

We proudly honor those who served in the armed forces and on the home front during World War II. Their sacrifices, resilience and determination continue as an inspiration to us all.



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## The Normandy Landings 5 – 6 June 1944



## United States Commemorative Activities 5 – 6 June 2004



## THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

The Coast Guard's role during the invasion has often been overlooked. Nevertheless, the service deserves more than a nod of appreciation from those who now enjoy the fruits of the Allied victory. The Coast Guard manned 99 vessels for Operation NEPTUNE (the amphibious phase of Operation OVERLORD) and lost more vessels that day than at any time during its history. Sixty of these were 83-foot cutters. The rescue flotilla patrolled off the five American and British beaches, saving more than 400 Allied soldiers, sailors and airmen on D-Day alone, and by the time the unit was decommissioned, they had pulled 1,438 from the English Channel.

On D-Day at UTAH Beach, the Coast Guard-manned attack transport *Bayfield* served as the flagship for Assault Force "U". Two other Coast Guard-manned attack transports and twelve LCIs transported troops to the beach during the initial landings at UTAH. Ten cutters from Rescue Flotilla One patrolled in support of this landing force. At OMAHA Beach, two Coast Guard-manned attack transports and twelve LCIs landed troops. Twenty cutters worked rescue at OMAHA Beach. U.S. Coast Guard support to British, Canadian, and French forces attacking GOLD, JUNO, and SWORD beaches included 29 cutters from Rescue Flotilla One and four LSTs. During the months following the invasion, Coast Guard vessels remained off the coast of Normandy to transport reinforcements and supplies from Great Britain.



Coast Guard LCI (L)-83 disembarks troops at OMAHA. She struck a mine upon landing & lay disabled on the beach, under enemy fire, until her hull was patched & she was able to get underway.

## The Normandy Landings 6 June 1944



*These endured all and gave all that justice  
among nations might prevail and that mankind  
might enjoy freedom and inherit Peace.*

### About this Booklet

This booklet is intended to serve as a guide and historical reference for the Normandy Invasion Commemoration Ceremonies sponsored by the United States. Although descriptive of the invasion as a whole, the actions discussed within deal predominantly with Americans and their role in the landings of 6 June 1944.

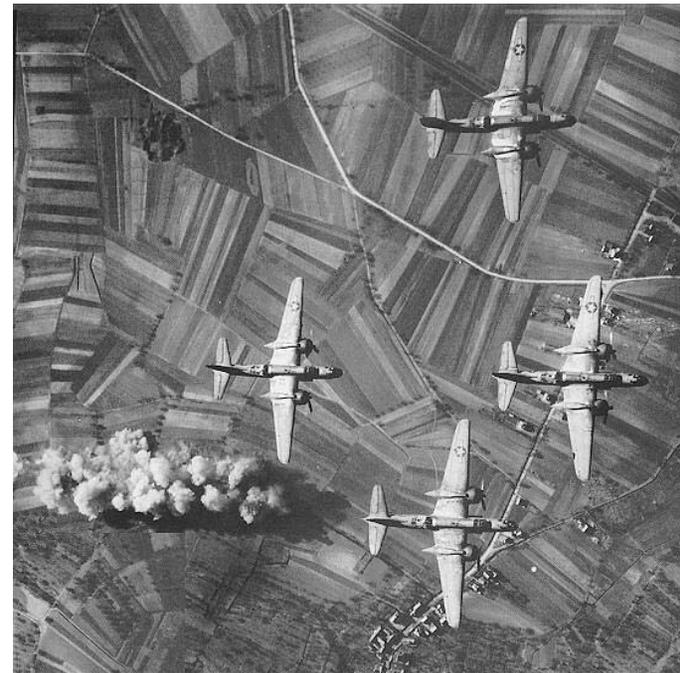
The booklet is divided into three general sections. The first section, "Introduction," presents an overview of the Allied landings. The section opens with the stirring message that General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, wrote and delivered to the assault troops on 5 June 1944, and then continues to relate details of the invasion.

The second section, "Ceremonies," provides a sequence of events and brief historical narrative for the Sainte-Mere-Eglise, Normandy American Cemetery, Pointe du Hoc, and UTAH Beach ceremonies, respectively.

The third section, "Armed Services," highlights the combined efforts of the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard, by outlining the roles each played in Operation OVERLORD. The section briefly describes the essential missions each of the armed services performed on D-Day.

The hope is that this booklet will serve as both a useful and illustrative guide to the ceremonies and an encouragement for visitors to learn more about the heroic actions performed by American veterans sixty years ago.

to the German home front between 1942 and 1944. Beginning in the latter months of 1942, the air forces delivered a costly but relentless bombing campaign against German industry and transportation. The Eighth Air Force was the principal American component of the campaign. Flying from bases in England, the Eighth Air Force suffered casualties of more than 20,000 aircrew before the end of the war. Although costly, that bombing campaign proved decisive, because it brought the German Luftwaffe an extended battle in which VIII Fighter Command literally destroyed it. During that battle, the German fighters suffered irreplaceable losses in skilled pilots and aircraft, losses that had to be made good by bringing in other fighters from such places as France. By June of 1944, Allied bombers ranged freely over Germany.



Air power played an important part throughout the Normandy campaign, crippling German transport and making daylight maneuver almost impossible.

Supplementing that success, the Allied air forces spent the final six weeks before the invasion attacking 36 German airfields in the Low Countries and France—all of those fields placed to offer resistance to the landings. So it was that the advantage of air superiority, a vital preliminary to the Normandy landings, was actually won in the skies over Germany.

On D-Day, British and American air forces each flew more than three thousand sorties. The assembled Allied air forces consisted of more than 2,800 heavy bombers, 1,500 medium and light bombers, and 3,700 fighters and fighter-bombers. The U.S. Ninth Tactical Air Force, organized in late 1943, added its weight to the Eighth Air Force. To the east, the British 2nd Tactical Air Force supported the British and Canadian landings. The night before the landings, Allied night fighters patrolled over the invasion fleet, while other aerial patrols searched for German planes, surface ships, and submarines. Over one thousand troop carrier aircraft and two hundred gliders carried the three American and British airborne divisions to France. Just before the main landings, Allied squadrons attacked German radar installations all along the French coast to prevent them from seeing the landing fleet. Anti-submarine patrols assisted the fleet and sank a number of U-boats near the invasion area, while simultaneously guarding against German surface ship attacks. Anti-submarine patrols covered over 20,000 square miles of ocean and were flown around the clock. Fighters and fighter-bombers interdicted German supply lines and attacked troop columns in the interior of France, helped direct naval gunfire, and protected the beaches from German air attacks—attacks that, in the main, never materialized.



A Douglas A-20 Havoc medium bomber, displaying the black and white invasion stripes that identified Allied aircraft on D-Day.

The virtual absence of the German Luftwaffe over the Normandy beaches was due in large part to the hard-won success of the Allied strategic air forces in carrying the battle

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## INTRODUCTION



**Martin B-26 Marauders of the Ninth Tactical Air Force over the Pointe-du-Hoc on D-Day.**

In addition to crippling the German transportation network, Allied air forces conducted other missions crucial to the invasion plan. A particularly important assignment involved both high-altitude and low-level photographic reconnaissance to give the Allied planners up-to-the-minute information about German troop dispositions, strength, and readiness. Many parts of the invasion plan were modified as a result of that reconnaissance and other information delivered by the French Resistance. A second vital mission was the complex and dangerous task of delivering the airborne divisions to their drop zones on the night of 5-6 June. Troop-carrier aircraft were obliged to fly at low altitudes and constant speeds, despite anti-aircraft fire, in an attempt to place the airborne troops on the ground in concentrated landings, rather than scattering them. The air forces were further tasked to provide a preparatory aerial bombardment of the coastal defenses and provide the fighter aircraft to seal off the beaches and the sea-lanes from attack both by the German Air Force and by German submarines and light surface warships. Once the Allied armies were ashore in France, fighters would provide air cover and close air support.

close of D-Day, Major General Leonard T. Gerow, commanding V Corps, acknowledged Sanders' courage in a message to Admiral Kirk: "Thank God for the United States Navy."



### THE UNITED STATES ARMY AIR FORCES

In General Eisenhower's view, the most valuable contribution that air power could make to the invasion effort was to cripple the German forces' ability to move men and materiel into the invasion area. His headquarters therefore devised the so-called Transportation Plan that called for a unified air campaign against the railroads and marshalling areas in France and was intended to destroy the rail system that was the principal means the Germans had to deliver units and supplies to the battlefield. The campaign enjoyed remarkable success. In mid-April of 1944, the air forces began a steady series of attacks on the transportation network by bombing 71 marshalling yards, bridges, and railroad junctions that were crucial to German efforts to supply and reinforce the defenders of the Normandy coast. On 21 May 1944, the campaign was intensified by a large-scale strafing attack intended to disrupt and destroy the moving trains and truck traffic on the roads. At the end of May, the U.S. Army Air Forces destroyed 18 of 24 bridges over the Seine River and critically damaged three more. The consequence of the entire campaign was a sixty percent reduction in German rail traffic in northern France between March and June of 1944. Once the invasion was launched, strafing and fighter-bomber attacks crippled German divisions marching toward the invasion area, to the extent that the Germans did not dare attempt such movement during the hours of daylight.

### SUPREME HEADQUARTERS ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE



Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!

Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

*Dwight D. Eisenhower*

## A Great and Noble Undertaking

On D-Day, 6 June 1944, United States and British forces went ashore along a forty-mile stretch of the Normandy coastline. The assault, the culmination of years of intensive Allied planning and preparation, took place under the overall direction of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who commanded the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force. Under Eisenhower, British General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery had overall command of the Allied ground armies. A combined Anglo-American air and naval headquarters assembled an armada of 6,500 naval vessels, supported by 10,000 aircraft, with total manpower amounting to more than one million. The stakes were high, and failure could result in countless casualties and the indefinite prolongation of the war.

The 100,000-man American assault force, under the command of Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley's First Army, invaded Normandy by both sea and air. V Corps, under Major General Leonard T. Gerow, with the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions leading the way, began landing soon after sunrise on D-Day on OMAHA Beach, its left flank connecting with the British and Canadians farther to the east. West of OMAHA, Major General J. Lawton Collins' VII Corps, the 4th Infantry Division as the assault element, went ashore at UTAH Beach to seize the base of the Cotentin Peninsula and drive to



Infantrymen of V Corps head for OMAHA Beach in the rough seas of D-Day.

the battleships USS *Nevada*, a veteran of Pearl Harbor, and the USS *Texas* and USS *Arkansas*. The Navy also assigned a number of cruisers to the invasion fleet, including the USS *Tuscaloosa*, the USS *Quincy*, and the USS *Augusta*. Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, commanding First Army, made his headquarters aboard the latter ship. Rounding out its contribution, the Navy assigned 34 destroyers, 111 coastal warships of various types, 49 destroyer escorts and minesweepers, and 865 landing craft. The Dutch, Greek, Polish, French, and Norwegian navies added another 49 warships to the fleet. Serving as a part of the U.S. Navy in wartime, the U.S. Coast Guard also assigned ships to the landing fleet to deliver fire support and carry out sea rescue operations. In addition, Coast Guardsmen crewed many of the landing craft. Marines were not part of the assault force, but numbers of them served in their traditional roles on warships of the invasion fleet.



Gunners on the USS *Arkansas*, supporting the landings at OMAHA Beach, were confident of their accuracy.

The Allied Expeditionary Force was divided into two naval task forces. The Eastern Naval Task Force supported British Second Army, while the Western Naval Task Force supported the American First Army. The Western Naval Task force, under command of Rear Admiral Alan G. Kirk, was further divided into Task Force "U", commanded by Rear Admiral John L. Hall, which carried VII Corps to UTAH Beach, and Task Force "O", commanded by Rear Admiral Don P. Moon, which delivered V Corps to OMAHA Beach. Bombardment groups delivered intense preparatory fires against German shore batteries and fortifications at each beach and also destroyed many of the minefields along the beaches. Once the troops were ashore, the ships continued to fire on observed targets. At OMAHA Beach, with the infantry pinned precariously to the foreshore, Captain Harry Sanders, commanding Destroyer Division 18, took his ships literally into the surf, as little as 800 yards from shore, to blast stubborn German defenses with direct gunfire. Near the

The Allied sailors went through a series of exercises intended to improve the coordination of the planned amphibious assaults. Allied plans detailed ships of the various task forces to bombard specific coastal fortifications and beach assault areas. To control that fire, the Allies created naval shore fire control parties that went ashore with the attacking infantry and then directed naval gunfire by the ships lying offshore. During the pre-invasion training, those men worked alongside the Army units they would support during the landings, learned how the Army intended to maneuver, and developed plans and means of communications to control the naval bombardment. On D-Day that training paid off, particularly at Pointe du Hoc and OMAHA Beach, where the naval shore fire control parties expertly directed naval gunfire to reduce German defenses. The bombardment plan dealt systematically with the heavy German gun batteries along the coast, and particularly in the UTAH landing zones. Throughout the following campaign, including the fights to secure Caen and Cherbourg, naval gunfire continued to be an invaluable asset for the Army.



**The Destroyer USS *Hobson* of Task Force "U", its deck strewn with expended shell casings, delivered a heavy bombardment of 5-inch gunfire against German defenses at UTAH beach.**

To accomplish the varied naval missions, the Allies assembled an enormous fleet of more than 6,500 vessels of all types. The Royal Navy provided the majority of the warships for the landings, dispatching three battleships, seventeen cruisers, 65 destroyers, 360 light coastal warships, and 447 destroyer escorts, corvettes, frigates, minesweepers, and other small ships. Included in that total were 3,261 of the all-important landing craft. The United States Navy, already heavily engaged in the war in the Pacific, sent older, although still-powerful warships to support the Normandy landings. Among them were

Cherbourg, a major port crucial to the American logistical build-up. By the time the seaborne infantry landed, paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions had dropped into the Cotentin behind UTAH, beginning just after midnight, and were already fighting to open exits from the beach for VII Corps and to cut Cherbourg off from reinforcements.

The attacks, assisted by overwhelming air support and naval bombardment and by French partisans who disrupted the German rear areas and hampered the movement of reinforcements, went more or less according to plan. The paratroopers, despite being badly scattered in their night drop and losing heavily in men and equipment, secured most of their D-Day objectives. They overcame initially confused, but increasingly stubborn and aggressive German resistance. On UTAH Beach, the 4th Division came ashore almost unopposed, thanks in good measure to the paratroopers' fight farther inland and to a fortuitous and accidental landing at a point where German defenses had been reduced by bombardment.

On OMAHA, it was a different story. V Corps ran into not just the expected units from a low-quality static-defense division, but also, unexpectedly, strong elements of a first-class German division, well entrenched on cliffs above the beach where the defenders had a commanding view of the Americans attempting to reach the shore. Despite a massive preparatory naval and aerial bombardment, the strength of the German positions, many of which did not directly face the ocean but fired laterally across the beaches, left the defenders well prepared to resist the landings. The assaulting forces came under heavy fire the moment they left their landing craft, and the initial landing waves of the 1st and 29th Divisions were cut to pieces before they reached dry land. Many of the amphibious tanks sank in the rough seas shortly after they were launched, and much of the artillery was lost when landing craft were sunk or destroyed. For the better part of the day, thousands of American troops were pinned down at the water's edge, struggling to return the heavy German fire, to rescue their many wounded from the rising tide, and to collect equipment and supplies. Gradually, intrepid groups of fighters worked their way off the beach and up the bluffs. Assisted by point-blank naval gunfire, they eliminated the German strong points one by one. The collapse of German resistance on the British and Canadian beaches to the east further undermined the cohesion of the German defense at OMAHA. During the afternoon the trickle of men off the beach became a flood. By nightfall V Corps had secured a firm lodgment, although one considerably smaller than its planned D-Day objective.



**American troops seek refuge from enemy fire in the heavily mined obstacles of OMAHA Beach. Many soldiers lost their equipment or drowned trying to reach the shore.**

At the price of some 6,500 casualties, almost half of them suffered at OMAHA Beach alone, the First U.S. Army successfully gained a foothold on the Normandy shore. At the close of 6 June, VII Corps held an area some eight miles wide and five miles deep at its widest point. V Corps held a still-precarious beachhead six miles long and three miles deep. In addition to the 16,000 paratroopers involved in the airborne landings, 57,000 Americans occupied the lodgment areas at nightfall. To the east, the British Second Army met with even greater success, securing more territory and landing more than 82,000 soldiers. The Allied goal of creating a lodgment area large enough to land its powerful armies and mass logistical support for continental operations had been virtually assured in a single day of intense combat. Although much bitter fighting remained on the continent—at Cherbourg, St. Lô, Falaise, the Huertgen Forest, and the Ardennes—after D-Day the outcome of the war was no longer in question. Once firmly established on French soil, Allied forces quickly built up overwhelming strength in men and equipment. Against this array, the Germans, already fighting desperately to hold back the Russians in the east, could not prevail. The Americans who fought and died to win the D-Day beaches opened the way for the liberation of Europe and helped seal the fate of Nazi Germany.

German naval authorities, using the same tide and lunar tables, could make much the same estimates about the timing of the landings. The enormous invasion fleet required that ships be loaded at ports all along the southern English coast and then rendezvous in the open sea. The route across the English Channel involved passing through a heavily mined area patrolled by German light naval forces.



Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, commander of the Allied Naval Expeditionary Force, devised a series of essential tasks and formed the armada into various task forces designed to carry out all the missions required to land the armies on the five invasion beaches. One of the most important was sweeping the mines in the middle of the English Channel to clear safe lanes for the invasion shipping to reach the Norman coast. Once those lanes had been cleared, other ships marked them and guided the main invasion force safely through the barrier. A second force defended the invasion fleet and its cleared lanes from attacks by German submarines and torpedo boats. A third task, and probably the most difficult, was the complex business of assembling the armada at sea and passing it through the cleared lanes in an orderly manner consistent with the landing plans of the armies. Just before the landings themselves, the warships of the Allied fleet were to bombard the German defenses and keep up their supporting fires throughout the day to help the ground troops reach their initial objectives. Finally, with the invasion force ashore, the Allied navies organized task forces to evacuate the casualties and sustain the logistical buildup to continue the fight.

assault, the Army devised special assault training centers along the English coast. Most of the American units that landed in Normandy rehearsed for the assault at the U.S. Assault Training Center in Devon. In addition to conducting realistic training, the centers also provided valuable help in solving technical problems and refining amphibious doctrine. By working with the various Army combat branches that would participate in the assault landings, and by working with the naval and air forces that were to support the landings, the training centers made it possible for the Army units to test new equipment and tactics under rigorous conditions while familiarizing the soldiers with their D-Day missions.

The unique challenges of the invasion, combined with the lessons of previous amphibious landings, resulted in Allied experimentation with, and utilization of, a wide array of specialized equipment. Prior to the landings, British commanders dedicated an entire armored division to testing and employing innovative modifications to various models of tanks. On D-Day, that resulted in a series of specially modified armor, the most noteworthy being the M-4 DD (Duplex Drive) amphibious tank. A modified Sherman tank, the DD was fitted with propellers, a canvas skirt to provide buoyancy, and a special exhaust and air intake system that allowed the tank to be launched into the deep waters offshore and driven under its own power to the beach. When landed, those tanks were intended to give immediate armored support to the attacking infantry and help overcome the German fortifications along the shore. On D-Day, amphibious tanks indeed played an important part at all of the five Allied landing beaches. Other specially designed equipment included rocket-fired grappling hooks for the assault on Pointe du Hoc. Upon landing, the American Rangers could launch the hooks individually to help scale the cliffs. That equipment was essential to get the Rangers up the cliffs quickly and in sufficient numbers to overwhelm the defenders. One of the most innovative uses of special equipment was employed by the paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, who were issued toy "cricket" clicking devices to identify themselves to each other in the darkness on and near the drop zones.

## THE NAVY

Operation NEPTUNE, the amphibious phase of Operation OVERLORD, was the largest and most complex amphibious operation the Allies had ever attempted, and ultimately the largest conducted anywhere during World War II. Unlike previous landings in the Mediterranean, NEPTUNE had to contend with the customary strong tides and traditionally poor weather of the English Channel in early summer. Only a few days in the course of the summer offered the conditions OVERLORD planners insisted upon for the landings. To project its entire force ashore on D-Day, First Army needed a day with two low tides. Selection of the date of the assault was complicated by two other factors as well. The airborne forces required moonlight for their drops, and the Navy and Army Air Force needed a half hour of daylight before low tide to deliver their pre-assault bombardment. The night of 5-6 June offered all of those conditions, with the next possibility being 19 June, although that date was moonless. The next possibility was in July. Every postponement meant a shorter period of good campaigning weather before the fall.

## CEREMONIES



## Saint-Mere-Eglise Ceremony

(5 June 2004)

### *Pre-Ceremony Activities*

#### *Airdrop*

#### *Posting of the Colors*

#### *Invocation*

#### *Assembly of Troops*

#### *Remarks*

#### *National Anthems*

### *Airborne Soldier March-off to Sainte-Mere-Eglise*

### *Post-Ceremony Activities*



With the majority of the British troops long since prepared to meet a German invasion on the English coast opposite Calais, the Americans were necessarily based in the western counties of the country. Once there, the soldiers received further training and equipment and participated in a series of exercises to ready them for the invasion. In the months prior to the Normandy landings, Great Britain was flooded with an unprecedented quantity of men and equipment. By June of 1944, American soldiers assembled for the invasion numbered over 1,500,000 and included six armored, thirteen infantry, and two airborne divisions. To this total were added the British soldiers of three armored, eight infantry, and two airborne divisions and ten independent brigades. Canadian forces amounted to one armored and two infantry divisions and one independent brigade. Rounding out those totals were various units from the occupied countries of Europe, including one Polish armored division and parachute brigade and a Free French armored division that would eventually lead the Allied liberation of Paris.



The first troops ashore had to deliver frontal assaults against formidable defenses, and to carry that through the plan called for a combined effort of infantry, artillery, tanks, and engineer units, all landing according to a carefully devised timetable. Amphibious tanks came ashore with the leading infantry platoons to deliver immediate covering fire and attack the bunkers that dotted the shoreline. Meanwhile, the combat engineers worked to clear lanes through the foreshore obstacles and through the minefields on the beaches and the bluffs. Working from low tide to high tide, the engineer work was intended to allow the landing of additional units and equipment throughout the day. Once those tasks were accomplished, the artillery could be positioned to support further attacks inland from the shore. In order to better prepare the inexperienced troops for the complex and difficult

The principal instrument that the United States would use to accomplish Eisenhower's plan was the United States Army. Although now more experienced as a result of the successful amphibious landings in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, and supported by powerful air and naval forces, the task that lay before the Army in Normandy was still a daunting one, and a mission to be accomplished for the most part by soldiers who had never before been in battle.



Like the soldiers who took part in the disastrous amphibious landings at Gallipoli in World War I or in the 1942 Dieppe raid, in which over sixty percent of the attackers were killed or captured, the men realized that there was little subtlety to amphibious landings and that their task therefore was an inherently dangerous one. On D-Day, Army airborne troops would jump from aircraft and crash-land gliders in the darkness to secure the flanks of the landing area. Assault troops of the main landing forces would charge into mined waters, overcome dangerous foreshore obstacles, and storm the landing beaches, all in the face of enemy fire. In the American sector, those tasks fell to the assault regiments of the 1st, 4th, and 29th Infantry Divisions, the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions, the Provisional Ranger Force, the Engineer Special Brigades, and the specially equipped tank battalions that spearheaded the first waves of the assault.

To accomplish the necessary build-up of Allied ground forces, American troops were shipped to Great Britain both from the United States and from other theaters of the war. All available shipping was employed, including ocean liners that could transport an entire infantry division in a single crossing. The first American troops to reach Britain came ashore in January 1942, and their numbers continued to increase up through the invasion.



Paratroopers board airplanes on the evening of 5 June 1944, their heavy combat loads virtually doubling their body weight.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley, aware that the Germans had prepared defenses for the causeways leading away from UTAH Beach and had flooded the lowland areas behind the beaches, feared that the 4th Infantry Division might easily be contained along the shore. Such a containment would allow the Germans sufficient time to deliver forceful counterattacks that would threaten the beachhead and certainly delay the drive to capture Cherbourg. To help alleviate that danger, Allied commanders planned the risky endeavor of dropping airborne forces behind the beaches. By so doing they hoped to surprise the Germans, secure the causeway exits over the flooded areas, and thereby clear the way for the 4th Infantry Division to move rapidly inland. They further hoped to prevent or delay any enemy counterattacks against UTAH Beach until VII Corps was ashore in sufficient strength to defeat such attacks. The 82nd Airborne ("All American") Division mission was to secure the western edge of the beachhead. In doing so, they would clear an area west of the Merderet River, capture the town of Sainte-Mere-Eglise, and block vital traffic routes along which the Germans could move troops. Further to the east, the 101st Airborne Division ("Screaming Eagles") had orders to capture the causeways that linked UTAH Beach with inland objectives and to secure tactically important areas on the southern edge of the beachhead.

Divisional pathfinders jumped minutes after midnight, and the divisions followed in the first hour of 6 June. Little went according to plan, as formations of troop-carrier aircraft were broken up by heavy clouds and then by German anti-aircraft fire, badly scattering the airborne drops. Casualties were high as the paratroopers missed the planned landing zones. Burdened by heavy combat loads that in many cases equaled their body weight, many paratroopers drowned in the shallow marshes and flooded areas of the peninsula. Others came down in trees or on enemy outposts and were shot as they descended. Nonetheless, their very dispersion created confusion among the Germans as to the extent and size of the invasion. Aided by special toy “cricket” clicking devices issued before the assault, the paratroopers identified themselves to each other in the dark and gradually pulled together into composite units by dawn. With troops and units of both divisions intermixed, the airborne soldiers began to secure their objectives. The 82nd Airborne, though out of contact with other friendly units until the next day, captured and held Sainte-Mere-Eglise, the first French town to be liberated, and blocked the vital highway between Carentan and Cherbourg. The 101st Airborne formed into small groups, fought tenaciously to secure the causeways, and held tactically important objectives south of the landing zone. Later that morning, with the beach exits secured, troops of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment made contact with assault units of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. On D-Day, each airborne division suffered roughly 1,200 casualties, a high total but far less than the predictions of some of the Allied planners.



General Eisenhower with soldiers of Company E, 502<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, on 5 June 1944.

## THE ARMY

For the United States the invasion of Normandy was the single most important operation of World War II, particularly in view of the avowed policy of the Anglo-American alliance to defeat Germany first before dealing with Japan. All preceding operations aimed, directly or indirectly, at weakening the enemy on other fronts and preparing the necessary conditions for a successful amphibious landing in northwestern Europe. Indeed, an attack across the English Channel had been the central feature of all American planning since the opening days of the war. Allied planners, although aware of the risk and difficulty associated with amphibious landings, believed that once Allied ground forces were ashore in strength, the progress of the war would inevitably turn in their favor and the outcome would be assured. As the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower helped shape a series of objectives that began with landing on the Norman coast and securing a lodgment area into which a massive build-up of men, equipment, and supplies could flow. A breakout and subsequent broad frontal attack would then be launched with overwhelming force to drive the Germans back across the continent, to cross the Rhine River, and to capture the German industrial heartland of the Ruhr and Saar valleys. Eisenhower envisioned the decisive battle occurring in the industrial areas of Germany, which the German army in the west would be obliged to fight to defend. Accomplishing that series of objectives, the Allies would be able to force the unconditional surrender that the coalition's leaders had set as their goal.



## ARMED SERVICES



*We also honor the brave sacrifices of the Merchant Marine and Maritime Services and recall all those who risked or lost their lives in the monumental effort to supply Americans and their brave Allies overseas.*

## Normandy American Cemetery Ceremony

(6 June 2004)

*Pre-Ceremony Activities*

*Posting of the Colors*

*Rendering of Honors*

*Invocation*

*Laying of Memorial Wreaths*

*Howitzer Salute to the Fallen*

*Remarks*

*Benediction*

*National Anthem*

*Fly-Over*

*Post-Ceremony Activities*



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When the 16th and 116th Infantry Regiments, the leading wave of the 1st Infantry Division team, landed on OMAHA Beach, they expected to find it defended by a reinforced battalion of a third-class German division. Their expectations were wrong, and the assault nearly ended in disaster, because the defenses had recently been augmented with two full-strength infantry regiments and an artillery regiment of the 352nd Infantry Division, a sound fighting unit. The German troops, protected in field fortifications of all types and backed by twelve strongpoints, were relatively unscathed by the pre-invasion bombardment. High cliffs, intersected by a series of heavily mined draws, overlooked the beach, affording the defenders a commanding view and canalizing the attackers. Adding to those disadvantages, strong tidal currents disrupted the landing craft formations, swamped many of the boats, and caused the infantry and engineers to be put ashore far from their intended landing spots, in most cases. The assault troops were immediately taken under fire as they exited the landing craft, and many were killed or wounded as they hit the water. Others drowned among the beach obstacles or under the sheer weight of their equipment. The planned armor support disintegrated as the amphibious tanks of the 741st Tank Battalion, designated to support the 16th Infantry, sank in heavy seas. Landing craft attempted to deliver tanks to the 116th Infantry sector, only to see half of them destroyed by accurate German artillery fire as soon as they reached the shore. Artillery support fared little better, and units such as the 111th Field Artillery Battalion lost almost all their guns and equipment. Tough German resistance hindered the landing of follow-on forces by preventing the 6th Engineer Special Brigade troops from clearing the planned number of lanes through the beach obstacles.

For the better part of the day, those Americans who reached shore were pinned down at the water's edge. There they struggled desperately to return fire and rescue the many wounded soldiers drowning in the rising tide. With troops of the 115th and 18th Infantry Regiments landing close behind soldiers already held up below the bluffs, the beach became dangerously congested with men and equipment. Colonel George Taylor of the 16th Infantry recognized the danger and helped lead men off the beach and into the attack. "Two kinds of people are staying the beach," he said, "the dead and those about to die. Now let's get the hell out of here." Gradually, intrepid groups of fighters worked their way up onto the bluffs. Engineers worked tirelessly in the face of continuous enemy fire to clear paths through the mine-infested draws and minefields on the lower slopes of the bluffs. With the assistance of point-blank naval gunfire from destroyers maneuvering perilously close to the shoreline, and with the skill of the combat engineers, the assault troops eliminated German strongpoints one by one. To their east, the penetration of British and Canadian troops from the GOLD Beach landings further taxed the German defenses. At the end of the day, the cliffs had been cleared of German resistance, and the Americans clung to a growing, yet still precarious, lodgment area. V Corps estimated its D-Day losses at 2,400 killed, wounded, and missing.

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the successful landing of amphibious tanks and artillery, moved inland almost immediately, clearing German strongpoints behind the beach and making an early link-up with elements of the 101st Airborne Division. Troops of the engineer demolition parties continued to clear the beach of mines and opened areas for a larger array of troops and equipment ashore. By the early afternoon of 6 June, the 4th Infantry Division was firmly established ashore, and VII Corps began landing other units and equipment to solidify the lodgment area and prepare for the attack toward Cherbourg. Miraculously, the D-Day landings at UTAH Beach had cost fewer than 300 casualties.



The VII Corps invasion plan at UTAH Beach began with a massive naval bombardment led by the battleship USS *Nevada* and designed to silence the German shore batteries and defensive works that dotted the coast of the Cotentin Peninsula. Two hours before the main landings, elements of the 4th and 24th Cavalry Squadrons began the assault by raiding the Marcouf Islands, which lay off the coast northeast of the beach and were thought to be occupied by German units. Once the islands were cleared, the lead battalions of the 8th Infantry Regiment, reinforced by an additional battalion of the 22nd Infantry Regiment and supported by armor of the 70th Tank Battalion, began the assault on the beaches. The troops landed two battalions abreast, intending to occupy the high ground south of the beach and then advance inland toward Sainte-Mere-Eglise to link up with and reinforce the paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. With the first units ashore, troops of the 1st Engineer Special Brigade cleared additional gaps in the minefields to open the way for follow-on forces. After the planned gaps were created in the beach obstacles, the remaining battalion of the 22nd Infantry and the entire 12th Infantry Regiment came ashore, reinforcing tactically important objectives already held by the paratroopers, and then helped secure the northern and southern edges of the beachhead.

The landings did not exactly follow the plan. At 0630 on 6 June, the two lead battalions of the 8th Infantry Regiment waded ashore approximately two thousand yards southeast of the planned landing site on the VICTOR Beach sector of UTAH. The enemy, believing the restrictive terrain beyond the VICTOR beaches lessened the probability of a landing there, left them more lightly defended than the beaches to the northeast, where VII Corps had intended to come ashore. Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Assistant Division Commander of the 4th Infantry Division, who came ashore with the first assault wave and who would later be awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on the beach, recognized the fortunate mistake. "We're going to start the war from right here," he told his leading troops, and directed them inland. The assault troops, supported effectively by

## Pointe du Hoc Ceremony

(6 June 2004)

### *Pre-Ceremony Activities*

#### *Posting of the Colors and 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Cordon*

#### *Invocation*

#### *National Anthems*

#### *Laying of the Memorial Wreath*

#### *Remarks*

#### *Rendering of Honors*

#### *Fly-Over*

#### *Benediction*

### *Post-Ceremony Activities*



The first hours of the landing were the most dangerous, the time when the Allies would be weakest and the Germans most able to launch a successful counterattack. Direct fire would threaten the approaches to the beaches and, therefore, the essential steady build-up of manpower and materiel. Intelligence reported a major German artillery battery atop Pointe du Hoc. Since the forbidding spur of land dominated both OMAHA and UTAH Beaches, it had to be taken, and the task fell to the 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalions. Three companies of the 2nd Rangers assaulted the position, scaling the cliffs, while other companies of that battalion and the 5th Ranger Battalion, landing on the extreme right of OMAHA Beach, fought their way overland to reinforce the attackers. The terrain was difficult—some thought impossible—and all the advantages seemed to belong to the German defenders. Commenting on the battle, Eisenhower later wrote, “there is an old expression, ‘the nakedness of the battlefield.’ It is descriptive and full of meaning for anyone who has seen a battle ... The feeling that pervades the forward areas is loneliness. There is little to be seen: friend and foe, as well as the engines of war, seem to disappear from sight when troops are deployed for a fight ... Here is where confidence in leaders, a feeling of comradeship with and trust in them, pays off.” Such leaders the Provisional Ranger Force of V Corps had in abundance, and chief among them was its commander, Lieutenant Colonel James E. Rudder, who led the 225 men of the assault force up the cliffs.

Despite the bombardment, German defenders remained at Pointe du Hoc, and the Rangers fought a desperate small-unit battle for many hours, gaining a foothold on top of the cliffs and then advancing into the hinterlands to find the German artillery that was, unexpectedly, not emplaced in the concrete gun bunkers at the Pointe. Just inland, near the Grandcamp-Vierville road, two of the Rangers spotted the battery and, with German gun crews close by, used thermite grenades to destroy the guns. At the end of the day, Rudder sent a message to V Corps saying “Located Pointe du Hoc—mission accomplished—need ammunition and reinforcement—many casualties.” For two days, Rudder’s assault force held out alone against increasingly aggressive enemy counterattacks. By the time V Corps units relieved the companies of the 2nd Ranger Battalion, only 90 combat-effective fighting men of the original 225 remained. There was justice in General Omar Bradley’s post-war remark of Rudder that “no soldier in my command has ever been wished a more difficult task than that which befell the 34-year-old commander of this Ranger force.”

## Utah Beach Ceremony

(6 June 2004)

### *Pre-Ceremony Activities*

#### *Posting of the Colors*

#### *Rendering of Honors*

#### *National Anthems*

#### *Invocation*

#### *Laying of Memorial Wreaths*

#### *Remarks*

#### *Benediction*

### *Post-Ceremony Activities*

