

D-Day - facts, figures and trivia

A few facts, figures and trivia about D-Day, the Allied invasion to liberate Europe during World War II.

On Tuesday 6 June 1944 the largest seaborne invasion force in history landed on an 80 km stretch of the Normandy coast in France.

Codenamed Operation Neptune, it was part of Operation Overlord, the liberation of German-occupied northwestern Europe from Nazi control. It was also the launch of the long-awaited second front. It was simply termed D-Day.

Figures

On D-Day, General Dwight D. Eisenhower commanded a force without parallel in history.

NAVAL FORCES

Ships

- 138 warships
- 221 destroyers, frigates, corvettes
- 187 mine sweepers
- 495 smaller vessels
- 58 submarine chasers
- 4,000 landing craft of all types
- 441 auxiliary Naval craft and small boats
- 864 Merchant Navy ships
- Over 300 other small craft

Servicemen

- 112,824 British sailors
- 52,889 American sailors
- 4,998 other Allied servicemen
- 25,000 Merchant navy
- Total - 195,701

AIR FORCES

Aircraft

- 11,590 aircraft
- 3,500 gliders

Air Crew

- 31,000 (not including airborne troops or their aircrews)

LAND FORCES

Vehicles

- 20,000 (including over 1,000 tanks)

Men landed on the beaches

- American sector - 57,500 (Utah - 23,250, Omaha - 34,250)
- British sector - 75,215 (Gold - 24,970, Juno - 21,400, Sword - 28,845)

Troops parachuted or landed by glider

- Americans - 15,500
- British - 7,990
- Total - 24,900

Total land forces deployed

- 156,205

Trivia

- Planning for Operation Overlord began in earnest in 1943 with Dwight D Eisenhower made supreme commander. British general Bernard Montgomery, hero of the Eighth Army in North Africa, was put in charge of the ground troops.
- About 3,200 reconnaissance missions were launched in the run-up to the invasion to take photos of vital locations.
- In the summer of 1943 an early copy of the plans blew out of a window in Norfolk House, London. A man who was passing by handed them

in, saying his sight was too bad to read them.

Beach landings in Normandy were chosen instead of the Pas-de-Calais because defences were lighter and advancing troops would have fewer rivers and canals to cross.

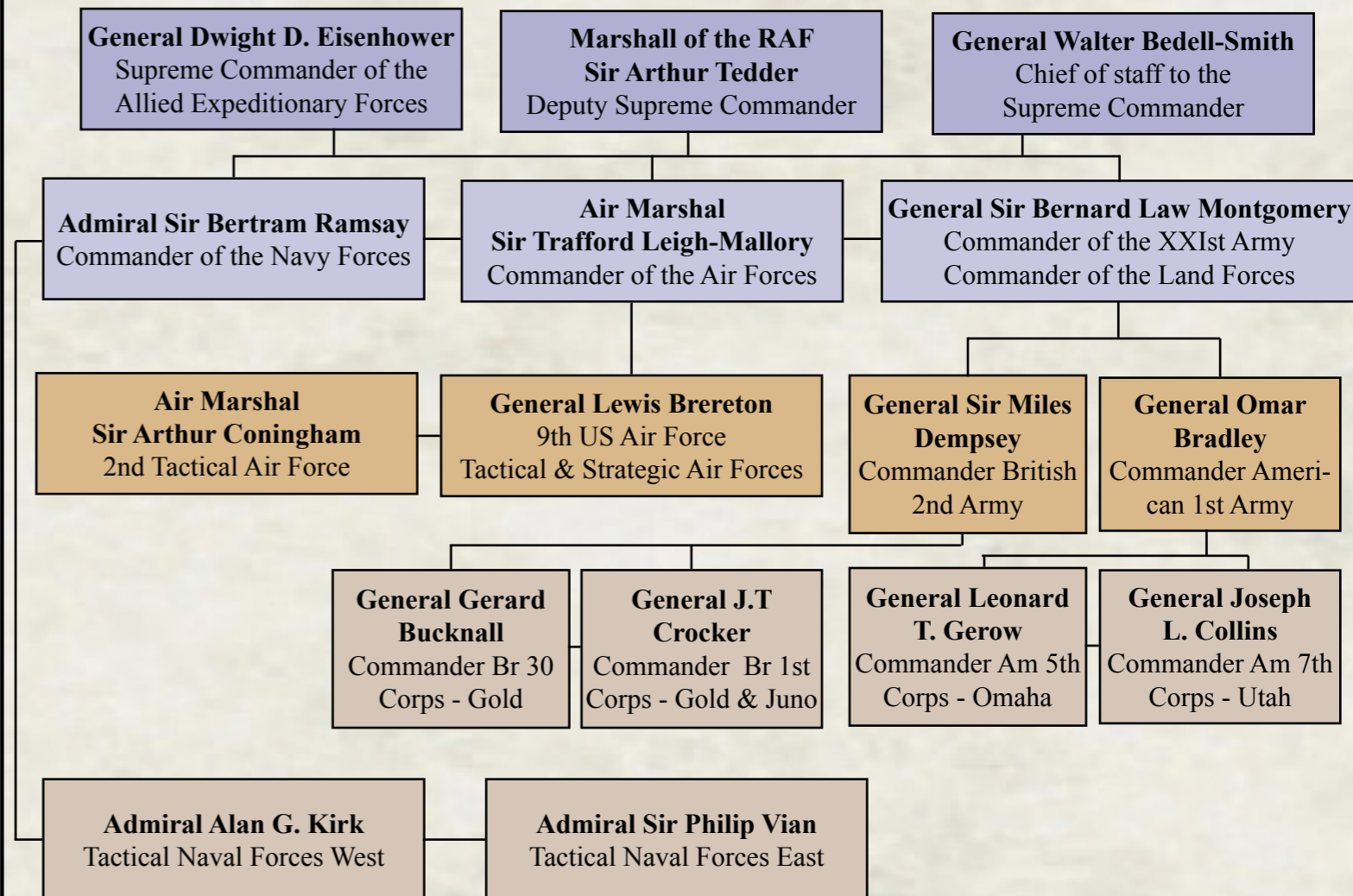
There were to be five landing zones along a 80 km stretch of coast. The Americans would attack at Utah and Omaha, the British at Gold and Sword and Canadian troops at Juno.

It was vital that D-Day take place on the date of the highest half-tide at the most Westerly beach (Utah), 40 minutes after first light and following a night when the moon rose between 01h00 and 02h00. Such occasion occur only three days each month and in June 1944 they were the 5th, 6th and 7th of that month. If the invasion wasn't launched on one of those three days it would have had to be postponed for another month.

D-Day was originally set for June 5 but had to be postponed for 24 hours because of bad weather. During D-Day preparations top-secret code names were used to hide the allies' plans from the enemy. 'Utah', 'Omaha', 'Gold', and 'Sword' were beaches on the Normandy coastline, 'Nep-

Supreme Headquarters of Allied Expeditionary Forces

6th June 1944



tune' was the code name for the landings, 'Overlord' was the ensuing battle for Normandy and a 'Bigot' was the code name for someone who had high level security clearance.

- In 1944 authorities became concerned when a number of secret code names appeared as answers in the Daily Telegraph's crossword puzzle. In the month before the D-Day attacks, no less than five code names, including 'Utah', 'Omaha' and 'Neptune' were spotted in the puzzle answers. Alarm bells rang at MI5, which sus-

pected someone was trying to pass information to the enemy, although a search of the writer's home and office turned up nothing.

- Operation Overload was the name given to the whole of the Normandy Invasion. Each separate task was named differently. Operation Neptune was the amphibious invasion, Operation Pointblank the massive bombing campaign prior to the invasion, and Operation Bodyguard to ensure information of the invasion never reached the Germans.
- Hitler anticipated that the

Allied Forces would invade France from the northern coast. To fortify and prepare for this, he assigned Erwin Rommel to head construction of defenses. Rommel was placed in charge of finishing Hitler's Atlantic Wall which consisted of 3,800 km of bunkers, landmines, and various obstacles to make a beach landing more difficult and hazardous for the Allies.

- A phantom army of dummy camps, planes and tanks was constructed in Kent and Essex in order to deceive Germans into thinking the invasion would be at Calais.

- On 28 April 1944, eight ships full of US servicemen and equipment were making their way to the Devon coast in the UK to take part in a rehearsal for the D-Day landings. Unfortunately, a mistake in their paperwork meant the ships were using different radio frequencies, so when a group of German boats picked up on the heavy radio traffic, the slow-moving US landing ships and their lack of communication proved to be easy targets for the German torpedoes. In total some 800 people were killed in the botched operation, a heavier loss than on some of the D-Day beaches. Worried about leaked intelligence and a drop in morale, Allied commanders ordered a blackout on all information about the attack and some families never found out how their relatives had died.
- Terence Otway, whose unit was tasked with attacking the Merville battery on D-Day, wanted to be sure that his men wouldn't leak this highly sensitive information in advance, so to test security he sent thirty of the prettiest members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, in civilian clothes, down to the local pubs. The women were told to do all they could try and get the information. None of the men fell into the trap.
- Despite his well-documented capacity for inspirational speeches, on the night before D-Day Winston Churchill was feeling less than confi-



NOT THE REAL THING: A dummy tank is moved into place. An entire phantom army was created in order to deceive the Germans into thinking the invasion would be at Calais.

- dent. He apparently confided his fears to his wife the evening before the landings telling her: "Do you realise that by the time you wake up in the morning 20,000 men may have been killed?"
- Over the years many people have wondered what the 'D' in D-Day stands for; some have suggested Disembarkment-Day, Decision-Day and even Death-Day. In reality the D just stands for 'Day'. D-Day and H-Hour represent the secret time and day an operation is set to begin, so before and after WWII many other operations had a 'D-Day'. The day before D-Day was known as 'D-1' and the day after as 'D+1', meaning that if the day of the operation changed, all the dates in the plans did not have to be changed.
- New gadgets designed for D-Day included a "swimming tank" and a flame throwing tank called "the crocodile". There were even collapsible motorbikes.

- Eisenhower's famous statement to the troops as he gave the order for Operation Overlord open with "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."
- US General Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote a letter that was to be opened 'in case of failure'. In it he wrote "Our landings in the Cherbourg-Havre area have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time and place was based upon the best information available. The troops, the air and the Navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone." The letter is mistakenly signed July 5 instead of June 5; presumably he was a little preoccupied at the time.
- Coded messages were sent to alert French Resistance to



D-1: At 23h00 on 5 June 24,000 British and American airborne troops dropped behind German lines. Their objective was to seize vital roads and bridges ahead of the landings at Normandy.

- begin a programme of sabotage. Phrases used included "*le dés est sur le tapis*" (the dice is on the carpet) – an order to destroy trains and railway lines.
- High command thought a successful landing would cost 10,000 dead and 30,000 wounded – 30,000 stretchers and 60,000 blankets were issued.
- From 23h00 on 5 June some 24,000 airborne troops were delivered behind the German lines to secure important roads and bridges. Along with more than 2,000 aircraft, 867 gliders were used.
- To add to the illusion, early on D-Day morning "Ruperts" – dummies dressed in paratrooper uniforms complete with boots and helmets – were dropped in Normandy and the Pas-de-Calais. The dummies were equipped with recordings of gunfire, while the real troops supplied additional sound effects to create the illusion of a large scale airborne attack. This operation, code-named "Titanic," was designed to distract the Ger-
- man military while the main forces landed further to the west.
- The first British casualty on D-Day was Lt "Den" Brotheridge, shot in the neck shortly after landing in France in a glider at 00h16. His unit was tasked with taking the crucial target of Pegasus Bridge, an objective that was achieved.
- Many paratroopers that day were dropped in the wrong place including US Private John Steele. His parachute famously became snagged on the church steeple at Sainte-Mère-Eglise. He was trapped for two hours before being taken prisoner.
- At 03h00 1,900 Allied bombers attacked German lines. A staggering three million kilograms of bombs were dropped that day. A total of 10,521 combat aircraft flew a total of 15,000 sorties on D-Day, with 113 lost.
- A naval bombardment from seven battleships, 18 cruisers, and 43 destroyers began at 05h00 and went on until 06h25. Midget submarines, called X-boats, lay submerged in the sea off the

- coast of France, surfacing on the morning of D-Day to guide in the invading craft using beacons.
- Defences on the beaches included concrete gun emplacements, wooden stakes, mines, anti-tank obstacles, barbed wire and booby traps. Around 50,000 German troops opposed the landing forces.
- General Dwight Eisenhower once said "Andrew Higgins is the man who won the war for us". But who is Andrew Higgins? Higgins is the man who designed and built LCVPs, the amphibious vehicles that enabled the Allied forces to cross the channel. Eisenhower is reported to have said, "If Higgins had not designed and built those LCVPs, we never could have landed over an open beach. The whole strategy of the war would have been different."
- The flat-bottomed landing craft were originally designed to rescue flood victims on the Mississippi river in the US.
- US troops went ashore on the landing beaches at 06h31, followed an hour later by the British and Canadians on their beaches. There were 61,715 British troops, 21,400 Canadian soldiers and 73,000 Americans.
- The heaviest losses were on Omaha beach where US forces suffered 2,000 casualties.
- Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was in charge of defending northern France from the expected Allied in-



HITTING THE BEACHES: American troops come ashore from one of the landing craft. By the evening of the first day more than 150,000 troops had been landed on the five beaches.

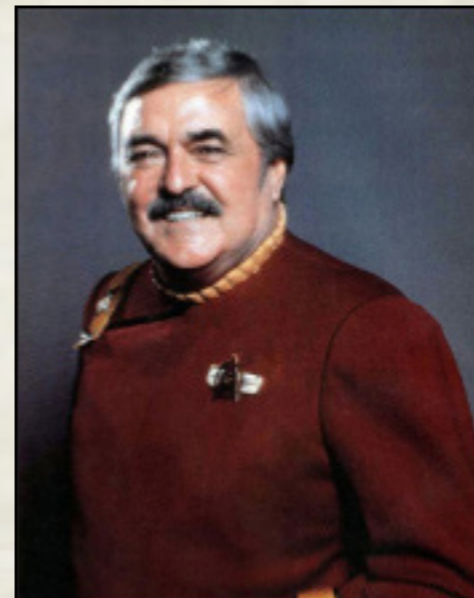
vasion. On 6 June he was at home in Germany celebrating his wife's 50th birthday having been told the sea was too rough for a landing.

- Nazi leader Adolf Hitler was asleep when word of the invasion arrived. No one dared wake him and it's said vital time was lost in sending reinforcements.
- Spanish-born double agent Garbo plied the Germans with misinformation that led them to believe the Normandy landings were just a ruse.
- The newly developed drug penicillin went with troops on D-Day and saved thousands of lives.
- Condoms were issued to soldiers – most were used for covering the end of their rifles to keep them dry.
- Despite setbacks, including

the failure to capture the city of Caen, D-Day saw the Allies establish a successful beachhead from which they could continue the invasion of Normandy. By the evening of the first day, along with more than 150,000 men, 20,000 vehicles had been landed.

- The Allies ferried two prefabricated harbours called Mulberries across the Channel to help supply the beachhead with equipment. The one at Arromanches involved 600,000 tons of concrete.
- Total Allied casualties on D-Day were much lighter than feared – around 10,000 with 4,572 killed including 1,641 Brits. The Germans are estimated to have lost about 9,000.

- Actor Richard Todd starred in *The Longest Day*, a 1962 film about D-Day, as Major John Howard. He was involved in the real landings as an officer in the 7th Parachute Battalion.
- James Doohan, who would go on to find fame as Scotty in *Star Trek*, was a lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Artillery on D-Day and lost a finger during the fray.
- The stunning Omaha Beach scene in the 1998 movie *Saving Private Ryan*, starring Tom Hanks, cost \$9,24 million to film and used 1,000 extras.
- Famous photographer Robert Capa captured some of the most memorable images of the action though only a handful of the frames he took survived. The others



BEAM ME UP SCOTTY: James Doohan, who played the part of chief engineer Montgomery Scott in *Star Trek* took part in the D-Day landings.

- were accidentally destroyed by a lab technician.
- The victory in Normandy can't be traced to a single moment. The Germans had been unable to complete the Atlantic Wall and the deception tactics had paid off with many of the German forces diverted from the key coasts. Even the French Resistance, having heard from their English sources of the invasion, had launched successful attacks that slowed German reinforcements.
- The Allies failed to achieve any of their goals on the first day. Carentan, St. Lô, and Bayeux remained in German

hands, and Caen, a major objective, was not captured until 21 July. Only two of the beaches (Juno and Gold) were linked on the first day, and all five beachheads were not connected until 12 June. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill landed on the beach at Gray-sur-Mer (Juno) on 12 June, General de Gaulle on 14 June and King George VI on 16 June. On 6 June the Canadian 50th Infantry Division had landed at Juno and by the end of the day had landed 21,400 men, 3,200 vehicles and 1,100 tons of supplies.

Key Allied role players - D-Day



Dwight D. Eisenhower



Arthur Tedder



Walter Bedell-Smith



Bertram Ramsay



Trafford Leigh-Mallory



Bernard Montgomery