists were aware of their responsibilities in preventing the merely frightened or unwilling man from taking this route of escape...the wheels are now turning in the opposite direction and the emphasis is on conservation" (p. 267).

In comparison with the first half of the book, and the chapters on psychological trauma, the latter parts of Wieviorka's study on the military conduct of 'D' Day and the Normandy Battle are more of a cogent rerunning of material that has been well covered elsewhere by military historians. It is rather in the imaginative and detailed treatment of the origins of "D" Day, and its implications for those on the ground, whether planners or fighters, that this book provides a startling new synthesis. To those seeking to understand the links between diplomacy, strategy, geopolitics and military planning, without losing sight of the experience of the ordinary soldier, Wieviorka has provided a superb account of preparations for "D" Day. He has been well served by his translator, who produces a fast moving and eminently readable analysis of these often complex arguments. This book should become a standard

synthesis on the planning and build-up for “D” Day, marked by its clear-sighted assessment of the psychological cost of war for those involved.

## NOTES

- [1] See for example: M. Hastings, *Overlord: “D” Day and the Battle for Normandy* (London: M. Joseph, 1984); J. Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy: From “D” Day to the liberation of Paris 6 June-25 August 1944* (London: J. Cape, 1982); S. Ambrose, *‘D’Day: June 6, the Climactic Battle of World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); R. Miller, *Nothing less than Victory* (London: M. Joseph, 1993); F. Kersaudy, *Churchill & de Gaulle* (London: Collins, 1981); H. Footitt, *War and Liberation in France* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
- [2] The Hachette series in the 1970s provided a monograph on the liberation of each region e.g. D. Laurent, *Libération du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais* (Paris: Hachette, 1974). See also: L. Capdevilla, *Les Bretons au lendemain de l’Occupation: imaginaire et comportement d’une sortie de guerre, 1944-45* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1999); P. Buton, *La joie douloureuse: la Libération de la France* (Brussels: Complexe, 2004); M. Boivin, G. Bourdin, J. Quellien, *Villes normandes sous les bombes, juin 1944* (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen/Mémorial de Caen, 1994).
- [3] Originally published as *Histoire du débarquement en Normandie* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2007).
- [4] P. Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

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