



D-Day – Normandy Invasion, Facts, and Significance

D-Day Normandy Landing

D-Day the **Wehrmacht** high command had long expected the Allied invasion of **Western Europe**. Nonetheless, the landing in **Normandy** managed to surprise the German commanders and proved to be a turning point in [World War II](#). References to D-Day focus on that particular day. However, it was a part of a larger campaign known as **Operation Overlord**.

Battle of Dunkirk



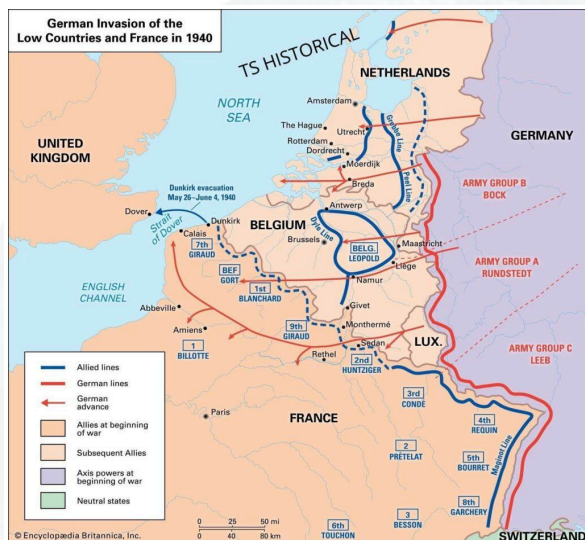
The first day of the campaign (the day we remember as **D-Day**) took place on **June 6th, 1944**.



The operation demanded a long period of preparation to reach that point. The landing was followed by an extended push to turn the bridgehead into a lasting presence in France. But first, a bit of background is required to place this **historical** invasion into context. On **May 10th, 1940**, the **Wehrmacht invaded [France](#)**.

They faced a large **French** military complemented by a **British Expeditionary Force** that had begun arriving in September 1939. The engagement was no repeat of **World War I**. While the two sides had been embroiled in a punishing war of attrition in the Great War, this decision was quickly reached. The German forces broke through to Paris and isolated the British Expeditionary Force and French 1st Army in a corridor around Dunkirk.

By the end of May, it had become clear these troops would require evacuation. A naval removal operation saved 338,226 troops and based them in the United Kingdom in an incredible turn of events. Thus, the Germans completed their occupation of France. Next, Adolf Hitler planned an invasion of the British Isles. However, the Luftwaffe could not overcome the Royal Air Force and Navy, and the British remained a thorn in [Germany's](#) side. Nonetheless, the German regime turned its focus eastward.



Battle of Dunkirk Map



On June 22nd, 1941, the **Wehrmacht** launched a massive invasion of the [USSR](#); the two totalitarian regimes faced off in one of the most destructive showdowns in global military **history**.

At first, the **German invasion** was shockingly successful, as the Panzer divisions reached the outskirts of Moscow. One of the main factors that facilitated the rapid German advance was their confidence that the British and their allies could not invade **France**. This fact allowed Hitler to move the bulk of his troops to the eastern front. But the situation changed over time. In December 1941, the United States entered the war. They brought with them large troop formations, increased manufacturing capacity, and the logistical ability to execute significant amphibious landings.

The United States proved very useful to the Soviet effort by providing supplies through the extensive end-Lease program. Indeed, the **Soviet victory** at the long and unforgiving Battle of Stalingrad and the great armored tank battle at Kursk were made possible by the help of the American materiel. Nonetheless, the Soviet government put pressure on the Western allies to open a front to alleviate stress on the [Soviet Union](#). In June 1942, General Dwight Eisenhower was appointed Commanding General of the European Theater of Operations. He would continue to be the main driving force behind the invasion plans and oversee the landing at Normandy.

Operation Roundup 1942



Allied Plans to Invade France

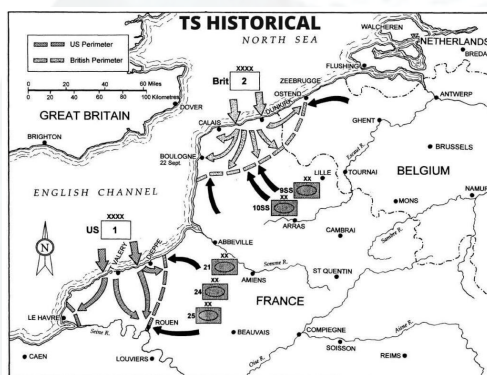


The Allies hoped to launch an ambitious attack on Western Europe in 1942. **General Eisenhower** presented two plans to his superiors. The first was **Operation Roundup**, which focused on northern France.

The second was Operation Sledgehammer, which prioritized the Atlantic French ports of either Brest or Cherbourg. Unfortunately, the complex logistics involved in both operations meant that they were delayed. The US military had yet to gear up fully, and the Allies did not have the requisite manpower to launch an invasion of the continental mainland. Instead, US troops planned their first significant operation against the Third Reich in November of that year.

On November 8th, they launched Operation Torch, which saw the Allies conquer Morocco and Algeria. The invasion of France was further delayed when the **Western Allies** decided to invade Italy first. In July 1943, US and British troops launched an invasion of Sicily. The operation was followed by a landing in Salerno in September, which was then followed by a difficult push up the Italian Peninsula. By 1944, the constant delays to a future invasion of **France** had become a serious diplomatic problem. Soviet dissatisfaction threatened to tear apart Allied cooperation before victory could be assured.

Operation Overload



Operation Overload



A series of Allied leader summits in 1943 saw Stalin gradually convince US President **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** to prioritize an Atlantic invasion of France over a southern invasion of Europe. Finally, at the Tehran Conference later that year, the leaders agreed that a full-scale invasion would occur in May 1944. With this political decision in place,

The Allied command focused on planning **Operation Overlord**. Eisenhower was promoted to the role of Supreme Allied Commander of the European Theater. Thus, he was now responsible for the most famous amphibious attack in military history. However, there was a cost to the delay. [Hitler](#) had long neglected the defenses of northern France. But as time passed, he accepted that a cross-channel invasion was inevitable and prepared a strategy. The Wehrmacht appointed the legendary general Erwin “the Desert Fox” Rommel to command the so-called “**Atlantic Wall**.”

The plan called for the erection of hardened positions facing the likely invasion points. In addition, Rommel kept elements of Army Group B in reserve to prevent an Allied breakout and push the invaders back into the Atlantic Ocean.

The major problem with the defensive setup was the rigid hierarchical structure Hitler had in place, which required direct approval from the political elite for many crucial functions. Eisenhower appointed Bernard “Monty” Montgomery, Rommel’s nemesis from the African campaign, as commander of the invading land forces. Monty planned to land five infantry divisions in different spots to create beachheads and break through the initial lines of the German defense. With the command structure in place, the plan took on its final shape.

The invasion would commence when three airborne divisions (two American and one British) dropped behind enemy lines and disrupted defense. Other divisions would concentrate on five beaches. Utah Beach was the westernmost point and was assigned to the VII Corps of the United States Army. Omaha Beach faced the English Channel and was the landing site by the American V Corps and British and Free French elements.

Next, the British XXX Corps and accompanying Polish and Dutch troops were to storm Gold Beach. Next, Juno Beach was the purview of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division,



the 2nd Canadian Armored Brigade, and British commando forces. Finally, the easternmost landing at Sword Beach was undertaken by the British 3rd Infantry Division. The fighting is the hardest part of an amphibious landing, especially one directly in front of enemy defenses. However, nothing provided planners with a bigger headache than the logistical nightmare of supplying such massive units across a body of water.



Lieutenant John Clifford Hodges Lee organized a fleet of 6,500 ships of various sizes and makes. They helped land close to 200,000 vehicles and well over half a million tons



of supplies. An invasion of that size was impossible to keep secret – and the Allies did not even try to! Instead, Eisenhower hoped to keep the Germans guessing regarding the exact location of the invasion and the specific date.

They followed the advice of Chinese military genius Sun Tzu, who believed that “All warfare is based on deception. When we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.” Therefore, pre-invasion bombings and preparations appeared to be focused on the **Pas-de-Calais** area across from Dover.

The site made more sense than Normandy for two reasons: it was closer to England and provided a better launching point into the German industrial heartland. Perhaps most impressive was the creation of a phantom army under the command of **General George Patton**. The formation was discussed in Allied radio traffic as the potential main thrust of an invasion. However, it consisted of inflated dummies.

The allies also used trickery to make phantom formations appear on German radar screens. In addition, the British had broken the German code to track the Wehrmacht's response and adjusted to mislead the enemy thoroughly. In the meantime, the Royal Air Force and US Air Force launched a massive bombing campaign to soften up the targets and disrupt the Wehrmacht defenses. One of the advantages of waiting so long to open the Western European front was that by 1944,

The Allies had complete air superiority over the once-dominant Luftwaffe. Utilizing this advantage to the fullest, the bombing operations preceding D-Day involved dropping over 195,000 tons of explosives on German targets in France. As a result, they succeeded in doing a good deal of damage to the Wehrmacht and its positions. However, their most important achievement was the destruction of the main bridges crossing the Seine and Loire.



The Downfall of France



The Down fall of France

The plan had called to launch the invasion in May. However, a series of postponements saw the date set for June 5th. Bad weather on the 4th pushed the date back yet again, and the invasion didn't begin until June 6th.

The initial landing of the airborne divisions was an unqualified success. It was followed by the first wave of amphibious landings at 6:30 AM. Most of the landing units confronted reserved opposition. The exception to the rule was the deadly landing on Omaha Beach.

The US 1st Division took thousands of casualties before clearing the beach of resistance. Luckily for Eisenhower and his troops, Erwin Rommel was on a leave of absence. Nonetheless, the Luftwaffe had enough prescience to order an armored attack



designed to cut off Sword Beach from Juno Beach. Had this move succeeded, the entire Allied plan would have been disrupted. However, British forces on the scene prevented this potential disaster and facilitated the continued advance of the allied forces.

Nonetheless, the invading force took a while to consolidate. Only on June 12th did the Allied troops break out of their segmented sectors and create a broad and unified front. This development allowed Eisenhower's forces to prepare for a deep advance. But just as importantly, it gave Allied engineers the space to create artificial harbors that could support the massive force. If the invading soldiers harbored illusions that the most challenging part was the landing, they were soon disabused.

The Luftwaffe consolidated its defense around the famed Panzer divisions. They took advantage of the thick hedgerows of northern France to make the lives of the Allies quite miserable. The Germans defeated early attempts to break out of the secured sector. The formidable defending forces finally gave way on June 30th, as Cherbourg fell to US infantry forces.

The victory there removed the threat that the invaders would be thrown back into the ocean. On July 25th, the US First Army, under the command of Omar Bradley, launched Operation Cobra. The German defenders were spread too thin, as they faced a British and Canadian attack near Caen by this time. Instead of withdrawing in an orderly fashion, Hitler ordered the Operation Lüttich counterattack.

The superior Allied force defeated the attack and left the Panzer divisions in disarray, Hitler was now forced to face facts. Normandy was lost to the Allies. He ordered the Wehrmacht to withdraw and prepare a new defensive line. By the end of August, Paris had been liberated, to the delight of the locals. Though the war was by no means over, it was now only a matter of time before the Third Reich gasped its final agonized breath. The bravery displayed by the Allied troops involved in D-Day played a crucial role in the liberation of Europe.