

May 28, 2019

Defense Primer: 75th Anniversary of D-Day, June 6, 1944

June 6, 2019, marks the 75th anniversary of the historic amphibious landing by Allied Forces on the coast of Normandy, France, on June 6, 1944, during World War II (1939-1945). D-Day marked the beginning of the Allied campaign to liberate Europe from Nazi Germany.

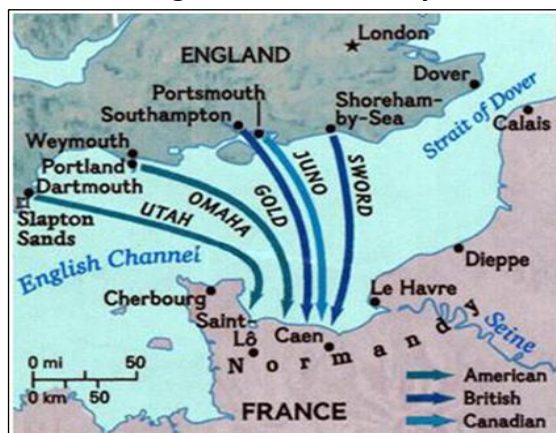
What is the “D” in D-Day?

The “D” in D-Day is the designation for the first day of any important invasion or military operation. The days before and after a D-Day are indicated using minus and plus signs, (i.e., D-1 means one day before (June 5) while D+7 means seven days after D-Day (June 13)).

D-Day Preparation and Operations

At the Tehran Conference in August 1943, Allied leaders decided that a cross channel assault was crucial to defeat Nazi Germany. In January 1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower became Supreme Allied Commander and took charge of Operation OVERLORD, the codename given to the combined land, naval and air operation. Tens of thousands of troops, with equipment and supplies, gathered in England in preparation for the assault.

Figure 1. D-Day Embarkation Ports in England and Beach Designations in Normandy, France



Source: DOD, Map from the U.S. Army Transportation Museum.

By May 1944, after considerable deliberation among Allied leaders, Normandy in northwestern France was chosen because of its proximity to the British coast and because it provided an element of surprise. Code named FORTITUDE, the deception operation prior to D-Day convinced the Germans that the Allied invasion was to be at the Pas-de-Calais directly opposite Dover, England, or via a northern route in Norway. The deception deflected the German high command's attention away from Normandy and resulted in panzer divisions being stationed inland. This left the “Atlantic Wall,” a 2,400-mile line of obstacles (6.5 million mines, thousands of concrete bunkers, thousands of tank ditches and pillboxes containing heavy artillery

manned by Germans), as the main barrier to the invasion force. Allied leaders initially set June 5, 1944, as D-Day but on the morning of June 4, stormy weather over the English Channel forced Gen. Eisenhower to postpone the attack for 24 hours to June 6 when a break in the weather was expected. Operation NEPTUNE was the code name given to the seaborne assault phase. See **Figure 1**.

Allied Landings on June 6, 1944

Before dawn on June 6, 1944, 13,000 paratroopers from three airborne divisions—the U.S. 82nd and 101st and the British 6th—parachuted and landed by glider behind targeted beaches. See **Figure 2**. Over 1,200 aircraft were used in the pre-landing drop. Allied naval forces, including the U.S. Coast Guard, conveyed assault forces across the English Channel. Beginning at 0630 AM, six American, British and Canadian divisions landed on Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword Beaches in the largest amphibious assault in history. The 29th Infantry Division (Omaha Beach), comprised of units from Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C., was the only National Guard division to land on D-Day. See **Figure 3** for additional data. By the end of June 11, 1944 (D+5), 326,547 troops, 54,186 vehicles and 104,428 tons of supplies were landed and the six beaches were secured.

Figure 2. Normandy Beaches on D-Day



From June 6, 1944 to August 21, 1944, the Allies landed more than two million men in northern France and suffered more than 226,386 casualties: 72,911 KIA/MIA and 153,475 wounded. German losses included over 240,000 casualties and 200,000 captured. Between 13,000 and 20,000 French civilians died, and many were seriously wounded. Paris was liberated on August 25, 1944.

Figure 3: D-Day by the Numbers

Total Allied troops who landed in Normandy: 156,115
Total Allied airborne troops (included in figures above): 23,400
American: 73,000 (Omaha and Utah beaches + airborne)
British: 61,715 (Gold and Sword beaches + airborne)
Canadian: 21,400 (Juno Beach)
Total Allied aircraft that supported landings: 11,590
Total naval vessels in Operation NEPTUNE: 6,939
 Naval combat ships: 1,213
 Landing ships/craft: 4,126
 Ancillary craft: 736
 Merchant vessels: 864
 80 percent were British; 16.5 percent, U.S.; and the rest from France, Holland, Norway and Poland.
Soldiers' home nations: United States, Britain, Canada, Belgium, Norway, Poland, Luxembourg, Greece, Czechoslovakia, New Zealand and Australia (+177 French commandos)
Engaged Allied army divisions:
 3rd British Infantry – Sword Beach
 3rd Canadian Infantry – Juno Beach
 4th U.S. Infantry – Utah Beach
 1st & 29th U.S. Infantry – Omaha Beach
 50th British Infantry – Gold Beach
 6th British Airborne – Dropped on east bank of the Orne River
 82nd & 101st U.S. Airborne – Night drop on Cotentin Peninsula behind Utah Beach
 2nd & 5th U.S. Ranger Battalions – Pointe du Hoc

Source: D-Day: The Beaches, EUCOM and adapted by CRS.

Medal of Honor Recipients



According to the Army Center of Military History, there were 12 soldiers who received the Medal of Honor (MoH) for action during the Normandy invasion on June 6, 1944. Nine were awarded posthumously. The three recipients awarded their MoHs were: Pvt. Carlton W. Barrett, S/Sgt. Walter D. Ehlers and 1st Lt. Carlos C. Ogden.

The nine posthumous recipients were:

2d Lt. John E. Butts, Lt. Col. Robert G. Cole, S/Sgt. Arthur F. DeFranzo, Pfc. Charles N. DeGlopper, Cpl. John D. Kelly, 1st Lt. Jimmie W. Monteith, Jr., T/Sgt. Frank D. Peregory, Tech. 5th Grade John J. Pinder, Jr., and Brig.

Gen. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. There were no MoH recipients from the other military departments for D-Day.

Normandy American Cemetery

The Normandy American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, France, is the resting place for 9,387 Americans buried, and a memorial to the 1,557 MIAs who gave their lives during the initial landings and subsequent operations. The permanent cemetery was dedicated on July 18, 1956. It is located on land granted to the United States by France in perpetuity, on the site of the temporary American cemetery established on June 8, 1944. It is one of 14 permanent WWII military cemeteries on foreign soil that are maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), an independent federal agency established in 1923, which serves as the custodian of U.S. overseas commemorative cemeteries and memorials.

Commemorative Events

ABMC, “75th Anniversary of D-Day at Normandy American Cemetery,” at <https://www.abmc.gov/dday75>.

EUCOM, “Commemorating World War II 75 in Europe,” videos at <https://www.dvidshub.net/feature/WWII75inEurope>.

U.S. Embassy & Consulates in France, “75th Anniversary of D-Day Landing and the Battle of Normandy,” June 1-10, 2019, at <https://fr.usembassy.gov/75th-anniversary-of-d-day-landing-and-the-battle-of-normandy/>.

Sources of Information

ABMC, “Normandy” at <https://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials/europe/normandy-american-cemetery>.

Army, “D-Day June 6, 1944,” at <https://www.army.mil/d-day/>.

Army Center of Military History, “Normandy Invasion: MoH,” at <https://history.army.mil/html/reference/Normandy/nor-moh.html>.

EUCOM, “Veterans of only National Guard division to land on D-Day return for 65th anniversary of invasion,” August 26, 2011, at <https://www.eucom.mil/media-library/article/20208/veterans-of-only-national-guard-division-to-land-on-d-day-return-for-65th-anniver>.

National D-Day Memorial, “Preparation and Planning” at <https://www.dday.org/preparation-and-planning/>.

National WWII Museum, “D-Day: The Allies Invade Europe,” at <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/d-day-allies-invade-europe>.

Naval History and Heritage Command, “Operation NEPTUNE: Invasion of Normandy,” at <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/o/operation-neptune-invasion-normandy.html>.

U.S. Coast Guard Historian’s Office, “The U.S. Coast Guard at Normandy,” at <https://www.history.uscg.mil/Our-Collections/Commemorations/D-Day/>.

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