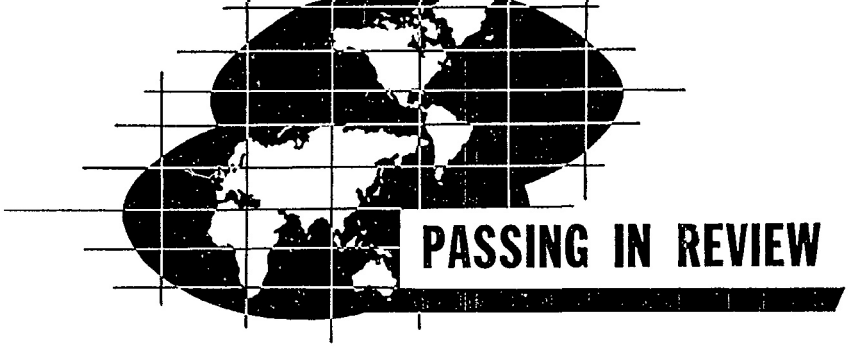

PASSING IN REVIEW

The Legend of Normandy . . .

THE INVASION OF FRANCE AND GERMANY, 1944-1945 — Samuel Eliot Morison. 360 pages, photographs, maps, and index. Boston: Little Brown-Atlantic. $6.50

Only professionals can understand what an albatross the legend of Normandy hung onto the amphibious art. With its amateurish magnitude, its clumsiness, its cascading publicity, its inflexibility, its glossed-over costly mistakes, its vast involvement of people (many very senior) who had never seen an amphibious operation and never would again, the Normandy assault seems destined, like the deadly upas tree, to wither by misleading precedent everything that falls within its long historical shadow. After reading Samuel Eliot Morison's distinguished *Invasion of France and Germany, 1944-1945,* you can readily see why. This eleventh volume of his soon-to-be-completed 14-volume *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* covers the Southern France landings as well as bits and pieces of naval mopping up in the ETO, but the *piece de resistance* is Normandy.

The truth is, in the classic oceanic sense, Normandy, the much touted invasion, was hardly an amphibious operation at all — it was a gigantic stream-crossing which was an anachronism by the time it was completed. Nonetheless, the massive dead hand of Normandy still rests heavy on amphibious warfare, and self-anointed experts (not only American but British) still sagely announce, "There will never be another Normandy" — as if that disposed for all time of amphibious operations as a mode of maritime warfare.

Professor Morison (who is also a retired RAdm, USNR) does not directly address the foregoing notions in his assessment of Normandy, but his book (a typically Morisonian combination of tangy writing and impeccable historical technique) provides all the evidence required. Never has an operation been so slathered with superlatives by its participants and by posterity, too. For example, Adm Sir Bertram Ramsay's Order of the Day commenced, "It is our privilege to take part in the greatest amphibious operation in history." Or Gen Omar N. Bradley's modest characterization of Normandy as "the mightiest of amphibious invasions." With such fuel to go on, Adm Morison can truthfully state, " . . . the fame of Normandy has eclipsed that of every other amphibious landing in WWII." This statement is likely correct, but the truly deserving reasons for Omaha's fame in amphibious annals ought to be better known.

Taking facts which are carefully substantiated and recorded in *The Invasion of France and Germany,* the Omaha Beach assault appears as the major landing operation in which . . .

Assault units missed 6 out of 9 of the planned beaches, in every case by more than a half mile, and some cases by as much as 2 miles. . . .

Landing craft had to wallow 11 miles in through 6-foot waves from transport areas located that far offshore by the planners to avoid the fire of one single battery (Point du Hoc) that afterward proved to have dummy guns. . . .

The naval gunfire support plan was gravely defective in almost every important aspect. . . .

The 8th Air Force intentionally dropped its 13,000 bombs 3 miles wide of the critically important beach targets because of a unilateral last-minute change in the air plan which no Air Force staff officer bothered to convey to the Navy or Army or the responsible commanders. . . .

Only 8 out of 16 planned beach-obstacle gaps were effected, and none of these was marked for the incoming landing craft. . . .

The inflexibly arranged ship-to-shore movement became so disorganized within 2 hours after H-hour that it had to be completely suspended. . . .

The much vaunted airborne envelopment by the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions lost more than 60 per cent of its equipment, and troops were scattered as far as 25 miles away from their planned drop zones (one airborne regiment required ten and a half hours after landing before it could collect 200 men in one place to capture an initial objective). . . .

Some operation, Omaha. Considering that the foregoing results were attained as a climax of almost 3 years' planning, training, and advance publicity, maybe we should thank heaven there weren't 6 years' preparation instead.

After reading all this, you may well ask — how could any such landing possibly succeed? Adm Morison provides one thought-provoking answer: mostly because of the wholly un-planned, spontaneous intervention by heroic Navy close-in fire support ships which deep-sixed badly prepared plans in face of mounting disaster, and pitched in, impromptu, with a weight of accurate, aimed fire which turned the tide, confounded the Germans, and even educated some of our own Army amphibious unbelievers (though not in time to help the brigadier general who, at the height of the beach slaughter, refused to let a Navy shore fire control party — the only one with working communications — call for help from the destroyers offshore because he thought naval gunfire was too dangerous. . . . !).

A second factor which turned the tide was the equally spontaneous boldness of several LCI skippers who rammed their fragile craft through mined beach obstacles and, once on the beach, had the guts and effrontery to take on emplaced German antiboat guns with nothing bigger than 40mm — feats which must have inspired the anxious ghosts of Jones, Farragut, and Dewey.

By contrast with Omaha, *The Invasion of France and Germany* correctly portrays the adjacent landings on Utah Beach as well planned and capably executed, and so they were. It is too bad, however, that the book doesn't make a sharper point-by-point analytical comparison between the 2 landings which were so similar and yet so different in results.

And, speaking of comparisons, did Professor Morison make use of Adm King's devastating analysis of weight of planned fire support versus strength of enemy defenses, as between Normandy and the Marshalls? If this was cited or known to Adm Morison and his capable assistants, I must have missed it. As King's study pointed out, the results of the overwhelmingly successful naval gunfire and air support in the Marshalls had been known for months before Normandy, but tyro planners somehow failed to get the point.

Of the Southern France (Operation DRAGOON) landings, Professor Morison has little but praise, all well deserved. Here, at length, after a succession of previous Mediterranean amphibious assaults marked by inter-Service " . . . false doctrine, heresy, and schism," there was effective, well planned gunfire support, Air Forces that had finally decided to play the game, and a beautifully coordi-

nated, sensitively controlled ship-to-shore movement against 30 miles of beaches.

As may be realized, this volume is another amphibious one. Adm Morison has now written quite a few, reflecting the dominantly amphibious character of WWII, and his grasp of this mode of warfare has become increasingly sure (no doubt reflecting the advice and background of one of his principal colleagues, RAdm Bern Anderson, an experienced amphibian). One may quibble (as reviewers do) at occasional overstatements — such as that (which cannot have been carefull weighed) that the defenses of Iwo Jima "are not to be compared with" the crust of German beach defenses at Normandy. Or that Gen Bradley's ghosted, anti-Navy, and amphibiously unsophisticated reminiscenses are "the best single account of the Normandy operation."

If, however, any such dictum as that last were true (which it emphatically is not), then readers may be greatly thankful that Samuel Eliot Morison has in this book provided us with an account of Normandy to which predecessors must defer and by which successors will be measured.

Reviewed by Col R. D. Heinl, Jr.

ED: *As Officer-in-Charge, Historical Section, HQMC, 1946-49, Col Heinl laid out and directed the Marine Corps historical program covering WWII. Subsequently, while on the staff of Marine Corps Schools (and still later while teaching at the British School of Combined Operations), he analyzed and lectured on aspects of the Normandy landings.*

Lawrence of Arabia . . .

THE MINT- -T. E. Lawrence. 250 pages. Doubleday & Co., NY. $7.50

In 1922, disillusioned and mentally exhausted from his efforts to keep faith with the Arabs, Thomas Edward Lawrence enlisted in the Royal Air Force under the assumed name of John Hume Ross. Thus the legendary "Lawrence of Arabia" became a simple aircraftsman. A few years earlier he had held the rank of Colonel in the Army; he had been offered a knighthood for his services in the Great War; only a few months earlier in 1922 Winston Churchill, then head of the Colonial Office, had offered him any position he desired within Churchill's power to give. But Lawrence was exhausted. He wanted all his thinking done for him. He wanted all his material requirements to be provided by someone else. And so, hiding his true identity (except from a few close friends at the top), he enlisted in the RAF.

As Aircraftsman Ross, Lawrence served in the Royal Air Force at Uxbridge from August until December 1922, when he was posted to Farnborough. Here his true identity was discovered in January 1923, and he was discharged from the RAF. Through friends in the Army he was able to then enlist in the Royal Tank Corps under the pseudonym of T. E. Shaw. Although he made many friends in the Tanks he was miserable and wished only to return to duty with the RAF. Finally, in 1925, he was permitted to re-enlist in the Royal Air Force (under the name of Shaw) and was assigned to duty as an aircraftsman at Cadet College, Cranwell. He remained in the RAF in an enlisted status for the next 10 years.

This volume was written from the notes he kept while serving at the Depot at Uxbridge and at Cadet College. The bulk of it deals with his basic training at the former location. The short final portion pertaining to his duties at Cadet College almost transforms the book into the proverbial happy ending of an otherwise tragic account.

This is a revealing and brutal document of recruit training in the RAF shortly after WWI. But it was not Lawrence's intention to write this in order to improve the recruits' lot. In fact, because of the names involved he wrote that the book should not be circulated until after 1950. In a letter to E. M. Forster he said that the book should not be published until that time because of ". . . the horror the fellows with me in the force would feel at my giving them away, at their 'off' moments, with both hands. . . ."

As a recruit at the Depot, Lawrence had little time to write. He describes it thus: "Every night in Uxbridge I used to sit in bed, with my knees drawn up under the blankets, and write on a pad the things of the day. I tried to put it all down, thinking that memory and time would sort them out, and enable me to select significant from insignificant. Time passed, 5 years and more (long enough, surely, for memory to settle down?) and at Karachi I took up the notes to make a book of them . . . and instead of selecting, I fitted into the book, somewhere and somehow, every single sentence I had written at Uxbridge. . . ."

In August 1927 at the Depot, Karachi, India, Lawrence began arranging the notes into sections, and a year later manuscripts and typescripts of *The Mint* were being read by a small group of individuals, including Bernard Shaw and Forster.

Four-letter words normally associated with recruit depots — and a few off-beat ones — abound in the book. They seem quite natural to the environment and