



Text Version of Audio Story: Piper

If we were going to win ... if we were going to liberate Europe from a madman ... If we were to going to save the world, Allied Forces were going to have to go ashore. The price would be high, very high. But Hitler had to be stopped.

Steven Spielberg masterfully recreated the storming of the beaches at Normandy in the opening 25 minutes of “Saving Private Ryan.” So masterfully that if people didn’t believe Spielberg was one of the greatest storytellers of all times, they certainly would after seeing those scenes.

I, of course, was not at Normandy, but I’ve interviewed many men who were and they all agree. Spielberg was the first moviemaker, and probably the last, to ever properly give justice to that horrific day, June 6, 1944, D-Day.

The British, Russians and Americans went ashore in amphibious landing crafts. The doors from the crafts would fall forward, and men would plunge into the cold surf making their way to shore under heavy enemy fire. Many were shot dead before reaching the beach. Hence the term *dead in the water*.

A landing craft led by Britain’s Lord Lovat and containing his Green Beret commandos, the 51st Highlanders, struggled ashore. In droves, the commandos splashed into the cold surf following the lead of Highlander Billy Millin.

The British High Command did not want Billy to lead troops at D-Day. They were afraid Billy’s presence would draw too much enemy fire. But Lord Lovat would disobey the order. He knew that Billy had what it took to stir the souls of the Green Beret Highlanders, to stir their souls to fight for the liberation of Europe. He knew that, set to the music of 21-year-old Billy Millin’s bagpipes, the Highlanders would fight to the end.

Billy splashed into the water as the only man to proudly wear a kilt at D-Day. The same kilt his father had worn while a piper in the First World War. Billy didn’t wear a helmet; instead, he proudly donned his Green Beret. As his fellow commandos — many falling dead — captured the cliffs, Billy played the road to the Isles.

The British regrouped and moved forward toward their inland orders — reinforcement to the Americans at Pegasus Bridge. The Americans under heavy

fire could hardly believe their eyes or ears as they watched Billy Millin and his bagpipes, with Lord Lovat at his side, leading the Highlanders toward their position. Ignoring the bullets smacking the ground directly in front of them, Lord Lovat and Billy, with the Highlanders, moved steadfastly forward. As they reached the bridge, Lord Lovat humbly apologized to his American allies. *“Oh, I say, would you be good chaps and forgive us, as we are shamefully several minutes late.”*

The Allied Forces would go on to victory that day and later triumph in liberating all of Europe.

There were many heroes at Normandy, many young boys who would never be the same after witnessing the unspeakable. Many lives would end, so that the world could be free.

In January 2001, Billy Millin donated his kilt, his bagpipes and his special forces Green Beret to the National War Museum of Scotland. In 1995, he played the bagpipes at the funeral of an old friend. The stirring of Billy’s music brought hauntings of heartache and, yet, feelings of pride. No words could say what Billy Millin’s bagpipes could, as he played at the funeral of his old friend and wartime commander, Lord Lovat.

At the time of this writing, Billy Millin, who played himself in the 1962 film, *“The Longest Day,”* is alive and well and living in Scotland. He is 79 years old.

I’m the American Storyteller.