**Introduction [SLIDE 1]**

The Allied landings on 6 June 1944 were the culmination of the hard and prolonged fighting of the Navies, Armies and Air Forces of the Allies over the previous four years – and of the vital contribution of the Merchant Navy. Without hard earned victories, including in the Battle of the Atlantic, in the air war over Europe and in North Africa, without German distractions in Italy, and, it must be said, the savage confrontation on the Eastern Front, none of it would have been possible when it was and how it was.

On 4 June this year Garrett M. Graff, an American journalist and author, released his latest book, ‘When the Sea Came Alive: An Oral History of D-Day.’ In an interview he said, *‘It was really important to me to do something this ambitious because the story of D-Day is the tapestry of so many different people and nationalities and ethnicities. D-Day was such an incredible, massive human endeavor…We’ve probably never seen anything like it in human history, and probably we’ll never see anything like it again. We wanted that to be reflected in the voices that you hear.’*

I’m afraid that today I provide a poor substitution for those voices – and probably a solitude one because as was shown here on 6 June this year, there is very little, if any, registration of D-Day in our national memorialisation of the Second World War. Even though, New Zealanders were there.

As then Prime Minister Helen Clark wrote in her foreword to the book “the Big Show – New Zealanders, D-Day and the War in Europe’, ‘*The landings on the Normandy beaches in June 1944 were certainly immense: there were over 150,000 Allied soldiers involved, and among those on the 6000 ships and 12,000 aircraft were 10,000 New Zealanders.’*

**Setting the scene [SLIDE 2]**

As early as December 1941, the defeat of Germany was acknowledged as the western Allies’ principal war aim. The plan was to open a second front in the west to relieve pressure on the Soviet Union in the east - and the liberation of France would weaken Germany’s overall position in western Europe. A successful invasion would drain German resources and block access to key military sites. Furthermore, securing a bridgehead in Normandy would allow the Allies to establish a viable presence in northern Europe for the first time since the ignominious evacuation from Dunkirk in 1940.

However, as late as July 1943, Hitler’s Wehrmacht still occupied all the territory it had gained in the blitzkrieg campaigns of 1939–41 and most of its Russian conquests of 1941–42 – and retained its foothold on the coast of North Africa. The Russian counteroffensives at the Battle of Stalingrad and the Battle of Kursk had pushed back the perimeter of Hitler’s Europe in the east. Yet he or his allies still controlled the whole of mainland Europe, except for four neutral countries. The Nazi war economy, though overshadowed by the growing power of America’s, outmatched both that of Britain and that of the Soviet Union except in the key areas of tank and aircraft production.

The hard and prolonged fighting of the Navies, Armies and Air Forces of the Allies over the previous four years were now shaping the strategic context. Hard earned victories, including in the Battle of the Atlantic, in the air war over Europe and in North Africa, German distractions in Italy, and, it must be said, the savage confrontation on the Eastern Front, could not be ignored by Hitler. By November 1943, he acknowledged the increasing chances of an allied invasion somewhere along France’s northern coast, and Rommel was tasked with increasing defensive operations in the region, and in particular with finishing the Atlantic Wall, a 2,400-mile fortification of bunkers, landmines and beach and water obstacles.

It was important, though, that the Allies acted as quickly as possible. The British, in particular, were running out of steam. In ‘All Hell let Loose’ the British historian Max Hastings writes, ‘*If the peoples of the Allied nations were impatient for the invasion of France, some of those who were to carry it out displayed less eagerness: British soldiers who had served for years in North Africa and Italy resented the call to risk their lives again in Normandy. They felt it was someone else’s turn.’*

That the invasion did happen at all was, according to Max Hastings, due *‘Only to relentless American pressure on Britain’s leadership….’*

**The Allies’ Normandy Plan [SLIDE 3]**

In December 1943, with Eisenhower’s appointment Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, that preparations for the return to Europe intensified. ‘Overlord’ was the name assigned to the establishment of a large-scale lodgement on the Continent. The first phase, the amphibious invasion and establishment of a secure foothold, was code-named Operation Neptune.

**[SLIDE 4]**

**The Allied commanders [SLIDE 5]**

Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander, had been made a brigadier general in September 1941 and was promoted to major general in March 1942. In June, he was selected over 366 senior officers to be commander of U.S. troops in Europe. A month later he was promoted to lieutenant general, and named to head Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of French North Africa. On December 24, 1943, he was appointed supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, and the next month he was in London making preparations for the Battle of Europe. The complexity and scope of the command and control structure he sat on top of, and the numbers of generals and admirals – all aged in their early 50s - located within it, is shown in this slide.

In their book on the Second World War, American authors Murray and Millett, describe the generals under Eisenhower’s command as ‘fractious and dysfunctional a group of egomaniacs as any war had ever seen.’ Here are some perceptions of some of them:

* General Montgomery was commander of the British and US Armies and in his book on Normandy, the British author James Hallet describes him as ‘a difficult, cussed, obnoxious, arrogant, overcontrolling SOB…’
* Of Air Chief Marshall Trafford-Mallory, commanding the tactical Air Forces, he writes, ‘There is little doubt… that(his) ego, ambition and ability to ingratiate himself with superiors also played a part in his appointment.
* US General Lee. who commanded the allied logistics organisation Services of Supply – or SOS – is described by the US Official historian, Roland G. Ruppenthal, with these words – ‘Heavy on ceremony, somewhat forbidding in manner and appearance, and occasionally tactless in exercising authority which he regarded to be within the province of the SOS, General Lee often aroused suspicions and created opposition where support might have been forthcoming.’
* Admiral Ramsay, the Royal Navy commander of the Allied Naval forces, described the United States Navy Rear Admiral Kirk as ‘a pompous and whingeing fuss-pot’, and of Royal Navy Rear Admiral Vian, he said he appeared to be ‘..a little helpless and requires to be given so much guidance on matters which I feel he could work out for himself.’

**[SLIDE 6]**

 **Executing the plan [SLIDE 7]**

In the months and weeks before D-Day, the Allies carried out a massive deception operation intended to make the Germans think the main invasion target was Pas-de-Calais (the narrowest point between Britain and France) rather than Normandy. In addition, they led the Germans to believe that Norway and other locations were also potential invasion targets. Many tactics were used to carry out the deception, including fake equipment; a phantom army commanded by George Patton and supposedly based in England, across from Pas-de-Calais; double agents; and fraudulent radio transmissions.

As the date of the invasion drew close, the naval duties expanded to include mine clearance and perilous surveys of the selected landing beaches. To preserve operational secrecy the latter task had to be carried out by midget submarines. A small number of these craft were the first Allied warships to arrive on station on the morning of 6 June, their role to guide the landing forces in with signal lights.

To gain the required air superiority needed to ensure a successful invasion, the Allies launched a strategic bombing campaign (codenamed Pointblank) to target German aircraft-production, fuel supplies, and airfields. Under the Transport Plan, communications infrastructure and road and rail links were bombed to cut off the north of France and to make it more difficult to bring up reinforcements. These attacks were widespread so as to avoid revealing the exact location of the invasion

Shortly after midnight on 6 June 1944, over 18,000 Allied paratroopers were dropped into the invasion area to provide support for infantry divisions to be landed on to the beaches. In the early morning, Royal Air Force Bomber Command alone dispatched 1012 aircraft – the targets, ten coastal batteries – dropping around 5000 tons of bombs. In all nearly 11,600 aircraft were scheduled to fly on D Day.

At 6.30am, the first of the 150, 000 soldiers who ha been transported across the English Channel were landed onto five assault beaches - Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword. By the end of the day, they had established a foothold along the coast, but it was not to be until 12 June, that the Allies had a secure base from which to move forward, deeper into France.

The scale of logistics required to support Operation Overlord are overwhelming. Take fuel as an example. It was estimated that the Allies would need to provide 8,000 tons of fuel every day. In terms of Merchant shipping support, on any given day during the War there were, on average, 2000 British Merchant vessels at sea and 3000 American. Vehicles and guns – in 1944, by June the United States had built more than1.7 million trucks and 150,000 artillery pieces. Seventeen million maps of the Normandy beaches had been produced, as well as aerial photographs of considerable detail on which had been marked every German position to the last machine gun.

**The weather and the decision to ‘Go’ [SLIDE 8]**

The success of the invasion depended on the best combination of three vital environmental factors. Air operations required clear skies and a full moon for good visibility. Naval operations required low winds and calm seas to safely transport troops ashore. Ground troops needed to land at low tide, when German beach obstacles were exposed and easier to deal with. Getting the ‘go’ decision right was dependent on the advice to Eisenhower provided by a team of meteorologists from the U.S. Army Air Corps, the Royal Navy, and the British Meteorological Office.

Group Captain James Stagg - Eisenhower’s chief meteorologist - and his team of experts - regularly rehearsed for D-Day. They were asked to prepare trial forecasts, which would then be checked for accuracy as each week progressed.

In the days leading up to D-Day, Stagg and his team forecast that weather conditions would worsen and, on 4 June Eisenhower postponed the invasion by 24 hours. On the afternoon of that day, when the weather began to deteriorate as the first storm approached, Stagg's team were made aware of an observation from a single ship stationed six hundred miles west of Ireland reporting a rise in the barometric pressure. The pressure kept rising.

Any decision to postpone D-Day from 5 June would be a difficult one, as any delay made it increasingly difficult to keep the operation a secret. If the weather did not improve, D-Day would have to be delayed until the tides were again the Allies’ favour – and this would not happen for another two weeks. But over the course of 4-5 June, Stagg‘s team predicted a temporary break in the weather. Based on this information, Eisenhower ordered that the invasion proceed on 6 June.

Afterwards, Stagg wrote on the bottom of an official report to General Eisenhower that, if the invasion had been delayed until the next suitable tides, the troops would have met the worst Channel weather for 20 years. Eisenhower wrote on the letter: "Thanks, and thank the Gods of war we went when we did."

The Gods of War did not favour the Germans. Noting the unfavourable conditions in the English Channel, an unaware that an interval of better weather was on the way, they announced on 4 June that, ‘*at the moment a major invasion cannot be assumed innocent.’* Rommel returned to Germany for his wife’s birthday.

Among the six meteorologists providing advice to Eisenhower was Lawrence Hogben – a New Zealander. Hogben was born in Thames on 14 April 1916, and he was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford University in 1938. When the Second World War started, he enlisted in the Royal Navy. After a foreshortened course at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, Hogben spent three years in the cruiser Sheffield in the rank of instructor lieutenant-commander, serving as an intelligence officer, radar officer and meteorologist. When the Royal New Zealand Navy was established in 1941 he was proud to join it.

With regard to the decision to postpone the landings, Hogben later said:

*'It took courage for us to say NO to the original D-Day on June 5th, but it also took courage to forecast YES for June 6th. I was scared - I think we all were - of getting it wrong. We knew we were making history.’*

After D-Day, Lawrence Hogben was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Although he remained overseas after the War, dying on 20 January 2015 at his home in France, he remained a proud New Zealander. He retained his New Zealand passport throughout his life.

**The NZ Army and Normandy [SLIDE 9]**

Given the military history of New Zealand it is notable that no New Zealand Army units participated in such a major Allied operation as the D-Day landings. However, one New Zealand Army officer did. He was Brigadier James Hargest, CBE, DSO & Two Bars, MC, New Zealand’s – self-appointed - official observer with the Allied forces, who went ashore with the British 50th Division on D-Day.

He was awarded the MC in September 1916, and for his leadership of his battalion during the last few months of the war, he was awarded his first Distinguished Service Order, a mention in despatches and the French Legion of Honour.

Ashore in Normandy, Hargest spent a great deal of time near the front line and is reported to have written perceptive reports on the campaign. Wounded in June, in August a freak shell burst instantly killed him as he sat beside his totally unharmed driver in an observer’s Jeep.

**The Royal New Zealand Air Force and Normandy**

The efforts of the Allied Air Forces were vital in creating favourable circumstances for the transport and landing of troops, and their success on the ground. For example, strategic bombing had destroyed much of the French rail network – by June it was operating at only 30% of January’s totals.

However, the air campaign to dismantle the transport system had led to significant losses for both the Air Forces and of French civilians. Almost 15,000 French were killed in April and May. From 1 April to 5 June the Allies had lost 12,000 aircrew dead or missing – and the United States Eighth Air Force and the Royal Air Force had lost almost 1300 aircraft.

The Air Plan for D-Day was a comprehensive one. **[SLIDE 10]**

The total number of aircraft supporting the invasion was 11,600**.** Among this number were 3,700 fighter aircraft which assured the Allies of air superiority on D-Day, and 1400 gliders and transport aircraft which dropped troops inland of the beaches. Over 14,000 sorties were flown in support of the landings. The Germans, on the other hand, flew just 319 sorties over France; all but a few of these were driven back or shot down.

On 6 June 1944, there were around 6000 New Zealanders serving with the Royal Air Force, and New Zealand was represented in almost all RAF squadrons. The Official History of the Royal New Zealand Air Force in World War Two, records of the months of June to August 1944:

**[SLIDE 11]**

*‘During these historic months New Zealanders, both air and ground crews, served with all the principal RAF formations – with Second Tactical Air Force, Bomber, Coastal and Transport Commands, and in the Air Defence of Great Britain. The Dominion contribution, including the six New Zealand squadrons in Europe, amounted to some 3850 men, of whom the large majority were air- crew. Their record of service and achievement in the air operations over Normandy is a notable one.’*

**[SLIDE 12]**

Also notable was the contribution made by Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, RAF, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of 2nd Tactical Air Force during operations in Normandy. He was born in 1895 in Australia, but when he was six, his family moved to New Zealand. In the First World War he served with the Canterbury Mounted Rifles in Samoa, at Gallipoli and in Egypt. Then, in 1916, he transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and became a fighter pilot, ending the war in charge of a squadron. He took command of the 2nd Tactical Air Force – made up of British, Canadian, Polish, Czech, Norwegian, French, South African, Australian and New Zealand crews - in January 1944.

Commanding nearly 2,000 aircraft and 100,000 men, Coningham used much of the experience he had gained during fighting earlier in the War in North Africa. He applied his forces to providing close support for ground troops and harassing the enemy’s lines of supply.

Equipped with rocket- and bomb-carrying Typhoons, Tempests, Spitfires, Mosquitos, Mustangs and medium bombers, the Second Tactical Air Force flew ground attack and tank-busting missions in support of Montgomery's 21st Army Group as it advanced through Normandy and north-west Europe in 1944-45. His relationship with Montgomery deteriorated markedly after the landings took place. The two often clashed when Montgomery regularly tried to bypass Coningham, who was the designated point of contact for air support requests, and deal directly with Leigh-Mallory.

He retired from the Royal Air Force in August 1947. Coningham disappeared on 30 January 1948 when the airliner in which he was travelling to Bermuda was lost off the east coast of the United States.

**The RNZN and Normandy**

**[SLIDE 13]**

The British historian Corelli Barnett has written, ‘Too often historians of D-Day and the Normandy campaign neglect NEPTUNE and concentrate on the conduct of the land battle once the invasion forces reached the beaches – almost as if the English Channel were just a conventional ‘no mans land.’’ However, under the command of the Neptune commander, Admiral Ramsay, were 7000 vessels – including 1,213 naval vessels. It has been described as, ‘the largest armada ever assembled.’ Nevertheless, as the Official History of the RNZN in the Second World War records, ‘Most of the work of the Navy is done by ships and men that are never in the news.’

The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History records that, ‘Many of the 4700 New Zealanders serving in the Royal Navy were present, commanding or crewing landing craft or motor torpedo boats, (minesweepers), serving in the escorting warships, troopships, and supply vessels, or flying missions over the area as part of the Fleet Air Arm.’

And, Sailors of the RNZN died at sea off the Normandy beaches; most notably on 20 July when the destroyed HMS *Isis* was sunk by a mine and among the 155 ship’s company killed, were ten New Zealanders.

Landing ships and landing craft were arguably the most important vessels for the invasion. In fact, it was a shortage of these vessels that had been ‘the prime reason for moving the original invasion date of early May by a month.’ On 6 June, 236 Landing Ships(Tank), 248 Landing Craft(Infantry), and 837 Landing Craft(Tank), plus other adapted for special purposes, moved men and equipment from the sea to the shore. Many of the RNZN personnel, in particular officers of the RNZNVR, served with distinction in these craft.

Although the development of specialised landing craft began early in the war, it was only on D-Day that they were used on such a scale. As well as transporting Commonwealth forces, Landing Craft also ferried American troops to Omaha and Utah Beaches. Among the some 200 ships lost during Operation Neptune, were over 60 landing craft.

**[SLIDE 14]**

Outstanding among the many New Zealanders in landing craft was Lieutenant Denis Glover, who was to become a noted New Zealand poet and publisher. During the landings, fourteen of the ships in Glover’s thirty-six ship flotilla were lost outright; on the night of D-Day there were only six ships left fully operational. Glover’s craft was one of the few left relatively unscathed after landing its crew of commandos, picking up wounded from the sea, landing infantrymen from damaged vessels, and dodging mines and enemy fire. For his bravery on D-Day he was awarded a DSC.

Another officer to be recognised for gallantry was Sub-Lieutenant Jack Ingham. He was awarded the DSC for landing troops on the beach under heavy fire. His craft was hit several times and damaged by near misses and underwater obstructions.

Another who was there, Sub-Lieutenant Peter Gurnsey of Christchurch, commenting on the Channel crossing to France on 6 June, remembered rather laconically:

*‘There were 12 landing-craft in our flotilla. It was a great sight to see them, line abreast, going full speed for the beach. We avoided those obstacles we could, but it was a case of hit or miss. One of the mines blew a hole four feet wide in my ramp door, but we got all the tanks ashore. There were a lot of mortar bombs bursting everywhere. One which exploded on the beach covered me with mud and water. It covered my craft, too, which was most annoying, seeing that it had recently been given a nice new coat of paint. In addition to mortar bombs, shells also were coming at us and my starboard bow was a mass of holes about as big as your fist, caused by shell splinters. Unfortunately my No. 1 was killed.’*

Reflecting a similar Kiwi attitude on the occasion was Cyril Phelps. While his Landing Craft was at anchor, he took the opportunity to do some fishing. He recollected that:

‘*The strangest part for me was the attitude of the Pommy crew. They seemed a little horrified and quite amazed, that an officer, and supposedly a Gentleman, could do such a thing.’*

At least 17 New Zealand officers were recognised for their gallantry at Normandy – all of them in the RNZNVR.

**The Merchant Navy**

Two thousand merchant ships—most of them British—supported the Allied invasion. As a measure of the scale of their effort, by the end of June, 850,279 men, 148,803 vehicles and 570,505 tons of supplies had been transported to the area of operations and landed ashore. By the time the Battle of Normandy ended in August, these numbers had increased to over two million men, 400,000 vehicles and 3 million tons of stores and supplies. The cost to the Merchant Navy was 50 ships sunk and a further 110 damaged to varying degrees.

While there were no Royal New Zealand Navy ships at the Normandy landings, there were two ships owned by New Zealand’s Union Steamship Company - the *Monowai* and *Aorangi*. Although they were there having been requisitioned by the Royal Navy, they nevertheless flew the New Zealand flag and the New Zealand Red Ensign – and the captains and most of the principal officers and engineer officers were New Zealanders.

**[SLIDE 15]**

In 1923 the Union Steamship Company laid plans for a brand new ship which would be launched on 17 June 1924 as RMS *Aorangi.*

Her war service began in October 1939 when she was chartered to transport troops. In mid-1941 the ship was officially requisitioned by the ‘British Ministry of War Transport’ and sailed from Sydney to the United Kingdom to be converted into a troopship. Having been converted to enter troop ship service, she operated in this role until early in 1944. In May, *Aorangi* was fitted out as an accommodation and depot ship for small craft personnel, as well as having hospital facilities.

From D-Day (June 6, 1944) until the end of July, the *Aorangi* served as a depot ship for a fleet of 150 tugs and auxiliary ships, and for other vessels involved with towing the artificial “Mulberry harbours” across the Channel; servicing over 1,200 vessels and countless other small craft. The hospital looked after hundreds of wounded men brought back from the landing beaches.

*Aorangi* was released from War Service in May 1946 and returned to her owners. It was estimated that during the war years, this ship transported 36,000 troops and evacuated 5,500 refugees from war zones.

At the end of her commercial service in 1953, the *Aorangi* returned to the Clyde, the river on which she was built, to be broken up for scrap.

**[SLIDE 16]**

*Monowai* had been built by Harland and Wolf at Greenock and launched on 16 October 1924, as SS *Razmak* was handed over to its owners on 26 February 1925. As a replacement the Union Company purchased *Razmak*, modifying it in Britain to increase the passenger capacity to 208 in First Class and 203 in Second Class. Renamed *Monowai* the ship sailed to Sydney, leaving that port on its first Pacific voyage on 27 November 1930. Having been laid-up at Auckland since 1936, *Monowai* was requisitioned for war service with the New Zealand Naval forces on 19 October 1939, converted to an Armed Merchant Cruiser, and manned by a combination of naval regulars, reservists and merchant seamen.

The ship served in the South Pacific until 1943 when it was commissioned into the Royal Navy and fitted out as a troopship. She was involved in the D-Day landings, delivering some 1,800 commandos to Gold Beach. Of the 20 landing craft that departed from the *Monowai* that day, sadly only six returned as all of the others had been destroyed whilst in combat, mostly by mines during the landing.

The ship was released from naval service in September 1946, returning to merchant service in 1949.

**Captain G.B Morgan, Royal Naval Reserve, DSO, DSC [SLIDE 17]**

As the *Monowai* lay off the Normandy Coast, she was under the command of one of the Merchant Navy’s most decorated officers, who had assumed command in June 1943.

Captain George Brotherton Morgan had been born in Christchurch on 3 August 1886. He joined the Union Steam Ship Company at the age of twenty-three in June 1909. In World War 1 he served in the Royal Naval Reserve as a Lieutenant. In June 1918, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, established in 1914 and awarded for meritorious or distinguished service before the enemy ‘by men of His Majesty’s Fleet’, in his case ‘for services in action with enemy submarines’.

After the War, he returned to the Union Steamship Company and in December 1920, he assumed his first command with the Company. Nineteen years later, he was sailing into another World War. Before assuming command of *Monowai*, he was in command of another Union Steamship Company vessel, *Awatea*. She had been launched in 1936, and was one of the finest and fastest ships of its size in the world at the outbreak of the Second World War. Pressed into war service in 1939 as a troop transport, she retained her Merchant Navy crew.

In November 1942, *Awatea* was off the coast of North Africa, involved in Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of Morocco and Algeria. After landing 3000 commandos near Algiers, and ferrying other troops further to the east, the ship was attacked by German and Italian aircraft on 11 November. She was so damaged by bombs and torpedoes, that she had to be abandoned. Remarkably, everyone on board escaped safely. The abandoned, burning hulk which was once *Awatea* was later sunk by an Italian submarine.

In recognition of his gallantry on this occasion, Captain Morgan received two awards. The first was Lloyd's War Medal for Bravery at Sea. This medal was established in December 1940, and awarded by Lloyds of London, the world’s largest maritime insurance company, ‘to officers and men of the Merchant Navy and fishing fleet in cases of exceptional gallantry at sea in time of war.’ The second was the Distinguished Service Order - awarded to officers who have performed meritorious or distinguished service in war.

After the Second World War, Captain Morgan returned to the Union Steamship Company, remaining in command of *Monowai.* He retired in October 1950. On 15 December 1960, he died in Christchurch.

**CONCLUSION**

In the Introduction to Alison Parr’s book ‘The Big Show’ there is one sentence that rebounds back to the title of this presentation and that is, ‘Until now we have not recognised, collectively, the 10,000 New Zealanders who were serving in Europe at the time of Operation Overlord and Operation Neptune.’ I would suggest that the Normandy Commemorations this year, especially when compared to the level of government support to and media coverage of the Battle of Casino Commemorations, support a view that as a country we still have not done so.

Those New Zealanders who were there on D-Day and for the following 76 days of the Battle of Normandy, ensured that the national memories of the occasion record that because they were there, so was New Zealand.

Our national memorialisation of our military history is shaped by the memories of those ‘were there’ – and the record of those whose names which are etched on the headstones of the fallen. The New Zealand flag flies at various Normandy memorials around the world – and the silver fern and ‘New Zealand’ appear in military cemeteries in Normandy - because New Zealanders were there – and served and died.

**[SLIDE 18]**