There is no better explanation of *The Longest Day*.

*The Longest Day*, released in 1959, is a tremendous success. Cornelius Ryan’s writing style of drawing on numerous first-person accounts was emulated in another book.

Ryan received tens of thousands of letters reacting to *The Longest Day*. Many ask for information...
There is no better explanation of Ryan's concept and style than that offered by Ryan in a letter to a literature professor at Antioch College in Ohio.
*The Longest Day*, released in 1959, is a tremendous success. It is critically acclaimed and widely read first in a condensed *Reader's Digest* version, then as a full-length book. More than 25 million copies are printed in at least 28 languages, and it was re-released recently to mark the 50th anniversary. Ryan noted with surprise that as many women as men seemed to enjoy the book. They discovered not a dry military history, but some of the best descriptions of the emotions of combat. It helped them understand the profound war experiences of their friends, husbands and sons.
Cornelius Ryan's writing style of drawing on numerous first-person accounts was emulated in another book on D-Day released in 1994 by historian Stephen Ambrose. Thirty-five years after *The Longest Day*, Ambrose acknowledged that Ryan's book remains a "superb account of the battle."
Ryan received tens of thousands of letters reacting to *The Longest Day*. Many ask for information he might have on missing loved ones. A few even ask for current addresses of wayward spouses whose adventures are noted in the book.

One fan letter is from oil company president and later U.S. President George Bush.
At precisely fifteen minutes after midnight on June 6, 1944, a few specially chosen men of the American 101st and 82nd airborne divisions stepped out of their planes into the moonlit sky over Normandy. Thus began the day that would forever be known as D Day. Here are a few moments from Cornelius Ryan's magnificent bestselling recreation of

THE LONGEST DAY

On Omaha Beach
1 p.m. After hours of inch-by-inch advance, Gen. George A. Taylor radioed his war-weary, battle-shocked men: "Two kinds of people are staying on this beach, the dead and those who are going to die. Now let's get the hell out of here."

-Sgt. Bill Courtney of the 29th Rangers climbs on the top of a ridge and yells: "Come on up! The N. S. H. are cleaned out". Immediately there is a burst of machine gun fire on his left. Courtney wheels, hurls a couple of grenades and yells again. "Come on! Come on! The N. S. H. are cleaned out now..."

and later, on the bluffs above, a captain and a private using a machine gun nest manned by three Germans. Suddenly one of the German's desks dives and yells "Birra, birra, birra!" The captain fires, killing all three, then turns to the private and says "I wonder what he meant?"

Ovation!
1. From the nation's press (a small sampling of the uncensored accolades)

"A remarkable story. One of the most moving and lucid histories of all books out of World War II." - Chicago Times

"Incomparable story of an unforgettable day." - World-Herald

2. From the D Day generals

"Magnificent...an unforgettable day." - Gen. Mark W. Clark

"Magnificent...a brilliant and inspiring story..." - Maj. Gen. Darius A. Suski

"Extremely well written, a stirring story of resolve, heroism, and sacrifice." - Col. John M. Flood, Book Editor, Army Times

"This book will read long after the memory of the momentous day it is brilliantly recreates." - Col. John M. Flood, Book Editor, Army Times

Illustrated. $4.95 at all bookstores.
D-DAY
JUNE 6, 1944:
THE CLIMACTIC BATTLE OF WORLD WAR II

STEPHEN E. AMBROSE
AUTHOR OF EISENHOWER
Mr. Cornelius Ryan  
230 E. 48th St.  
New York, N.Y.

Dear Connie:

It has been a long time since our paths have crossed. Yesterday morning at the airport I picked up your terrific book and yesterday evening I was almost through it. I never thought I would be writing a fan letter to a reprobate such as you but I must say that I don't believe I ever enjoyed reading a book more. I think in this day and age many of us are inclined to view all of our international problems without due consideration to the human aspects of a total war. We have short memories in this connection. Your forthright and sensitive treatment of D-Day is going to be crammed down the throats of each of my four boys as soon as they are old enough to digest the importance of this fine book.

The offshore business is rocking along. Actually things have improved somewhat and today our business is better than it has been in anytime during the last three or four years. Our stock is acting rather doggy but I like to think that part of this at least is due to the generally sad oil market. I note with some satisfaction that you are still a stockholder.

Incidentally I read in the paper that your old acquaintance from the Cork Club, Glen McCarthy, is on his way to New York to be at the side of his brother who is to be sentenced from some type of felonious act. Perhaps you and Glen will have a chance to renew your acquaintance.

If you ever plan a trip to Houston please save time to visit with the Bush family. We have an extra bed and it has your name on it. We moved down here just about a year ago after eleven years in West Texas. Once again let me say how much I enjoyed "The Longest Day". Great book.

Very truly yours,

George H. W. Bush
five years before. What struck me most was what had the Germans
thought when they looked down from their defenses when the Allies
swarmed ashore? Conversely, I could not help but think of what our
men must have thought when they gazed up at the ferocious defenses
of the Germans towering on the bluffs above them. I found later one
simple answer - that there was an umbilical cord between both the
attacker and attacked and it could be described in one word: fear.
I think it was on that day, June 5, 1949, that I decided to write
"The Longest Day." I had no idea what form it would take, what
characterization, or what its name might be. But I did wonder whether
I might not be able to find existing documents, read them and then,
having learned officially what occurred, interview whatever survivors
I could find from both sides to see if those documents were correct.

No words of mine can tell you of the anguish I went through
over the next 10 years. Documents had been misplaced or lost. In
some cases, no records at all had ever been kept. In some interviews,
men had seen too many movies and had won the war all by themselves.
Hardly one interview out of every 10 could be believed. I never found
a single man who could tell me whether the water was warm or cold when
he landed on Omaha Beach. Nor did I find a soldier, Allied or German,
who, in the best Hollywood tradition, prayed during the moment of
battle. So much for all that. I spent years putting the material
together. Once finished, I set out to write. The story was bigger
than I could tell. Consciously or subconsciously, I was forced back
to the simplistic method that I had long ago tried in Israel. There
was no plan as you put it to, "Take a momentous event that occurred
over a short time period. Capsulate within it a mass of people in-
volved, great and small, of widely different perspectives and positions.
Then, as if to regain bulk, follow their separate actions moment by
moment. Shift scenes rapidly; backtrack in time to catch simultaneous
episodes; mix in liberal quantities of facts for an unquestionable
flavor of authority. Suspense will somehow be maintained even when
the outcome is well known, and the final product will usually be a
big book - for example, "The Longest Day," Cornelius Ryan's recounting
of the Allied invasion on June 6, 1944."

While I am most grateful to you for presenting what you be-
lieved to be my formula, I must say to you in all seriousness that
if a formula was developed, it came that way by chance, not by design.

Some professional historians have very nearly suggested
that I plotted the book like a Whodunit. If I had been asked to ex-
plain how the book was written or what style was used, I could not
honestly have answered. I simply let it flow the way I felt it must
go.

The day I handed in "The Longest Day" manuscript, I walked
across to The Reader's Digest and asked them for an assignment. I
did not think about whether "The Longest Day" would achieve any worth-
while success. I felt only that I had researched that day and its
participants more thoroughly - with a view to both sides of the con-


[Note: The rest of the text is not visible in the image.]
afraid, as a professional that, without my intent, I may have
spawned a breed of "instant histories."

It has been implied by other professional historians that
quotes were simply made up in "The Longest Day" and "The Last Battle." It seems not to matter that I have never changed a quote, a fact or
an event in any book I have written. Yet, some professionals prefer
not to accept me as a working historian because I do not stud my books
with thousands of anecdotes and footnotes that have little, if any,
relevance. I have no desire to build up an academic ego by doing so.
Let that remain the prerogative of other professional historians who
attempt to write contemporary history. Perhaps I am simply a story
teller who has taken the true facts, put them together and let the
story tell itself. Certainly I have not set myself up as a writer
in the sense of those great chroniclers of the past.

I hope you will forgive this long letter. Yet, I felt im-
pelled to set my record straight so I must emphasize once again that
nothing I have ever written was designed by formula. If there is a
style, I'd like to think it was derived from the action and the people
I write about. Certainly I developed nothing to fit history into
some scheme of my own.

Best wishes,

[Signature]

Cornelius Ryan

P.S. Under separate cover I am sending you two autographed copies
of "The Longest Day" and "The Last Battle." Additionally, I'm in-
cluding a little book of articles written some years ago and put out
in book form. They were perhaps the only real apprenticeship to
the form of writing which so often today is called the "Ryan Style."
British participants, their names, the difficulties of translation and language interpretation— all these created confusion, not only for me but for the reader whom I was trying to inform. I felt that the reader could never get the sense or smell of the agonies that were taking place in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, etc. What I was trying to do, therefore, if we may call this manner of writing "style," was to place myself "within" the very conflict that was taking place, shifting from one side to the other to try and produce an over-all picture within the ambiance and context of what was happening.

I must tell you that, at the beginning, when I tried a form of writing so simple that it was simplistic my editors did not look at the style with any great favor. My cables were not used to any great extent by Time and they certainly were not used by The London Daily Telegraph whom I also represented. Although I wrote thousands of words my batting average, from their standpoint, was extremely low. In a nutshell it could be said that neither The Telegraph nor Time enjoyed this "style."

Many critics, in reading and reviewing my books, have either commented on the amount of money I have made or they have talked about the so-called "Ryan Style." My God, I never devised one. I never thought there was one. And I wrote the only way I knew how, which was to tell what was happening with the utmost accuracy as though the reader was actually there watching it himself.

I have never considered myself an historian in the academic sense although others have been kind enough to do so. I am aware that I have rocked the historians' boats. Too many professional historians are remote, rewriting the works of others, rarely doing any original research of their own. Not that I blame them. It costs so much money to do original research that the average professional historian, who is generally teaching at a college, has neither the time nor the finances to indulge himself in such an exercise but the result is too often repetitive propaganda. I have seen it, as I'm sure you have done, at first hand. I grew up in Ireland, and finished my education in England and elsewhere. I can say, in all sincerity, that I know of no Irish history that is absolutely accurate. The theory of the history written about events in the land of my birth seem to boil down to this: when a fact becomes a legend, use the legend. I remember discovering in my student days that the version of what happened to Ireland in English histories bore no resemblance whatsoever to what I had learned reading Irish histories. Was it possible that there were actually two sets of histories to suit two national prides? I began to see that history was not really an art form but rather an extension of foreign policy and patriotism. In those days I did not think too much about a time when one day I, too, would be faced with the problems of trying to put on paper the minutiae and curiosities of events.

In 1949, five years after the invasion of Normandy, I found myself walking along Omaha Beach kicking up pieces of shrapnel, looking at rusting hawsers—the flotsam and jetsam of a terrible day
November 3, 1970

Mr. Robert Maurer
Literature Department
Antioch College
Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387

Dear Mr. Maurer:


In the review you touched upon an observation that has often been made in the time since "The Longest Day" first appeared in November 1959, i.e. you referred to "one formula at least is set...etc." I suppose, in a sense, the writing of "The Longest Day" does indeed look formulaized but there was never any intention on my part to create a formula nor was I aware in writing the book that I was setting what has now become a kind of "style."

I note that you are attached to the Literature Department of Antioch College where, I must assume, contemporary writers and how they work come under some discussion. For the very first time I should like to set down a few thoughts about "The Longest Day" and its successor, "The Last Battle" which (you may or may not know) were the first and fifth volumes of a five-volume series, the last three of which I am now writing. I am currently at work on Volume 2, "A Bridge Too Far." It carries on where "The Longest Day" left off and tells the story of Operation Market-Garden and the tragedy of the British in their failure to get the bridge at Arnhem on the Lower Rhine, thus the title, "A Bridge Too Far."

It is curious to me that, although I have written some 8 books, "The Longest Day" is largely the one remembered. "The Last Battle," in my opinion, is better -- more mature, more important. If there was a style of writing used in either of those books I must say to you at the onset that I was unaware of it. If, however, for the sake of semantics, we must use the word "style," then it took me something like 15 years to develop. What I was really trying to do, then and now, was simplify history.

In truth, this manner of writing began for me when I was running Time Magazine's bureau in Israel in 1947-1948. Somehow I felt unable to create the atmosphere of the fighting there by straight reporting. The very names of the villages, the Jewish, Arab, and