

## D for Desecration: A giant off-shore windfarm's being built overlooking the D-Day beaches where Allied troops died liberating Europe. How can this be right?

By [Robert Hardman](#)

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Even after numerous visits, in all weathers and at all times of year, it never fails to move me — to make me pause for reflection.

Whether it's the vast remnants of the Mulberry defences sprouting from the Channel at Arromanches or the stirring emptiness of Omaha Beach, this stretch of the Normandy coast — between the ports of Cherbourg and Le Havre — is, to my mind, hallowed ground.

Of all the battlefields of northern Europe, this is, arguably, the most important of them all.



**Normandy Beach June 6 1944: Of all the battlefields of northern Europe, this is, arguably, the most important of them all, says Robert Hardman**

It lacks the shocking senselessness of the Western Front, of the Menin Gate in Ypres, the Thiepval Memorial at the Somme and all those heartbreaking Great War cemeteries in between.

It did not mark a resounding finale to an entire epoch of war like the Battle of Waterloo.

And it must sound pretty rum to a veteran of Dunkirk or the Battle of Britain, or anywhere else for that matter, to make any distinction between any actions in what was, simply, a heroic fight for national survival.

Nonetheless, D-Day remains, I believe, the single most audacious, brilliant and pivotal moment in the history of modern democracy. It was the day when the free world gambled everything on a surprise punch in the face of totalitarianism. And it worked.



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**A steel plantation of 100 wind turbines is to be plonked offshore in the area where the Allied landcraft gathered**

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It is why D-Day — unlike any other anniversary — continues to bring the world leaders together in homage to what was achieved on June 6, 1944. For the 50th anniversary it was Messrs Clinton, Major and Mitterrand, not to mention Jean Chretien, prime minister of gallant Canada (whose troops actually advanced farther than anyone else on D-Day).

For the 60th, it was Bush, Blair and Chirac, for the 65th, Obama, Brown and Sarkozy. The sight of thousands of old boys marching past their Queen on the sands of Arromanches in 1994 will remain a lifelong memory for anyone who was there.

It certainly will for me.

And that is why I feel profoundly uneasy about plans to add a new feature to this historic coastline — a colossal wind farm.

Under plans approved by President Sarkozy only this month, a steel plantation of 100 wind turbines is to be plonked offshore in the very area where the Allied landcraft gathered for their murderous run-in to the shore.

It will be around seven miles out, we are told, but clearly visible and closest to Juno Beach, the six-mile front which was liberated by the Canadians with help from our own Royal Marines.

It will also be visible from all the other Allied landing zones along this coast — Gold, Sword, Utah and, of course, bloody Omaha Beach.

Needless to say, it has infuriated locals and veterans alike. 'A disgusting affair,' was the verdict of Canadian veteran Jack Martin, a visitor to the Juno Beach memorial. 'I saw so many buddies die on Juno Beach that I figure it is very hallowed ground.'

Farther along the coast at Arromanches, which has become a focal point for British veterans, there is plenty of local opposition.

Hervé Texier, who runs a local environmental group called FED (Federation Environnement Durable), is deeply sceptical of government claims that the project will have little impact.

'When local officials tell us that the wind turbines will not be any more visible than pin heads, and that they will even bring tourism to the area, then you know the situation is serious,' he says.

'How is it that you won't be able to see 100 machines almost 200 metres high, with blades which rotate in the sun and which will reflect on the water?'



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**The turbines will be around seven miles out but clearly visible and closest to Juno Beach, pictured, which was liberated by the Canadians and our Royal Marines**

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Some members of the Lower Normandy regional council have now resurrected a campaign to get the D-Day beaches classified as a Unesco world heritage site, a move which would force the wind turbines elsewhere.

This is a corner of France which suffered terribly in the Allied invasion, but which remains eternally grateful to the liberators.

Gérard Lecornu, president of the Port Winston Churchill Association of Arromanches, wants nothing to detract from the iconic remnants of the Mulberry Harbour — an entire IKEA-style port which was towed across the Channel and assembled under enemy fire. Without it, the Normandy landings would almost certainly have failed.

'We can see Le Havre perfectly in front of us, and that's 52 kilometres [32 miles] away,' says Lecornu, pointing out that the wind turbines will ruin the view.

'As for the remains of the Mulberry Harbour built by the Allies, they are 18 metres high and situated just two kilometres from the coast, and we can see them perfectly, even in heavy seas.

'At stake is the industrialisation of our coastline, and the possible loss of millions of visitors every year.'

Even as the rain was bucketing down on Arromanches this week, you could see miles out to sea. Hundreds of visitors stared out into the distance, some using binoculars or special telescopes set along the coastline by the local council.



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The turbines will also be visible from all the other Allied landing zones along this coast - Gold, Sword, Utah and, of course, bloody Omaha Beach - pictured

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'It's certainly a view which is timeless,' says Charles Hodge, a 52-year-old American from Norfolk, Virginia, who is on holiday with his wife and three young children.

'I've been here a few times in the past and the atmosphere never changes. Sticking a wind farm out in the sea nearby would be a terrible thing to do — it would alter the entire character of the place.'

It must be said that there are veterans who are not bothered about the plans or who believe they have no right to tell the French where to put their wind farms. Of course, it is easy to become over-sentimental about an area which was smashed to pieces less than 70 years ago and much of which is a newly-built industrial area.

The area around Pegasus Bridge, the famous canal crossing captured by the glider-borne men of the Ox and Bucks, is full of commercial estates.

But the Normandy invasion beaches are a very special bit of Europe. They are unquestionably French territory but, in a sense, many nations have a stake in them.

And that is why this eco-development sends out an important message. If modish environmental dogma takes priority over our most important heritage sites, then a precedent has been set.



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Omaha Beach today. The move to build wind turbines has infuriated locals and war veterans

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These wind turbines could have been moved to another part of this breezy coast — the French government has plans for some 1,200 of them along its Atlantic and Channel seaboard — but ministers and officials have made it clear that eco-development trumps history.

So do not be surprised if, in the years ahead, we see gentle incursions into more and more previously sacred spots.

It will become that much easier, say, to pave over trenches and build an 'eco-town' on the Somme.

And if France can do that, what's to stop, say, the Belgians planting wind turbines alongside the poppies in Flanders fields?

In Britain, canny landowners and exploiters of the lucrative grants system for all things green will be feeling a little more cocksure this week.

After all, if you can plonk a thicket of heavily subsidised pylons next to the greatest battlefield in modern history — all in the name of saving the planet, of course — what's to stop you covering your own backyard?

But some of these old boys are not going down without a fight. Arromanches resident and wind farm opponent Jean-Louis Butré is pleased to report plenty of fighting talk.

'I even had one RAF pilot say that he was prepared to bomb the windmills if they went ahead with the plan,' he says. 'I think he was joking.'

[www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2019599/Giant-windfarms-built-overlooking-D-Day-beaches-How-right.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2019599/Giant-windfarms-built-overlooking-D-Day-beaches-How-right.html)