

# D-Day - Surveyed 70 Years Later

D-Day, the landing of the allied armies on the beaches of Normandy, France, took place exactly 70 years ago. The invasion that marked the start of the liberation of Europe from the Nazis took place on Tuesday 6 June 1944. Although the invasion was the beginning of the victory, it was bloody and tragic: thousands of young soldiers lost their lives on the beaches that we still know under their code names Omaha, Utah, Sword, Juno and Gold Beach. Much went wrong during the invasion, probably causing many more casualties than expected by the strategists beforehand. The allied forces built two artificial harbours close to the beach to be able to supply the shore and have a place where ships could stay out of the swell of the Channel. In a storm, just a few days after the 6th, the so-called Mulberry Harbour A was completely destroyed – remains can still be found off the coast of Omaha Beach.

Last summer, a hydrographic survey was carried out to collect as much data as possible about the beaches, Mulberry Harbour and tanks that sank during D-Day. Data are still being analysed, but a mosaic of over 600 geo-referenced images of the destroyed harbour can already be found in the article [Hydrographic Survey of the Normandy Beaches](#) (2014, May/June, page 14) by Jerry Knisley, Andy Sherrell and Damon Wolfe in this issue of *Hydro International* on page 15. Surveys such as these, which acquire data of lost objects and artifacts, and destroyed harbours, always attract a lot of attention. News items on the website of Hydro International ([www.hydro-international.com](http://www.hydro-international.com)) reporting the discovery of a wreck, like that of the 19th century steam liner City of Chester off the Golden Gate Bridge or the survey ship Robert J. Walker off the coast of New Jersey, are amongst the most viewed items.

I am happy and grateful that several companies and organisations like Hypack, Caris, QPS, Netsurvey, SHOM and UKHO investigated the story of the survey of the D-Day beaches in Normandy and will share this with Hydro International this summer as a paper, 70 years after the historic event. Surveying the seas to map maritime heritage resting on the seabed is not just fun for wreck divers or treasure hunters, it is a really important task for hydrographers to assist maritime historians in conserving knowledge and writing history while filling gaps with findings of wrecks, comforting families that have never found out about their missing sons, and maybe even supporting decision making in the future – for instance in the case of Mulberry Harbour. In addition, in the case of wrecks, hydrographers may even learn something about their own field and why a wreck sunk where it did and if there are seabed features that caused it.

Hydrography for digital heritage might not be a field in which funds are as superfluous as in oil & gas or offshore renewable energy. The satisfaction of the job, however, may be just as high, if not higher, for those who like the fun aspects of discovery, adventure and treasure hunting in the light of the necessity of knowing and understanding history to make it possible to create a better future.