Triumph and Tragedy

Normandy Landings: D-Day

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Bodies everywhere, ears ringing because of constant gunfire, one of the bloodiest battles of World War II. On June 6, 1944, the Allied powers invaded the Normandy Beaches to triumphantly gain control of the Normandy Beaches, liberate Western Europe, and make a mark on history forever, however it came at a tragic price.

THE BREAK OUT OF WORLD WAR II

Twenty-one years after World War I, “lingering disputes erupted in an even larger and bloodier conflict—World War II”\(^1\). It began in Europe on September 1, 1939, and ended on September 2, 1945, and a vast majority of the world was involved. The war was fought between the Allied Powers; England, France, U.S., Canada, Soviet Union and other small countries, and the Axis Powers; Germany, Italy and Japan. After June 6, 1944, the war was finally favoring the Allied Powers.

THE PLANNING OF D-DAY

The operation name for D-Day was called Operation Overlord. Operation Overlord called for three divisions to land on the beaches of Normandy, with two being air dropped. Another eleven were divisions scheduled to land within the next two weeks through portable harbors. Two “portable harbors” were to be towed across the English Channel, after the beachheads were established. In total, one hundred more divisions (large military unit) were going to land on the beaches of Normandy to start to liberate Western Europe.

\(^1\)From Calvocoressi on Britannica.
The three American divisions were going to strike at the center and the right flank at St. Martin de-Varreville, (code name Utah Beach), and Vierbille, (code name Omaha Beach). The British and the Canadians were to strike the left flank at Arromanches, (code name Gold Beach), lion-sur-mer, (code name Sword Beach), and Couselles, (code name Juno Beach). Each division was made up of about 60,000 men with support troops.

WEATHER DELAY

General Dwight D. Eisenhower picked June 5, 1944, for the invasion. However, bad weather on the days leading up to the invasion caused the operation to be delayed twenty-four hours. On the morning of June 5, a meteorologist predicted improved
conditions for the next day. Eisenhower ordered for Operation Overlord to take place on June, 6 1944.

THE LAUNCH
A few hours before the soldiers landed on the beaches of Normandy, paratroopers were to be dropped behind the targeted beaches. Five thousand ships, varied in sizes, were on their way to their positions. Eleven miles from the shore of the beaches, they released the landing crafts. Five divisions made of three American, one British and one Canadian were going to attack along a fifty-mile front, the Normandy beaches.

INEXPERIENCED SOLDIERS
Many of the U.S. forces were only teenagers and had no combat experience. The average age of the U.S. forces on D-Day was 26. However, on D-Day, even the most experienced soldiers struggled. The German forces were more experienced and led by famed field marshal Rommel. It was the will and fight of these young men that lead to them being known as the Greatest Generation.

HUNDREDTH AND FIRST AIRBORNE
A few hours before the invasion, the hundredth and first Airborne dropped behind the Normandy beaches. The hundredth and first Airborne were expected to attack from behind the German lines. The first wave of paratroopers were not troops at all. They were three feet tall rubber figures with explosives attached to them. The mannequin
goes up in flames on impact. Meanwhile, the allies played gunfire on loudspeakers to simulate a major attack, and the Germans fell for it. The German reserves went to go to stop these mannequins when the real attack was the opposite way. But landing was still an issue.

General Rommel of Germany flooded hundreds of square miles to make it harder for the paratroopers to land because they also wearing a hundred pounds of equipment. They had to take off their harness “which was not an easy task on land let alone water”\(^2\), causing many to drown. All those that survived the landing, landed all spilt up or in small groups, and they had to go and find each other.

**LANDING ON THE OMAHA BEACH**

At 6:30 A.M., also known as H-hour, on the day of the invasion, the divisions started landing. They were heavily supported by naval guns and more than 5,000 planes. When the troops got there they let the doors down, and they ran out however there was one problem, the machine guns at the top of the hill, could shoot 25 bullets a second. Once the doors went down, the gunner shot into the narrow door opening, and the soldiers were shot at, as they ran out. Many jumped off the side. Then the soldiers had to swim for their life. The soldiers that made it on the beach, had to find cover (which there was not much of) from the gunfire. The machine guns were supposed to have been taken care of.

\(^2\) From the documentary by The History Channel.
On D-Day there were thick clouds and the planes had to rely on radar. Due to the threat of hitting their own on the beach, the bombers were told to wait for 5, even 30 seconds to “make sure you know you are over the beach”\(^3\). Waiting can make a big difference to a bomber at 10,000 feet going at 150 miles per hour, a five-second delay can make the bomb miss by a 1/4 of a mile. A thirty-second delay can make a bomb miss by a mile and a 1/2. Roughly 13,000 bombs were dropped on D-Day, none of them managed to hit the bunkers.

Of the soldiers that did survive the gunfire, they took cover right before the barbed wire fence at the bottom of the small hill. The machine guns waiting for them at the top of the hill. The soldiers were trying to regroup and come up with a plan.

From offshore one man had been watching. He saw that without leadership and belief, the mission on Omaha Beach would fail. At the age of fifty-one he was the oldest soldier there, General Norman “Dutch” Cota. Once on shore he took action. Walking across the beach, Cota was encouraging the soldiers. Trying to get across the barbed wire fence, Cota and his men had to be fast. They used a Bangalore torpedo to blast through the barbed wire quickly. The key was getting it in place. The first soldier to attempt to get the torpedo in place was shot, but the torpedo worked. However, waiting at the top of the hill was an MG42 machine gun, that was able to shoot 25 bullets per

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\(^3\) Stated by General Eisenhower.
second. One of the soldiers volunteered to run up the hill and charge and was shot immediately. Cota and his men sat there not knowing what to do, Cota used the best weapon of all, leadership. He was the first to run up the hill, with all of his men following behind him.

Meanwhile ten miles off shore, 12 destroyers were watching. Their orders were to protect the troop ships. The senior officers faced a dilemma: obey orders or go help the soldiers on the beach. The news came to the senior officers that some of the soldiers were starting to break through the German forces. After a few hours of holding back, the Navy commanders gave the orders to engage in the attack. “Full steam ahead” ordered Captain James Sims of the U.S.S Frank-Ford.

Eight hundred yards off shore the fleet of 12 turned broadside and fired at the German forces. After a few hours at Omaha Beach, it started to look better for the U.S. forces. Supported by Naval fire, the U.S. forces made a route inland and the liberation of Western Europe began.

AFTER THE INVASION

After the invasion the Allies gained control of the beaches of Omaha, Juno, Gold, Sword and Utah, but it came at a tragic price. The Allies lost more than 200,000 due to death, injury, or people not being found. Germany had lost more than 300,000 because of injury, death and people going missing. More than 12,000 Death numbers from Britannica.
lives that day, due to the bomb missing the bunkers. Less than a week after the invasion, on June 11, 1944, the beaches were fully established and over 326,000 troops, more than 50,000 vehicles and 100,000 tons of equipment had landed at Normandy. D-Day was over, but in the end, a total 512,000 people had tragically lost their lives.

END OF WORLD WAR II

D-Day began to turn the tide in the war to favor Allied Powers side. The significant blow also stopped Hitler from sending troops from France to build an eastern front against the Soviets. The next spring, on May 8, 1945, the Allies accepted the surrender of Germany. The Allied powers triumphantly won the war. Hitler committed suicide a week before on April 30.

CONCLUSION

On June 6, 1944, the Allied powers invaded the Normandy beaches to triumphantly gain control, liberate Western Europe, and forever make a mark on history, but it came at a tragic price. Twenty-one years after World War I, a much bigger war broke out. World War II lasted a total of, six years. World War II had almost every country of the world involved in it. On D-Day, also known as Operation Overlord, the Allied Powers invaded
Normandy beaches. The Allies needed the Normandy beaches to help liberate Western Europe. D-Day was a success, and started the liberation of Western Europe. D-Day was a significant turning point of the war.

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