

Normandy landings

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The Normandy landings were the landing operations and associated airborne operations on 6 June 1944 of the Allied invasion of Normandy in Operation Overlord during the Second World War. Codenamed Operation Neptune and often referred to as D-Day (after the military term), it is the largest seaborne invasion in history. The operation began the liberation of France, and the rest of Western Europe, and laid the foundations for the Allied victory on the Western Front. Planning for the operation began in 1943. In the months leading up to the invasion, the Allies conducted a substantial military deception, codenamed Operation Bodyguard, to mislead the Germans as to the date and location of the main Allied landings. The weather on the day selected for D-Day was not ideal, and the operation had to be delayed 24 hours; a further postponement would have meant a delay of at least two weeks, as the planners had requirements for the phase of the moon, the tides, and time of day, that meant only a few days each month were deemed suitable. German leader Adolf Hitler placed Field Marshal Erwin Rommel in command of German forces and developing fortifications along the Atlantic Wall in anticipation of an invasion. US president Franklin D. Roosevelt placed Major General Dwight D. Eisenhower in command of Allied forces. The invasion began shortly after midnight on the morning of 6 June with extensive aerial and naval bombardment as well as an airborne assault—the landing of 24,000 American, British, and Canadian airborne troops. The early morning aerial assault was soon followed by Allied amphibious landings on the coast of France c. 06:30. The target 80-kilometre (50 mi) stretch of the Normandy coast was divided into five sectors: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword. Strong winds blew the landing craft east of their intended positions, particularly at Utah and Omaha. The men landed under heavy fire from gun emplacements overlooking the beaches, and the shore was mined and covered with obstacles such as wooden stakes, metal tripods, and barbed wire, making the work of the beach-clearing teams difficult and dangerous. The highest number of casualties was at Omaha, with its high cliffs. At Gold, Juno, and Sword, several fortified towns were cleared in house-to-house fighting, and two major gun emplacements at Gold were disabled using specialised tanks. The Allies were able to establish beachheads at each of the five landing sites on the first day, but Carentan, Saint-Lô, and Bayeux remained in German hands. 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. German casualties on D-Day have been estimated at 4,000 to 9,000 men. Allied casualties were at least 10,000, with 4,414 confirmed dead.