Story of D-Day told through documents and Twitter 70 years on

Seventy years ago, Allied servicemen and women were preparing for the much-anticipated invasion of northern France. Years of meticulous planning had gone into Operation Overlord but the unpredictable weather in the English Channel delayed things for 24 hours with D-Day finally coming on 6 June, 1944.

This week, the story of the momentous landings on the beaches of Normandy will be told through The National Archives’ @ukwarcabinet Twitter feed using official government and military documents from the time.

From Thursday, June 5 until Sunday, June 8 army unit war diaries (including those from Canadian battalions), RAF squadron records, documents from the Admiralty, Government Cabinet Papers and messages sent to Prime Minister Winston Churchill - all held at The National Archives - will be used to describe events “as they happened.” Some tweets will also be illustrated with D-Day photographs from The National Archives' extensive image library and digital versions of the documents.

The @ukwarcabinet feed has been telling the story of the Second World War on a day-by-day basis through War Cabinet Papers for the past five years. But tweets from Thursday 5 June until Sunday 8 June will see far more detail with extra documents giving an insight into decision making and actions of British and Commonwealth forces during the successful attempt to liberate Western Europe.

Simon Demissie, Contemporary Records Specialist at The National Archives, said: “We will use war diaries and operations records to tweet details of everything from the parachute regiments landing overnight; then the ships sailing across in the morning; and what the infantry and special services were doing on the ground during 6 June, 1944.

“We will also be tweeting Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s speech to the House of Commons alongside the action which was happening on the beaches at the same time.

“We have photographs taken of the beaches from the air, images of men on the boats waiting to go ashore and maps which will also help to tell the story as it unfolds.

“The war diary extracts give a real sense of what was going on as the Allies fought to secure the beaches and are written in really expressive language. We will also
continue to tweet details from the War Cabinet minutes outlining what the key British decision makers were debating at the time."

All information released in the tweets is available to see in files held by The National Archives. The files used include:

- Army war diaries of the 1st Suffolk Regiment (WO 171/1381), 2nd Warwickshire Regiment (WO 171/1387), 2 Royal Ulster Rifles (WO 171/1384) and Queen’s Own Rifles of Canada (WO 179/2958)

- Admiralty ship logs of HMS Belfast (ADM 53/118968), HMS Ramillies (ADM 53/120330) and HMS Warspite (ADM 53/120730)

- RAF squadron operation books (AIR 27)

- Cyphers to Churchill including reports of straw dummies being dropped as parachutists (HW 1/2890) and situation reports by the Sea Defence Commandant in Normandy (HW 1/2909 and HW 1/2913)

- Conclusions of the War Cabinet (CAB 65) and memoranda circulated to its members (CAB 66)

In addition, core records of the British Cabinet from 1915 to 1982 have been digitised and their full text is searchable online at nationalarchives.co.uk/cabinetpapers

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