



Defense Primer: 80th Anniversary of D-Day, June 6, 1944

May 29, 2024

On June 6, 1944, military forces from the United States and several other countries (known together as the Allied Forces) crossed the English Channel to Normandy, France, during World War II (WWII), in what is considered [the largest amphibious assault in history](#). This date, known as [D-Day](#), marks the beginning of the allied campaign to liberate Europe from Nazi Germany. June 6, 2024, marks the 80th anniversary of this historic assault.

The [Allied Forces](#) were composed of a coalition of countries, including the United States, that opposed Nazi Germany. [Figure 1](#) provides information about the forces that participated in D-Day.

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. In this instance, D-Day denotes June 6, 1944, the first day of the operation to land troops on the coast of Normandy.

D-Day Preparation and Operations

At the [Quebec Conference](#) of August 1943, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill discussed a cross-Channel assault. At the [Tehran Conference](#) from November to December 1943, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin discussed military strategy and the post-WWII period and the Americans and the British committed to a cross-Channel invasion. In December 1943, General Dwight D. [Eisenhower](#) was appointed Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Forces, and took charge of [Operation Overlord](#), the code name given to the combined land, naval, and air cross-Channel operation. Tens of thousands of troops, with equipment and supplies, gathered in England to prepare for the assault. [Operation Neptune](#) was the code name given to the seaborne assault phase.

[Normandy](#) in northwestern France was chosen as the landing site because “the Allies would have the element of surprise. The German high command expected the attack to come in the Pas de Calais region ... where the English Channel is narrowest.” Allied Forces had used a [deception operation](#) prior to D-Day to mislead the Germans into thinking the invasion would occur at Pas de Calais or in Norway. Due to the deception operation, the bulk of German defensive forces were [150 miles away](#) from the Normandy

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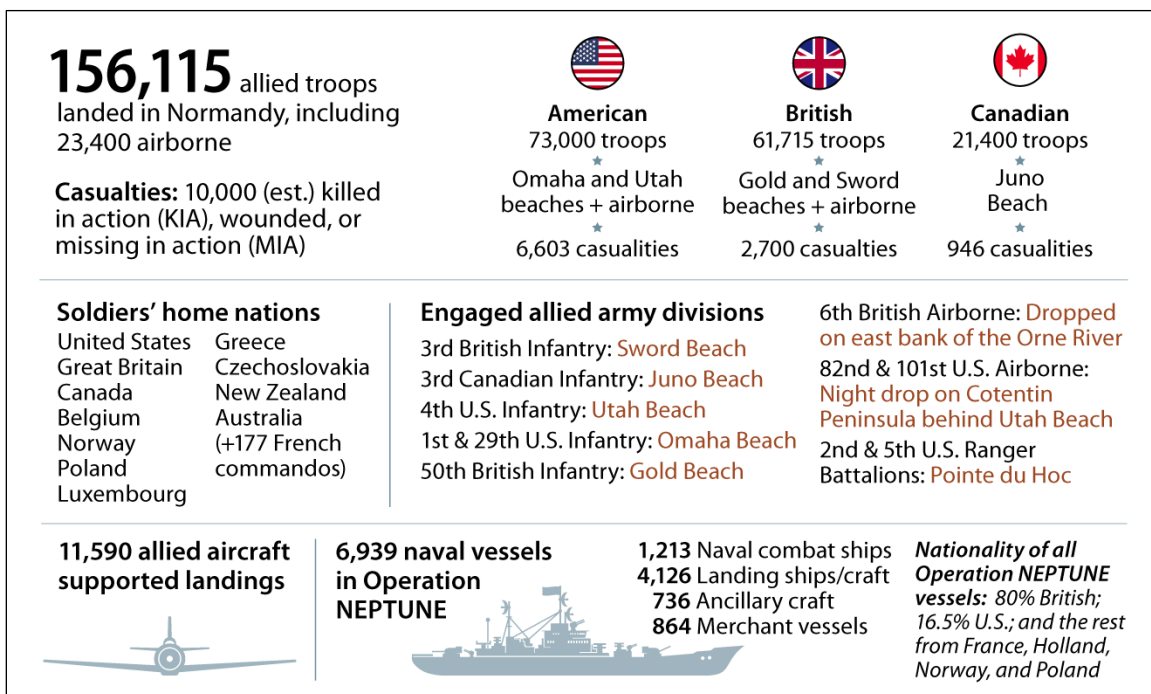
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landing sites. The main barrier left to the invasion force was the “Atlantic Wall,” a German effort to fortify the Atlantic seacoast with concrete and steel defenses against the Allied Forces.

Allied Landings on June 6, 1944

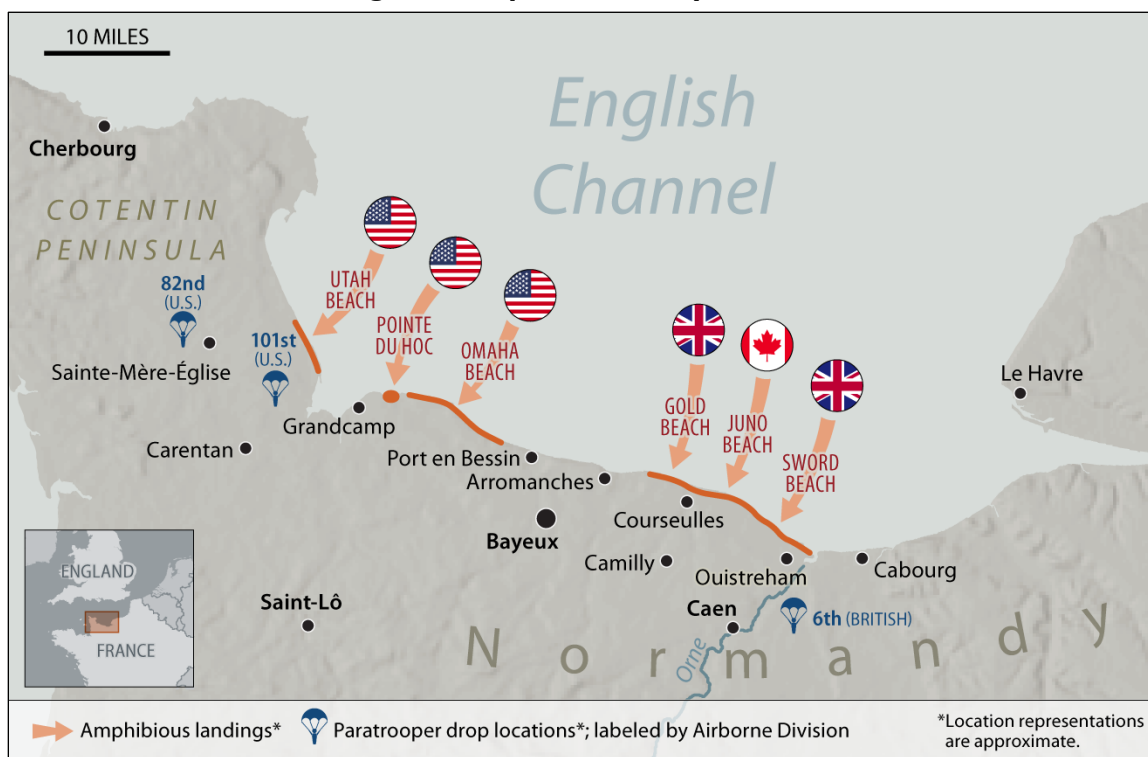
Shortly after midnight on June 6, 1944, 18,000 paratroopers from [three airborne divisions](#)—the U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions and the British 6th Division—landed behind the targeted Normandy beaches. **Figure 2** provides the approximate drop locations. Beginning at 6:30 a.m., [allied naval forces](#) conveyed assault forces across the English Channel. [Six army infantry divisions](#)—three American, two British, and one Canadian—landed on Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword beaches. The [2nd and 5th U.S. Army Ranger battalions](#) were assigned to [Pointe du Hoc](#) (sometimes called [Pointe du Hoe](#)), a prominent position along the coast of Normandy.

Figure 1. June 6th, 1944: D-Day by the Numbers



Source: CRS, based on information from the Smithsonian Institution’s “[June 6, 1944: A Day That Changed the World](#)”; U.S. European Command (EUCOM)’s “[D-Day: The Beaches](#)”; and the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

Note: The 2nd and 5th U.S. Army Ranger battalions were non-Divisional units, involved at [Pointe du Hoc](#), an important operational objective. Other [non-Divisional units](#) are not represented in this figure.

Figure 2. Map of the D-Day Invasion

Source: CRS, based on maps from the U.S. European Command (EUCOM)’s “D-Day: The Beaches”; “The Final Overlord Plan” (pp. 22-23) in the Army Center for Military History’s “Normandy”; and William M. Hammond, *Normandy: 6 June-24 July 1944*, pp. 26-27 (Washington, DC: Army Center for Military History, 2019).

WWII Participation and Casualties

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), about **16 million** Americans served during World War II. As of 2023, there were approximately **119,550 living World War II veterans**, and it was estimated that **131 World War II veterans** die each day. There are no VA statistics on the number of living D-Day veterans. See **Figure 1** for casualties for Allied Forces on June 6, 1944.

Medal of Honor Recipients



According to the [National Medal of Honor Museum](#), four soldiers received the Medal of Honor (MoH) for actions specifically on June 6, 1944: Pvt. Carlton W. Barrett; 1st Lt. Jimmie W. Monteith Jr.; Tech. 5th Grade John J. Pinder Jr.; and Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt Jr. An additional 12 soldiers were awarded the MoH for actions on subsequent days of the Normandy invasion.

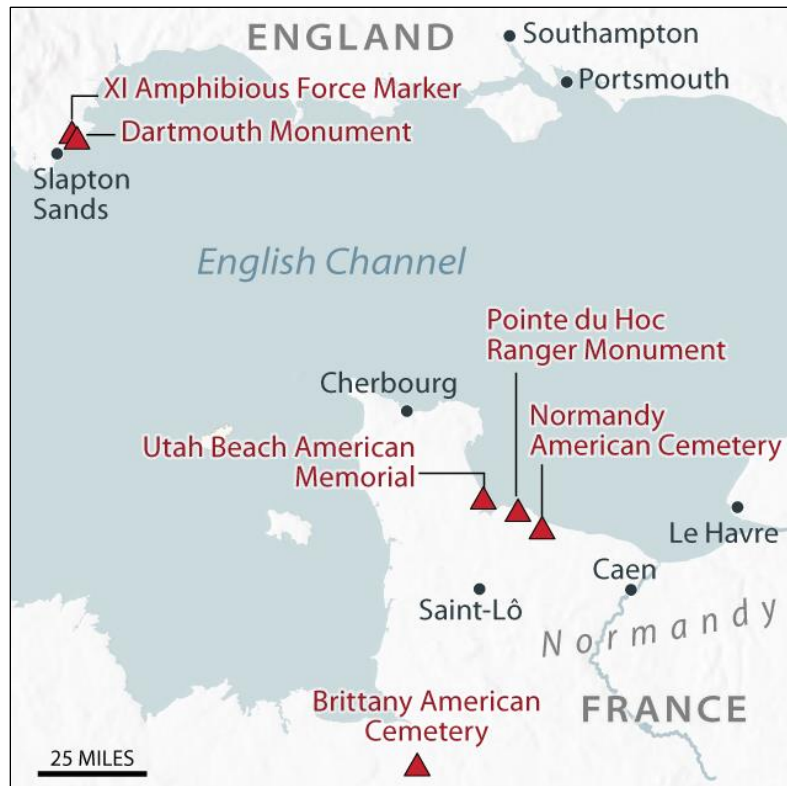
All MoH recipients for D-Day and the overall Normandy invasion were in the U.S. Army.

American Cemeteries, Monuments, and Memorials

The [American Battle Monuments Commission \(ABMC\)](#) manages America’s overseas commemorative cemeteries and memorials, including the following D-Day-related sites in France and the United Kingdom. (For a map of the cemeteries and memorials, see **Figure 3**.)

- [Normandy American Cemetery](#), France
- [Brittany American Cemetery](#), France
- [Dartmouth Monument](#), United Kingdom
- [Pointe du Hoc Ranger Monument](#), France
- [Utah Beach American Memorial](#), France
- [XI Amphibious Force Marker](#), United Kingdom

Figure 3. American Cemeteries and Monuments



Source: CRS, based on American Battle Monuments Commission websites.

Additional Resources

Veterans Stories

- Library of Congress, Story Map, [“D-Day Journeys: Personal Geographies of D-Day Veterans, 75 Years Later”](#)
- Library of Congress, VHP (Veterans History Project), [“Serving Our Voices: D-Day \(June 6, 1944\)”](#)
- Library of Congress, VHP, [“Operation Overlord \(D-Day Normandy Invasion\)”](#)

Maps at the Library of Congress

- Library of Congress, [“D-Day’s Top-Secret Map”](#)
- Library of Congress, [“Planning D-Day: Relief Model of Utah Beach Given to Library”](#)

- Library of Congress, VHP, [“VHP Collection Spotlight: Joseph Vaghi’s D-Day Map”](#)

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