

HOW CLOSE DID D-DAY COME TO FAILURE?

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT – EVEN THE BEST LAID PLANS

[Presented by General Sir Richard Dannatt, former head of the British Army]

In the early hours of the 6th June 1944, these huge guns opened fire on the coast of northern France.

It was H-Hour, on D-Day.

Nowadays, this vast ship, HMS Belfast, is moored by the banks of the River Thames in London. But on D-Day it was one of the first ships of the British and Allied invasion force that unleashed fury on the forces of Nazi Germany that lay just across the Channel.

If the invasion was successful, the battle to defeat Hitler would follow. The stakes could not have been higher.

The man in overall command was US General Dwight D. Eisenhower. He had been planning for this moment for over a year.

Now, like Eisenhower, I have sent men on life-threatening operations and I know what Eisenhower knew; that no plan, however well thought through, survives first contact with the enemy. When the first bullets flew, when the first boots hit the ground, he would have known that so much could have gone wrong.

What if the enemy forces were far stronger than expected? What if reinforcements arrived more quickly or in greater strength? What if the new technologies developed for D-Day failed? And what about the weather? No general can control that.

D-Day was a critical step in ending the war. But at the moment it began, failure was a real possibility.

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