

80th Anniversary of D-Day



Early in the morning of June 6th, 1944, General Dwight Eisenhower addressed thousands of troops gathered at Cheesefoot Head, a natural amphitheatre just outside Winchester in Hampshire. He told them that the eyes of the world were upon them and that the hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere would be marching with them. He was brutally honest with those standing silently in front of him. *“Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped, and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.”* Months of meticulous planning had gone into this day. Eisenhower affirmed those who within hours would be at the forefront of defeating the evil of Nazism. He told them that he had every confidence in their courage and their devotion to duty. He wished them, *“Good luck. And let us all beseech the blessing of almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.”* Eisenhower had ensured that 175 000 copies of his speech were printed in pamphlet form and distributed to every member of the Allied Forces. It became one of the notable speeches of the War. Thus began D-Day (Day-Day), a term we still use to emphasise a final deadline.

Closer to home, across the Beane Valley, some will have heard the broadcast on BBC radio that morning that the Allies were landing on the beaches of Northern France. By lunchtime, every heart in every home would be filled with

hope and fear in equal measure. For those who had already lost a loved one, the dread that yet more young men would not be returning home. At the end of WWII, across the Valley, twenty families were left grieving the loss of a husband, father, or boyfriend. Benington lost ten men, Walkern five, Cottered three and, Ardeley two. Those who grieved their dead withstood the worst of the cost of war. Yet no home was left untouched by the sacrifice that the war demanded. Courage, camaraderie, community, and sheer dogged determination meant that each day was a victory in terms of survival, both physically and mentally.

This year is the 80th Anniversary of D-Day and is being widely commemorated, including across our own village communities. It is important to remember that this is a commemoration and not a celebration. VE Day celebrations will take place next year! For now, D-Day focuses on those brave men and women, who responded to the call of Eisenhower, Montgomery, and others for one last great push against the evils of the Nazi regime. In every house, in every village and hamlet across the Valley, people held their breath, hugged each other, said their prayers, and asked God's blessing on those whom they knew they may never see again. Faith in God and faith in each other sustained and triumphed. D-Day proved to be the turning point that the military campaign needed.

Amidst the ensuing commemorations, as we reflect on all that D-Day meant and continues to mean for us as a nation, we pray for more D-Days, in the conflict in Ukraine and Gaza, and in all parts of our world that presently rages at war.

God Bless.

Revd Mark Bailey