

Voiceover: This program is sponsored by the National WWII Museum.

(Theme music)

Voiceover: The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is *Pritzker Military Presents*.

(Applause)

Havers: Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* for an interview with Dr. Gordon Nick Mueller about his book *Everything We Have: D-Day 6.6.'44*. I'm your host Rob Havers, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago and is sponsored by the National WWII Museum in New Orleans. This program and hundreds more besides, covering a full range of military topics, is available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. On June the 6th, 1944, more than 150,000 Allied troops landed along a fifty-mile stretch of the French coastline across five landing beaches and myriad airborne drop zones. At the end of that first day and after taking close to 10,000 casualties killed and wounded the Allies were ashore, and the march to defeat the Germans in the west and on land had begun. Tonight we hear from Dr. Gordon H. "Nick" Mueller, President and CEO Emeritus of the national WWII Museum about his compelling book, *Everything We Have: D-Day, 6.6.'44*. It takes an intimate look at the personal stories of those on the ground that day in their own words. This compelling new treatment of D-Day builds on the institution's archival strengths and commemorates the invasion's 75th anniversary. Rare documents, artifacts, and first-hand accounts from the National WWII Museum's own collections provide a poignant and personal insight into the thoughts and feelings of those soldiers who fought on the beaches of Normandy. Gordon H. Mueller, Ph.D., historian and vice chancellor of the University of New Orleans, served as the founding president and CEO of the National WWII Museum. During a long and distinguished career at the university, Mueller made his mark as a popular teacher, dean, and ultimately as vice chancellor. He continues to lead overseas WWII tours and speaks widely on the war experience, the nature of the American spirit, and nonprofit leadership. In 2016 Mueller together with two other national WWII champions, Tom Brokaw and actor Tom Hanks, all received the Legion d'Honneur from the French government. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming back to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library Nick Mueller.

(Applause)

Havers: Well, Nick, this book connects to the roots of the museum in the history department of the University of New Orleans and its wonderful oral history departments and to the research and the writing of Stephen Ambrose. Can you tell us a little bit about the genesis of the museum as the D-Day Museum, Dr. Ambrose's role and your roles? And perhaps it could be said, it's an unlikely story that two historians could launch such a massive undertaking.

Mueller: Indeed, it is an unlikely story, I guess you could say. Certainly the book itself, *Everything We Have*, as well as the National D-Day Museum and indeed the WWII Museum took its life from the inspiration of the stories of first of all the men of D-Day and then later all of those who fought and served their country during WWII. So it was their stories that brought about the birth of the museum. And so this is almost a 360-degree from where we started, and everybody asks, well, how did this all happen? And there's Steve Ambrose and myself at the grand opening on June 6, 2000, but that little gazebo in the back of the picture there was a gazebo that before Katrina was in Ambrose' former back yard, and we used to get together every afternoon around five o'clock and have drinks and plan our next venture together. And there were lots of them. We did things off

campus and on campus. We were best friends of thirty years, and so it wasn't unusual to plan a D-Day to the Rhine tour or some big sailing adventure or whatever it was. So this day I came there, and he says, "Sit down. You're starting this research part where Andrew Higgins tested his landing craft, and Eisenhower told me in 1968 that his boats were the boats that won WWII. And so this is what we're gonna do." He says, "You're gonna try to raise a million bucks to build a small national D-Day museum out there, and I'm gonna donate you about a thousand oral histories"—that he had already collected for his book that came out in '94, *D-Day: The Climactic Battle of WWII*. Some of you may have read that. So he finished his oral stories, and he said, "I'll give them to you, and you go out and raise the money." I said, "Steve, it's the best idea you ever had, but there's a couple things wrong with it. Number one, you're naive about these things. It's gonna be at least four million dollars."

(Laughter)

Mueller: "Number two, we're gonna do it together because you've got the big name nationally and "Meet the Press" and everything. So I said, "Okay, it's a deal, so let's get going. "Well, ten years later and 125 million later, we were out downtown at the--and there's a ribbon cutting with Steve and myself and Secretary of Defense Bill Cohen. On the right you see Steven Spielberg. On the left behind Secretary Cohen is Tom Hanks. We had 200,000 people on the streets that day all honoring the veterans of WWII and especially those who fought on D-Day and all the d-days of WWII, and the Higgins boats that were built in New Orleans by Andrew Higgins were used in all the d-days of the Pacific as well as Europe, and there were no boats in the coast guard, the marines, everywhere, that could put men over an open beach in 1940. I mean, think about that. And we weren't in the war, didn't want to be in the war. We were an isolationist country at the time. So it was Andrew Higgins, it was the technological marvel, and he mass-produced them, and that's why Eisenhower gave them such praise. This was a great day for the museum, a great tribute to the veterans of D-Day and WWII and a great day for the nation because it was broadcast on CSPAN for the whole day and for the following couple days. So this was way bigger than anything we were thinking about when we had too many drinks in the back yard that day. But in any event, Steve Ambrose always knew that this story was gonna get bigger and bigger and bigger, and he was right. And so if you flash forward just a little bit, that's the Campaigns of Courage across the street from where we opened. Now it's a 400 million dollar project, and we're almost at the end of it, taking up three city blocks. So after eighteen years it's gone quite a way. And I always like to say at this point when you look at this whole campus, who said you couldn't do something with a history degree?"

(Laughter and applause)

Havers: I think we might need that on a T-shirt at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Nick, tell us a little bit about the title of this book.

Mueller: Well, *Everything We Have* was really picked by Cullman Warner, one of my senior staff members in my little research office that I work out of now, and it really comes from General Eisenhower, the supreme commander meeting with his generals a couple of weeks before D-Day. And he went in--guys you've got to remember the troops are loading the ships, they're all trained, everybody's under lockdown, nobody can go in or out of any of the bases because they knew D-Day was coming up, the troops did. They didn't know when or where they were going, but he goes to the generals. Everything's been prepared, planning's gone on for a couple years at this point. This is really a big event, everybody knows it. This is extraordinary. He goes into the generals and he says--all the Allied generals of the SHAEF were there, and he says, "We planned this is a victory, and we're going down there, and we're throwing everything we have into this battle." There was no alternative plan. They all knew it. And so it provides the

elements of sacrifice. The guys who were gonna lose their lives that they knew was inevitable from this tremendous showdown. So that's where the title came from, and that picture that you're looking at up behind me is Ike's iconic order of the day. I know you all by your applause a moment ago are all closet historians here, so many of you have read this, his order of the day, which was giving the mission to every soldier, sailor, and airman on June 5th as they're heading toward Normandy. And you all have read it, but just the opening lines of it—"Soldiers, sailors, airmen, you are about to embark on a great crusade. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you." Those were powerful words, a clear mission. They were going to destroy the Third Reich, and they knew that everything was up to them. So this book presents their stories, their letters, their feelings, their memories of the day. What they felt when they cut that order of the day if they were on a ship or an airplane, and so it was a very important day.

Havers: The 75th anniversary is obviously a very important one. Other motivations, Nick, for writing this book at this juncture?

Mueller: Well, you're looking here at the major invasion map of the Operation Neptune and Overlord, and let me just say that I'm not in the book rehashing the whole Operation Overlord plan from the big strategic, but you have to understand the strategic plan, and the right side of the map as you're looking at it with the American flag shows the American sector because, so first of all the motivation has to do with telling the American story, which is the mission of the National WWII Museum as well, and we have 10,000 oral histories. We just got about a couple thousand about D-Day. So, we're focusing on the American assaults. So the first motivating factor was to pay tribute again to the veterans, those who went in on that day, which again goes back to the original reason to have the museum. Look, everybody in this room understands that this D-Day was an epic battle. It was a huge gamble. There was tension and drama and concern right up to the last moment with weather and timing of the tides and everything, so it was the largest battle in human history, and everybody in the planning of it knew it. So we want to set that stage, the drama of 150,000 troops landing at the same day; 11,000 aircraft involved at the same time; 5,000 ships; all of the coordinating with millions of people behind that invasion, supplies, logistics, and reinforcements had to come in, so the drama of that day is important. And it was the pivot point of the war in Europe. Arguably it might have been the pivot point of WWII, but that is a larger debate that we can have at another time. But it is certainly the bright line between the forces of freedom and democracy and the forces of totalitarianism and fascism. So, a second motivation was just saving the history of those guys that were a part of this, and women. And thirdly, it's a way for me to pay tribute to my pal Stephen Ambrose who died and left us in 2002, too early. But in addition to that it's a treasure trove of artifacts, images of artifacts and photographs and surrounding all of these stories, so those are the basic motivations for writing the book. And it's also the 75th anniversary of D-Day this June. So eighteen months ago when we started planning for this I said this is something we have to do as a museum, and I was fortunate enough to be able to do it.

Havers: Other historians have employed oral histories in the telling of their stories. What might you say, Nick, is unique or special in how you use them in this book?

Mueller: Well, let me first say what it's not. This is not another Rick Atkinson's *Guns at Last Light* or Beavor *D-Day* or Max Hastings, any of the great books, or even Stephen Ambrose which was the classic book on D-Day, *The Climactic Battle of*—it's not that. This is really—several key features to it. One is that we try to pick personal stories, oral histories, for the first twenty-four hours of D-Day, from midnight to midnight. So we have longer oral histories, and these oral histories start with training, and they go all the way through D-Day and the end of the war, if they made it that long. But the first twenty-four

hours was that we felt was the most important part of the narrative. So we sliced that out of their oral histories. It might be three pages; it might be five pages. So we begin their stories with their words. Either right at midnight, or just before. You know, Rick Atkinson, whose well-known to all of you, talked to me recently about Cornelius Ryan and his famous *Longest Day*, and as you all know if you've read that book that he understood in the late 50s already the power of those personal testimonies, and he stitched a lot of them together to write that book. Now, this is no Cornelius Ryan *Longest Day*, but the point was, he got it right there, and he understood, and Ambrose picked up on that as well. So mostly we focus on the individual soldiers and sailor and airmen and those—in that twenty-four-hour period. And I want to say that our team at the museum curated the best of our oral histories. We have a couple thousand. There are forty-one stories here from Omaha, Pointe du Hoc, the airborne, naval stories. Then we surround those stories—there's about 150 photographs, many of them never seen before, that come out of our collection. There's about ninety images of artifacts and weapons and uniforms and things that surrounded the battles and the lives of the guys who took place. And they're about eleven newly developed and designed maps with one of the best mapmakers that does the West Point maps too. And we designed those, so when you're reading the stories and they mention certain places where they were fighting or where they landed when they parachuted in or when they hit the beaches, you're gonna be able to follow that from the maps and so forth. And the last thing that's unique about it, there's this wonderful website, DDayBook.com, and we have about eight or nine of the stories, the actual video histories, so if you've read one of the stories at Omaha Beach and you want to see that story, if we have that on the website you can go read that, and there's a whole treasure trove of other things on the website. So there are several things that make this book pretty special.

Havers: That's a great use of--innovative use of technology. We're all familiar with the novel *The Longest Day* and the movie "The Longest Day." It's still only twenty-four hours, however. How do you really get into that story of those twenty-four hours?

Mueller: Well, my narration or introductions to the book, and then there's an introduction to each chapter, and each chapter is like the airborne--airborne was in first, an hour or so, a few minutes after midnight. So this is when your heart starts beating. I want to get you inside those planes. Here they are flying, 900 of these C-47s flying wingtip to wingtip, coming across a Cotentin Peninsula. Heavy flak going in. Turns out about twenty-one of them crashed. They're flying low. It was tough going. But I want you inside the plane with those guys and hear what they were thinking before they went out the door. Similarly on the Battleship Nevada for example or any of the ships out there, the stories--these guys are offshore when the invasion starts, and what are they feeling? Whether they're below decks or manning one of the big guns on deck, and their impressions from there. And then if you're going beyond that you get to, of course, the famous going ashore here at Omaha Beach. Here they are going right out the door, and that's when the stories take off. And you're saying, your suspense of what this soldier sees as he's going to battle, and boats are getting blown up next to him, and guys are getting cut down as they wade ashore. This story is unsparing in some cases. It's hard reading, and you're gonna feel the violence and the chaos of the battle through their eyes. And so, getting inside the planes, inside the boats. And these guys wading ashore here, I mean, eighteen years old, now think of that, if you've got kids, grandkids. Eighteen, nineteen, twenty. One guy told us that it would have been my senior prom that night. Instead he's going into bloody Omaha. So these are powerful, powerful moments, personal accounts that as I said are surrounded--and sometimes the stories overlap. There's Grant Gullickson, who was a machinist mate on the USS Corry, the destroyer. And it hit a mine or was hit by German artillery fire off Utah Beach three minutes after H-

hour, it's like 6:33. So Gullickson is down below in the boiler room talking about getting hit. The ship was already sinking. By the time he gets up out of the hatch onto deck, the deck is already awash, it's going down so fast. He grabs a lifejacket, and he says, "I didn't have to jump over the side." He literally floated off of the ship. Meanwhile over on the Quincy is John Bradford, and he's on the counting tower--not the counting tower, the observation tower on the Quincy, and he's watching the Corry go down and seeing the guys come off, and he gives that kind of testimony. So at the same time, you've got the dueling guns—you've got the artillery from the shore from the German Groesbeck battery and all the ships blasting away at those shore batteries, and you've got these guys coming off of a sinking ship, and one guy telling you about floating off, and the other guy seeing it happen. It's pretty amazing stuff.

Havers: I mentioned at the beginning, there is a real poignancy in these accounts. And any historian is struck by these emotions, the feelings of these individuals, their experience, raw and on the day.

Mueller: Well, you're looking at the face of war here on the beach. This is a combat history through the eyes of the combatants, and chaos of the battle here. We're not talking about stories of the admirals or the generals that were offshore on the ships. I mean, they were looking at the battle through binoculars. They could imagine what was happening on Omaha and Utah, but they weren't there. What you're getting in these stories is the guys who were on those beaches and going through hell and seeing their buddies get killed left and right and ships blowing up and bodies floating by them, and one story talks about the landing craft next to him getting blown up and body parts come flying into their boat. So as I say, it's tough stuff. So there's fear, and the whole thing about this is the sensations of war and battle and that horrific encounter. And I hope that you'll feel when you read it that you understand what they were feeling, what they were thinking in the middle of that chaos. So the drama and tension are palpable and evident. And Eisenhower had a sense of what they were going to go into, just to look at before the battle the night before, he was worried about the airborne guys, so he's out there with the 101st airborne. He's talking to Wallace Strobel there, the lieutenant, right in front of him, and he was going out like a football coach to cheer them up, pump them up. He was worried because some of his generals were concerned about the airborne, thought they were gonna get slaughtered going into the Cotentin Peninsula. So he's out there trying to pump them up. Are you well trained, are you guys ready? And hey were all cheering, gung-ho and excited, and Wallace Strobel's gun you can see on his waist, we have that gun, and there's a picture of it in the book too. So there's a connection of the photographs to the actual stories that we tell. So, that's a pretty famous moment, and he just trying to cheer up the troops before they go. One guys says, "Why is he here? We're getting ready to get on the pane?" (Chuckles) So these guys are eighteen, nineteen, they're cocky, they're ready, they're trained. They're really well trained, these airborne guys and the rangers. They were so ready. Hitler, here we come. You know, it was--and Ike felt good about making that--but he knew that airborne were gonna suffer tremendous casualties, and so I think partly he wanted to be there because of his own feelings of guilt or worry that some of these guys were just not gonna come home.

Havers: Can you give us an example. I know you've got one particular story from Hal Baumgarten who went in on D-Day. Both Ambrose, Steven Spielberg used his account to help tell their stories of D-Day and of course "Saving Private Ryan." Baumgarten went in on the most harrowing part of Omaha Bloody Beach, as Rick Atkinson referred to it. You've got some special photos and a video clip I think that you can perhaps share with us this evening.

Mueller: Yeah, I'll give you a sense. There's a picture of Hal on the left when he was a young man, so here's an idea of here are these guys looked like, and there's the landing

craft going ashore there on D-Day. And you can see those guys huddled down there, they're huddled down around the bottom of that boat. I mean, you can see the guy standing up, so you know those guys were grabbing the bottom. And Hal was a good friend of Ambrose and mine--closer friend of Steve's going back to the mid-90s. And we had him at our grand opening on June 6, 2000, and he gave the talk to our dignitaries and officials at the banquet the night before, so he's always been very close to us. And he was in the first wave with the 29th infantry division, the 116th regiment that really got slaughtered, and his story picks up when he gets off of the Higgins landing craft, and he puts flesh and blood on this story. And it's a riveting story. He survived, ended up becoming a doctor. So he's good. We're gonna listen to Hal right here.

Baumgarten: When we started running across the beach we were about 500 yards out. So we're neck deep water. When we got to the actual beach we--the sand was wet and we were--tide was treacherous. It went out fast and came in fast, came in one inch a minute. So we hit the sand, we're running across sand at 300 yards out. So I landed--there's an artificial pier on that beach nowadays. It wasn't there on D-Day. I landed right where that artificial pier is, a little to the right of that one tank that was firing, so I was all the way on the western part of Dog Green sector. The next beach over was called Charlie Beach. That's where the rangers actually landed. They didn't land on Dog Green. But anyway there were a group of us running across the beach with our rifles at port arms, which is the rifle across your chest. When we got to about 135 yards away from the sea wall, a machine gun spray came from the trenches up on the bluff, and I heard a loud thud on my right front, and my rifle vibrated. I turned it over--there was a clean hole through its receiver, which is a little rectangular plate in front of the trigger guard. My seven bullets had stopped--in the magazine section--had stopped the German bullet. Another thud behind me to the left, and that guy was gone too. I hit the sand behind the hedgehog, which is about 130 yards from the sea wall, and I observed to my right Private Robert Ditmar, Fairfield, Connecticut, was yelling. He tripped over the hedgehog, spun completely around, lying on his back and yelling, "I'm hit, I'm hit. Mom, mother." And then he was silent. I looked over to my left and Sergeant Clarence Robeson, of Lynchburg, Virginia--I always mention their names and where they came from. I don't want people to forget about them. Clarence Robeson was staggering by me without his helmet, gaping hole in the left side of his forehead. His blond hair was streaked with blood. I was yelling, "Get down." This used to be my nightmares. I'd be yelling, "Get down," 'cause I never forgot that scene. I guess he couldn't hear me anyway. The noise on that beach was horrendous. All these shells coming in, flamethrowers blowing up with the guys getting on fire. Noise was tremendous.

Mueller: Well, Hal is not with us anymore, but passed away a couple years ago, but he was with us on our tours to Normandy and at the museum so many times. He was wounded three times on D-Day. Half his jaw was blown out. His cheek was, he says, over his ear, teeth were loose in his mouth. He made it to the beach the next day, still carrying on with all of those wounds, wounded twice more. So in a day and a half, wounded five times. And that was the end of his war. He was evacuated at that time. But these stories and others like them are what you get. I think you get a sense of that from Hal.

Havers: You of course talk about other parts of the battle, other parts of the day, other assaults. Your piece on Pointe du Hoc is fascinating. You do go beyond the first twenty-four hours in that piece. An amazing feat of arms, 200-foot cliffs, second-range battalion, heavily defended German positions, a mission to knock out 155mm guns, six of them on a bluff, commanding view of both beaches. Many generals and many officers thought a suicide mission. Did you discover something fresh about that particular piece of the battle?

Mueller: Yeah, I did. That's actually why I went beyond the two days. And of course it's a very famous Rudder's Rangers, Colonel Big Jim Rudder, who was the ranger colonel that had trained the second battalion in Tennessee and climbed every cliff in Tennessee and in England before going in, and his story is very well known. And he died before we ever got his oral history, but we have letters from his family that are in the book and his letters home. And so, but at the center of the drama for us is Len Lomell, a sergeant nicknamed Bud, and you can see the point in the cliffs, part in the cliffs there in the shadow is where they went up 200 feet, and only to find that the guns that were at the point there and that they were to knock out and take out, because these 155mm guns that they could see from the aerial photos had commanding views of Utah beach and the range to just destroy the landings there, and they could also reach the five kilometers to the east to the first parts of Omaha Beach. So this was, as you said, Rob, a suicide mission. These guys were so well trained and so well prepared they didn't think it was going to be a problem. But in any event Lomell becomes the star of this story. And let me just go through these maps. You can see them more in detail. But the far right side of that map where you see the orange, that's Omaha Beach and Pointe du Hoc is right there in the orange section right in the middle there, and you see those arrows coming to shore there, and that long dotted line that goes across left to right, right to left is the coastal road about a kilometer back behind the point. So that was the second objective. The guns were the first part of the objective, and getting that coastal road. Because far to the left of that map you see those big orange emplacements over there. That was Grandcamp, and there was big German troop installations there, and they could provide reinforcements in any direction, but they had to sue those coastal road. So my thought was to really go beyond, because Lomell gets up to the top of the cliffs and sees the guns are not there, so what does he do? And I'll jump you to the next map, and you all can see the point, and you can see where those--at the top right of the photograph, you can see where those boats landed. That's where they went up the cliffs, those little round dots there at the point, those orange dots, those were where the six guns were supposed to be. The big ones. And they were fierce fighting at the top of the cliff once they got on top. And they got there late. That was part of the problem. They were supposed to be there at 6:30, and there was an error in navigation, so they didn't get there until 7:10 in the morning, forty minutes after the bombardments stopped, so the Germans were out of the bunkers and ready for the rangers when they came up, and they were dropping the grenades down. They had infiltrating fire from the machine guns, and nevertheless they, Lomell and Dog Company got to the top in about ten minutes, if you can believe it, in the midst of heavy fire coming down on top of them. So despite all those setbacks, which we cover a little bit in the book, he's taken the offensive right away. As a ranger, he says, "The guns aren't here. Second mission, get back and get to that coastal road back there." And that coastal road on the map you're looking at is that horizontal road going from left to right that goes to the German insulations on the left side of the map and over to Omaha Beach on the right side. And you can see they found this little lane when they got to the costal road, and it's on the right side. It looks like a road. It's not a road, it's double hedgerows. And they got there, they set up their perimeter with Dog Company, EZ Company, and Fox--D, E, and F were set up. And so Len Lomell and his buddy Jack Kuhn chopped back this hedgerow because they saw some heavy tracks going in there. Maybe the guns were hauled back there, and sure enough they got back and they found the guns. Believe it or not, no Germans were around them. The Germans were over at a farmhouse about 150 yards away. And so they got out their thermite grenades, and they spiked a couple. They ran back to the road where the rest of the company, got some more thermite grenades, came back, spiked the rest of them so they couldn't use their traversing or their elevation

mechanisms to sight, and they were perfectly sighted on Utah Beach. Now, I went to that spot with a French guide about a year and a half ago. He had never been. It's hard to get to because it's in--a French farmer owns it, but we made up a story and got there. I mean, the view of Omaha--of Utah Beach from there, it would devastate. Now he got there, spiked those guns at 8:30. So mission number one was done by 8:30. Mission number two was done by quarter of eight that morning when they got to the coastal road. And they set up this perimeter. It's kind of an L-shaped perimeter. You can see the bottom left of that map where the German counterattacks were coming, so that was what was fresh and new for me, Rob. It was the fighting, the hand-to-hand fighting that went on. The Germans knew how critical it was to get that road open so they could reinforce Omaha Beach, and Lomell and his three companies, they stuck in there, and they fought them off every night. And the rangers that were supposed to come over from Omaha Beach with John Raaen, Captain Raaen and the 5th ranger headquarters didn't get there until the morning of the 8th, so these three companies were holding out against the best the Germans could throw at them. And it was a decisive action, like Pegasus Bridge and the airborne at La Fiere. It was one of those decisive actions. And Lomell says in the book, you'll read it, he says, "We destroyed those guns so they could not be used and got back to our roadblock. We fought there for two days and then were relieved. We had heavy casualties. I think out of sixty-five men, I had fifteen men left. Those of us who did survive of course were just plain lucky." Of 225 rangers in the 2nd battalion, ninety of them walked off Pointe du Hoc two days later.

Havers: That's serious stuff, which sort of segues nicely into the simple fact that many of these stories are derived from letters and artifacts from men who clearly expressed their fear of what was coming, of death, and even those who were actually killed in action.

Can you speak to some of this material a little bit, Nick?

Mueller: Yeah. This is on the personal side. Here's Lieutenant Gordon Auslin that you're looking at. He was a coast guard artillery corps. He didn't make it, but he wrote this letter, and the artifact of this is in the book. And I won't read it all to you. Beautiful handwriting, but he wrote this on June 3, 1944 to his wife who he called Chickee, and he says, "To my beautiful wife Chickee. And he goes on and says, "It's almost midnight on June 3rd. I want you to remember that date. I'm going to get my first real test as an officer very shortly, Sweet, and I don't know just exactly how I will react to it, but at the present I am very calm and not the least bit nervous. As I said before, Chickee, when you get this letter it will be old news, and you will know what the score is. Honey, I'm with a wonderful bunch of men, and they're all in the best of spirits, and morale is high. And then, "Honey, it's getting late. I'm a little sleepy. I love you. Always will. Yours forever, Your husband Gordon." And then he says, a little human note here, "P.S. If anything should happen to me honey, please pay HJ the twenty-five dollars I owe him."

(Laughter)

Mueller: But he says, "Don't do it, though, unless something prevents me from doing it." Sad thing is that she had to do it. So, those kind of personal stories I think along with the combat stories really make this special, so very typical of many of the letters and comments that you'll find in the book.

Havers: We--looking back seventy-five years, we know the significance of the events of that day. Is the evidence that you uncovered-- letters, diaries--that indicate that the men themselves were aware of the enormity of what they were doing, their role in that?

Mueller: Yeah, a lot of them are very aware. They knew they were fighting Hitler. They knew they were fighting for freedom, their country. That's pretty powerful stuff. Some more than others. So it's different. And not all of them are terribly reflective at the end of their stories. They were doing their job. They were lucky, they said, all of them. And the real heroes are the ones that didn't make it back. But there was one, I mentioned earlier,

John Raaen with the 5th ranger headquarters, he was one of the reinforcement group that was supposed to come in Pointe du Hoc with reinforcements once Rudder got on top and sent a signal out by 7:30. The plan was, if there was no signal you divert with one of the companies of the 2nd battalion, and you go in alongside Hal Baumgarten on Omaha Beach and then come over land by that coastal road and provide the reinforcements. They thought that that could be done even on that day. In any event, so he went over and went into Omaha, and his story is in there. And he's the only officer, living officer, today who was on Omaha Beach and on D-Day. All the other officers have long since passed, and I've had the privilege of having him in Normandy with me on a number of occasions, interviewed him several times, and he talks about that afterwards, and let me just--

Raaen: As I think I told you, from what I've seen we met with nothing but military success. And we did in fact relieve the 2nd battalion, and we did in fact get all the way through Maisy and captured the artillery batteries they had there, and there were three of them. Sometimes you can count a fourth, but it doesn't really matter. And militarily it was a great success. It certainly was a giant step toward unseating Hitler. And the success on my side, which ended up with the capture of Saint Lo of the 29th division, it all depended upon the fact that the 5th ranger battalion landed in tact. We were a major fighting force. Nobody was able to stop us. We brushed them right out of the way. Now, we had help from the tanks. We had help from artillery. Don't kid yourself. We had lots of help on D-plus-one and D-plus-two, but still their main thing was a ranger battalion, well trained, intact. We just brushed right by the enemy opposition.

Mueller: So that's John Raaen, great story.

Havers: Great story indeed. Nick, you've lived with this museum for twenty-eight years, lived with these D-Day stories even longer. What do you take away from all this? What is your thinking about the battle, what it meant for the world, the United States? What does it mean for you personally, professionally?

Mueller: Well, obviously, twenty-eight years of my life tied up with this, so sort of a second career, so it's meant a tremendous amount to me personally to be immersed in these stories. But on the larger scale in the big tapestry of D-Day and WWII, D-Day and WWII, it was a fight for freedom and democracy, and it was a great crusade. Eisenhower even couched that use of the word in its almost religious terms as a fight for freedom-loving people against fascism and totalitarianism. And I think I come away from this always, every time you read these stories and see people like John Raaen and Hal talk, it's--you get the feeling they knew why they were fighting, what they were fighting for, and they were prepared to die for their country to defeat fascism. The home front was behind them, too. You're aware of that. They were aware of it. Everybody was united, and you come away from that great feeling of national unity. We're all in this together, as you know, was the mantra. And the guys on the warfront felt the strength of the home front behind them. And so I hope that *Everything We Have*, this book will give the readers an appreciation for the values and the spirit and the courage, the sense of duty and the modesty, I think too, of these troops in the heat of the battle. Their voices are authentic. There's no pretense about what the--there's no politics. After seventy-five years, I think their legacy is clear not only to our country but to the world. And I think they'd want their memory of what they did on D-Day and WWII to give meaning to our lives. I mean, they answered the big questions for their generation and left us with the big questions for our own generation. I mean, we all--when you read these stories, you think, could I have done that? Would I have done that? Would I have? What did it mean? Was it really a battle for freedom, democracy? It was just another military victory. Then when you read these stories you'll know the answer. And you think about all of our presidents from Roosevelt to Truman to Eisenhower and Johnson and Kennedy,

Reagan, all the way up to Bush '41, these are all WWII veterans. And they all were carrying the beacon of freedom and human rights and democracy. For the first time in '45 we always believed in those values, we always did in this country, but these presidents, WWII veterans said we're gonna defend these values around the world, and we called that the Pax Americana. So we extended those values and beliefs at home and abroad. And I think that's much of what this means to me, and so in the end I think this book, the National WWII Museum, and the quest that really began with Stephen Ambrose continues to pay tribute I think to the citizen soldiers who went ashore at bloody Omaha, Utah, Point du Hoc, the airborne, the ships, the bombers, all of it. So one final note as inspiration, and I think everybody in this room is familiar with President Reagan, who stood at Pointe du Hoc. That's where he is right at the tip of the point there in 1984 on the 40th anniversary of D-Day, where many of the rangers were sitting in front of him there on the left who were still alive on that day, and those people and all of us today continue to honor what happened there. And just let me quote this one couple sentences here from President Reagan's speech. He said, "We're here to mark that day in history when the Allied armies joined in the battle to reclaim this continent for liberty. For four long years much of Europe had been under a terrible shadow. Free nations had fallen; Jews cried out in the camps, millions cried for its rescue. Here in Normandy the rescue began. Here the Allies stood and fought against tyranny and a giant undertaking, unparalleled in human history."

Havers: Wow. Powerful stuff indeed. Nick Mueller, fantastic performance. Thank you so much.

(Applause)

Havers: We have time for a few questions from the floor. Ladies and gentlemen, if you have a question, please raise your hand, and a microphone will come to you.

1: I was talking last night with someone, and we agreed that Americans come together. We're from everywhere in the world, and that makes us strong. We have the talents and the abilities of the whole world. Do you think that if we were challenged like they were in WWII, and also back in the Civil War. Why did those soldiers keep fighting? And medicine wasn't what it is today. If they got shot, they might not make it. Get--lose a leg, it'd have to be cut off maybe while they were conscious. What's your feeling? Would Americans come together to meet a big challenge today, as diverse as we are?

Mueller: Well, we're pretty divided right now, but to answer the same way that Steve Ambrose always did, he said, "Yes, hell yes, this country would come together." Now, I would say as a--we need to teach more history in our high schools and our colleges. We need to understand--

(Applause)

Mueller: --places like the Pritzker Museum and Library and our museum, and we're all reaching out across the country to schools and teachers. We need to know our history. We need to remember the values that make us great. But I think deep down this country is a great country, always will be. And I think the country would come together if we feel the threat is as palpable and as dramatic as it was in 1941. Now, the one problem we had in the 30s is we became--we were in a great depression, had isolationist sentiments. We didn't want to be in that war. We wanted to withdraw from the world, and we were totally unprepared. We were ranked 17th in the world. We were not anywhere in strategic locations in the world where we could respond. We didn't have the manpower. We barely passed the draft by one vote a year before the war. So we weren't prepared. We did not project our power around the world, and so that was a big lesson that we have learned from WWII, and so it's--we've got to have the fighting spirit of our young people, but we've also got to be vigilant. Democracy is always under threat,

freedom is under threat, human rights are under threat, and we just can't go to sleep on those things.

Havers: Absolutely. Any more questions?

2: There was a pipeline, I understand, laid from the Isle of White, I think to the Normandy area called Pluto. How long after the landings was that pipeline in service to the forces that were landed, or in other words, how long did they go without that?

Mueller: Well, yeah, PLUTO is pipeline under the ocean, is what it stands for, and coming from Louisiana, oil and gas country, we had a lot of guys that were up there building that pipeline, Pluto, and it was a very important to the forward movement of the troops beyond the beachhead and pushing on through Normandy into Paris, and they had to keep the oil flowing, and that was one way of doing it. They brought it by ships and tankers too, but the pipeline was farsighted plan, technologically really important too.

2: So how long after?

Mueller: Well, I think it continued, I'm not sure, once they got to Belgium and the Battle of the Bulge and beyond that they had other means of getting into ports with oil supplies, so I couldn't put a date right on when they stopped using it.

Havers: Ladies and gentlemen, Nick Mueller, thank you so much once again.

(Applause)

Havers: Thank you to Nick Mueller for a great discussion, and thank you also to the National WWII Museum for sponsoring this program of *Pritzker Military Presents*. The book is *Everything We Have: D-Day 6.6.'44*, published by London-based Carleton Books with distribution in America through Sterling Publishing. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit us in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

Voiceover: On its 75th anniversary, D-Day +75 opens at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. More than just a day, D-Day was the result of great coordination and cooperation, but that success came at a cost. Learn more at PritzkerMilitary.org/d-day-75.

(Theme music)

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(Theme music)

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