

A black and white photograph showing a group of soldiers in a landing craft. In the foreground, a soldier wearing a helmet and camouflage gear looks directly at the camera with a determined expression. Behind him, other soldiers are visible, some looking towards the camera and others focused on their surroundings. The water and sky are visible in the background.

LEVELED BOOK • Z¹

D-Day

MULTI
level
X•Z¹•Z²

Written by Michael T. Foley

D-Day



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www.readinga-z.com

Focus Question

What effect did D-Day have on World War II?

Words to Know

Allies
amphibious
Axis powers
casualties
commandos
decoy
drafted
foothold

fortifications
infantry
liberation
mines
mourning
Panzer
paratroopers

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Level Z1 Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL Z1	
Fountas & Pinnell	W-X
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	60



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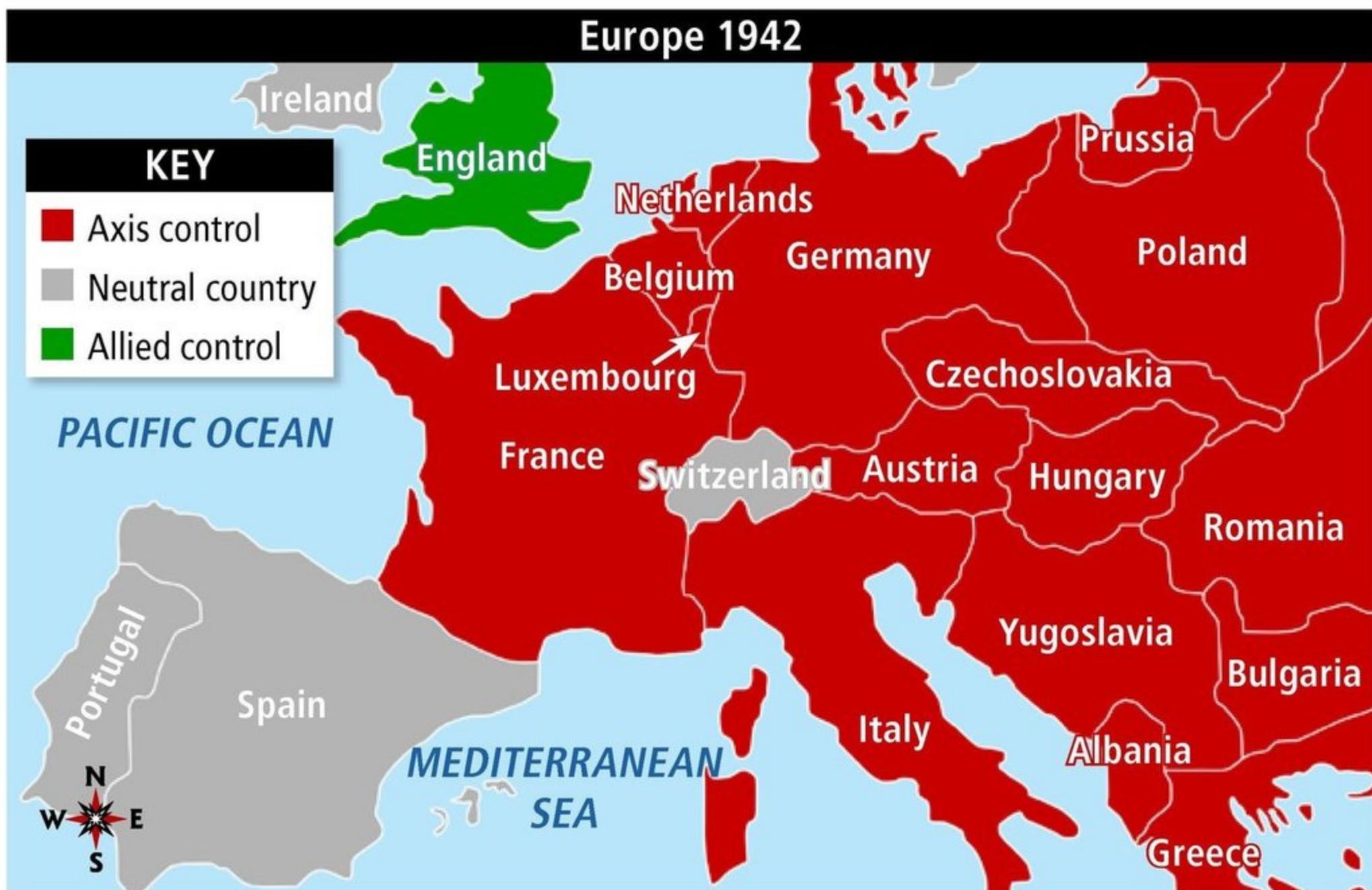
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Introduction

Hundreds of men huddled in dozens of small landing craft, thinking about their families far away. The men were just off the coast of German-occupied France. Most of them were not highly trained soldiers who had spent their whole lives in the military; they were teachers, store clerks, housepainters, and other ordinary citizens from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada who had been **drafted** into military service to fight in World War II. The landing craft were rocking in the rough waters, and many of the men were seasick. All of them were scared. To begin their mission, they needed to jump into the cold water and run across the beaches while members of the German army, themselves ordinary citizens before the war, shot at them. The world as these men knew it had changed, and failure was not an option. This mission, code-named *Operation Overlord*, was a must-win for the Allies. Welcome to the story of D-Day.

The “D” in “D-Day”

In military terminology, the “D” in “D-Day” stands for “day.” This special code was used for the day of any important military operation. The days before and after a particular D-Day—in this case, June 6, 1944—were indicated using plus and minus signs. For example, D – 3 meant three days before D-Day (June 3), and D + 3 meant three days after D-Day (June 9).



Background

World War II, the biggest war in modern history, began when German troops invaded Poland in September 1939. German troops quickly captured Poland and from there turned west and invaded France in June 1940. Over the next four years, Germany and the other **Axis powers**, Italy and Japan, took over most of Europe and many Pacific islands.

Meanwhile, the Allied nations, consisting of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, the Soviet Union, and many others, were trying to stop the Axis powers. If Allied forces could free France from German rule, the German troops would be trapped between Allied-occupied France and the Soviet Union.

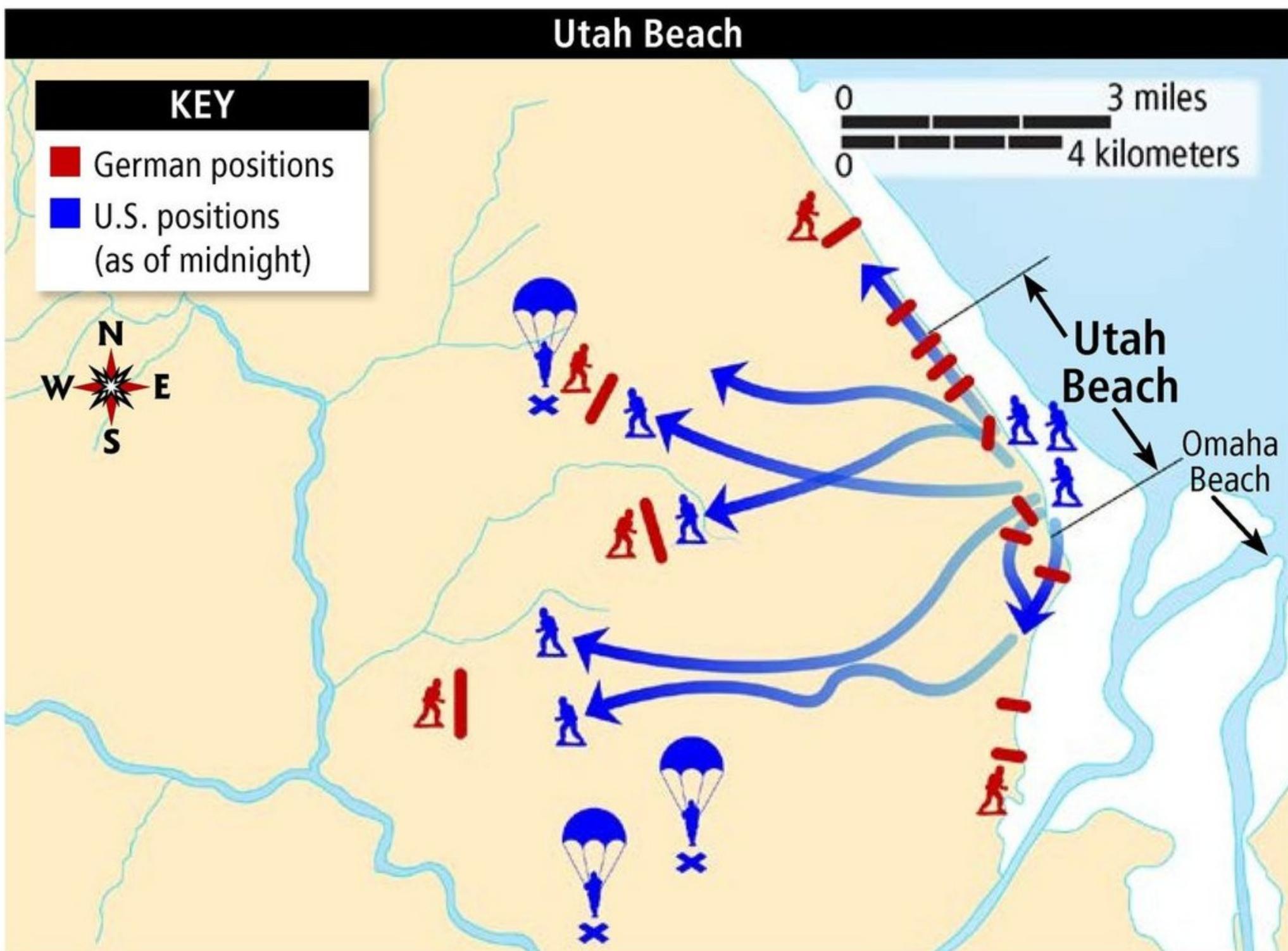
Operation Overlord

June 6, 1944, was one of the most important days for Allied forces during World War II. Allied landings on France's Normandy beaches marked the start of a long and brutal mission to free Europe and end the war.

The D-Day invasion would be the most ambitious military operation in history. The Allies would have to move more than 156,000 men and all their equipment and tanks across the English Channel without the Axis powers discovering the plan in time to concentrate their forces and crush the invasion.



The plan called for Allied airborne forces to parachute into zones across northern France early on the morning of June 6. Other troops would then emerge from naval landing craft and storm across five beaches—Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword—that were guarded by German troops. The Allies hoped to establish a **foothold** along the French coast and begin their advance into France.



Utah Beach by the Numbers

Number of U.S. Troops Landed	20,000
Number of Military Vehicles Landed	1,700
Number of U.S. Casualties	589

The Beaches

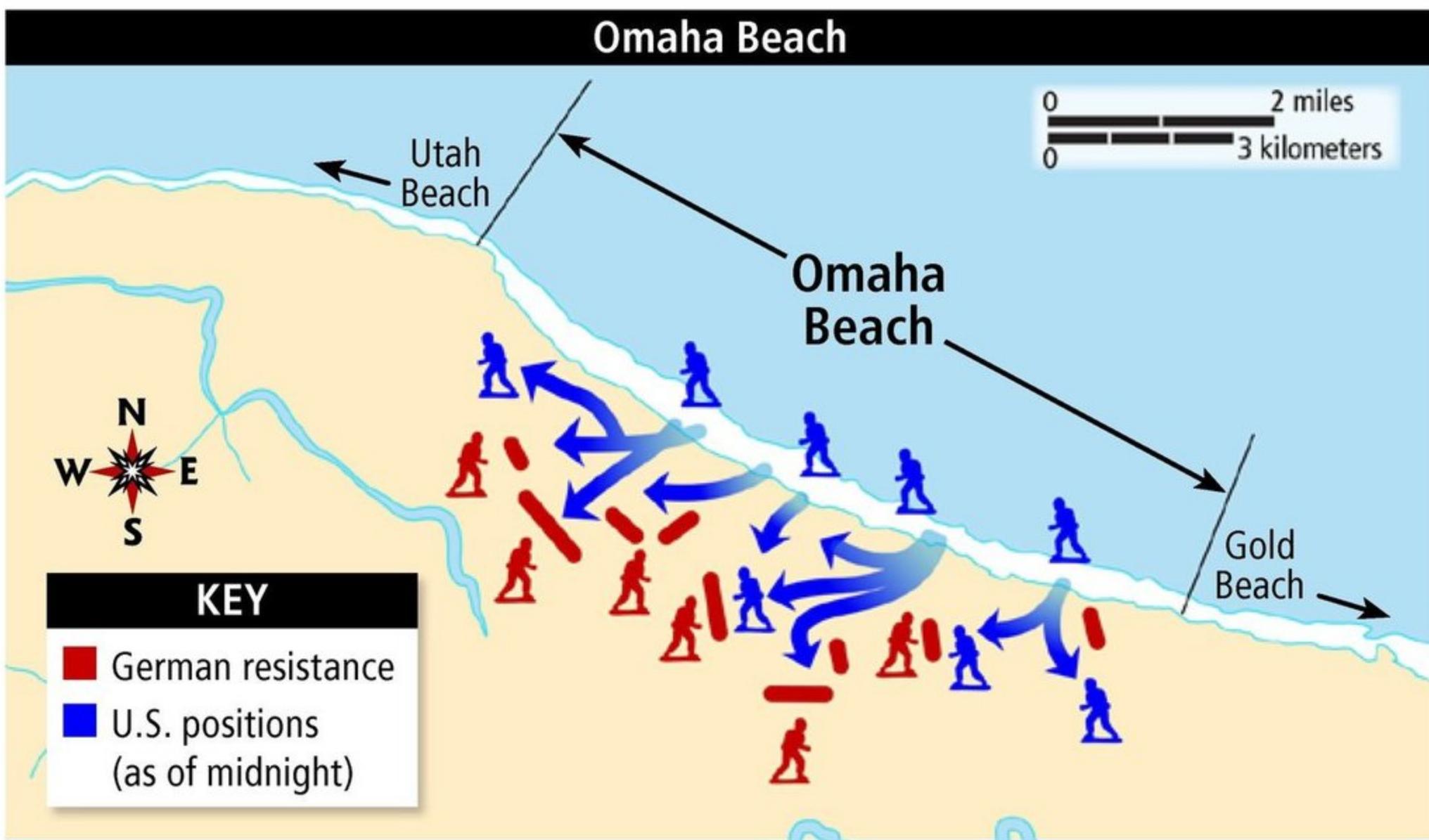
Utah Beach

United States 4th Infantry Division and 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions

The U.S. 4th Infantry Division was scheduled to land on Utah Beach at 6:30 AM. Five hours earlier, **paratroopers** from the U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions were dropped at various points 2 to 5 miles (3.2–8.0 km) inland. The paratroopers had to secure the main road from

Valognes (vah-LOHN-yuh) to Carentan (kah-rohn-TOHN). German troops had no idea whether the paratroopers were the main attack force or a **decoy** force meant to distract them from a larger assault.

With the paratroopers providing a distraction, the troops who landed on the beach at 6:30 AM were supposed to push inland to meet up with the paratroopers as soon as possible. However, owing to strong currents caused by poor weather, the **amphibious** craft landed 2,200 yards (2 km) from the intended targets on the beach. The troops had to wade ashore. Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Jr., the oldest son of former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, told his men, “We’ll start the war from here!” and ordered them to advance. Luckily, it was not a heavily defended area on the beachfront, and American **casualties** were minimal in comparison to those on the other beaches. By afternoon, the U.S. 4th Infantry had met up with the American paratroopers, and the German defense was defeated quickly. By the end of the day, the Americans had advanced about 4 miles (6.4 km) inland. They were roughly 1 mile (1.6 km) from the American paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne at Ste. Mère-Eglise (sahnt-MER-e-GLEEZ), some 6 miles (9.7 km) north of Carentan.



Omaha Beach by the Numbers

Number of U.S. Troops Landed	34,000
Number of Military Vehicles Lost	136
Number of U.S. Casualties	3,686

Omaha Beach

United States 1st Army

Omaha Beach was 6 miles (9.7 km) in length and was the largest of the five beaches. From the beginning, the U.S. 1st Army, led by Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, was at a disadvantage. Omaha Beach was overlooked by 100-foot (30.5 m) cliffs, which made it very difficult for the Americans to attack. Additionally, the Germans had placed heavily mined “dragon’s teeth”—3- to 4-foot (0.9–1.2 m) toothlike concrete obstacles—around the beach to take out any landing craft. To make matters even worse, the

beach was guarded by several Germans firing from the top of the cliffs as well as from thirteen resistance nests—small, self-contained defensive positions.

The odds were against the Americans before the first shot was even fired. The attack on Omaha Beach was scheduled for 6:30 AM, when the tide was low and the dragon's teeth were visible. The plan was to land infantry troops along with twenty-nine amphibious Sherman tanks. The armored tanks would have given the Allied troops a huge firepower advantage. However, disaster struck when the tanks were released from their landing craft too far from the beach. All but two tanks flooded and sank to the bottom of the ocean. Nothing could be done to save either the tanks or their crews. Meanwhile, the troops on the beach didn't get their expected armored cover from the tanks.

The weather added to the challenges faced by the Allies. Powerful winds and the rising tide carried many of the landing craft way off target, which caused mass confusion among the troops. The Americans were being picked off by the Germans at an alarming rate. Their losses were so severe that Lieutenant General Bradley considered abandoning the entire operation. The only way to

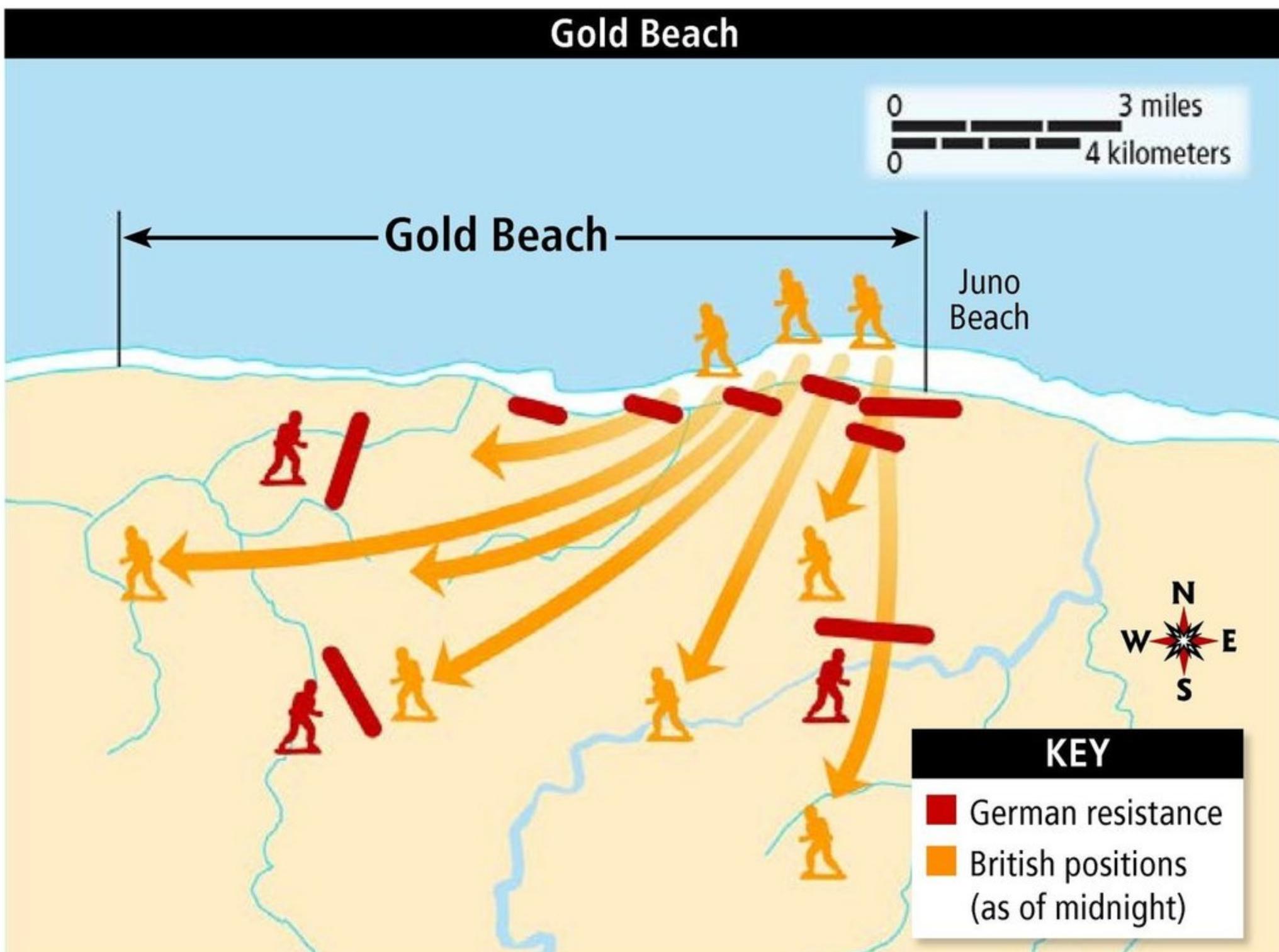


Omaha beach is 5 miles (8 km) long and bound by rocky cliffs.

survive was to sprint across the beach toward the cliffs all while dodging heavy German gunfire. The Americans who did manage to make it then had to scale the towering cliffs. As the troops scaled the cliffs, U.S. Navy destroyers got as close as they could and attacked the German **fortifications** at point-blank range. The destroyers provided important relief by distracting the Germans, who were focused solely on defeating the Americans on the beach. By nighttime, the Americans had gained a hold on Omaha Beach.

Bad Weather Delays D-Day Invasion

Originally, the D-Day invasion was scheduled for June 5. The Allies chose that date because the visibility was supposed to be good, winds from the northwest light, and the tides low. Otherwise, they'd have to wait two more weeks for ideal conditions to return. On June 5, the weather was stormy. Strong winds and high waves ruined any chance of a naval landing, and low-level clouds prevented pilots from seeing targets to drop paratroopers and attack enemy positions. Unfortunately, the weather was not much better the next day.



Gold Beach by the Numbers

Number of British Troops Landed.....	24,970
Number of Military Vehicles Landed	2,100
Number of British Casualties.....	1,023

Gold Beach

British 50th Infantry Division

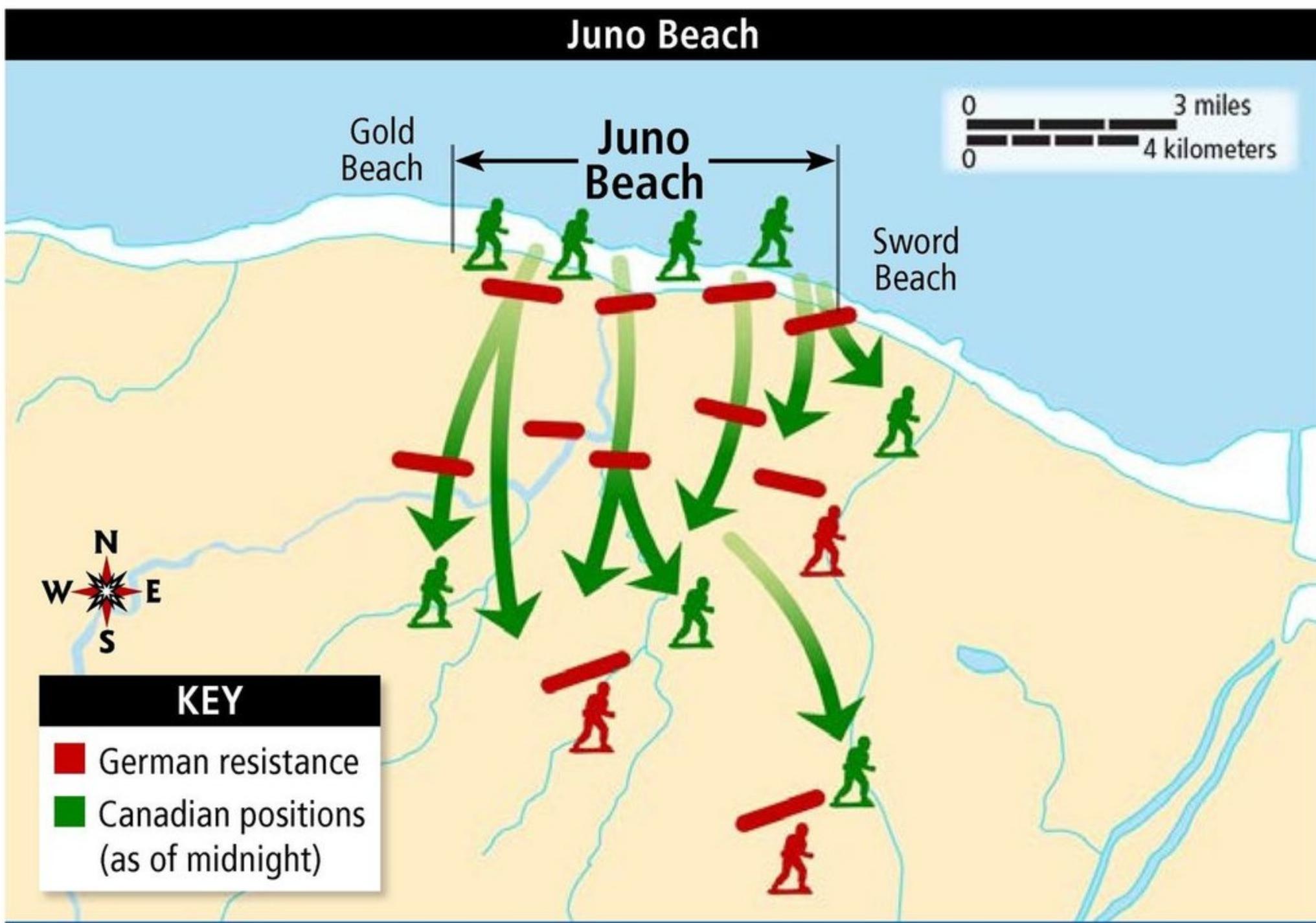
Gold Beach was one of two beaches secured by British troops and was the middle of the five beaches. Landing time at Gold Beach was 7:25 AM. However, British forces immediately faced a major problem: the weather. Owing to strong winds, the German **mines** and other obstacles on the beach were covered by seawater. As a result, British engineers were unable to disarm them as planned.

Twenty armored cars were damaged by the hidden mines. The situation could have been disastrous for the British troops had German defenders not been taken out by naval and aerial attacks. By afternoon, the British controlled most of Gold Beach and quickly pushed inland. They also managed to capture the fishing village of Arromanches (ar-roh-MAHNSH), later the site of Mulberry harbor, which was used by the Allies to unload supplies.

The invasion of Gold Beach was a tremendous strategic success. The British troops were then able to link up with the Canadian forces that landed at Juno Beach.



The Mulberry harbor at Gold Beach was about 6 miles (10 km) long and made of flexible steel roadways supported by steel or concrete pontoons.



Juno Beach by the Numbers

Number of Canadian Troops Landed.....	21,400
Number of Military Vehicles Landed	3,200
Number of Canadian Casualties.....	961

Juno Beach

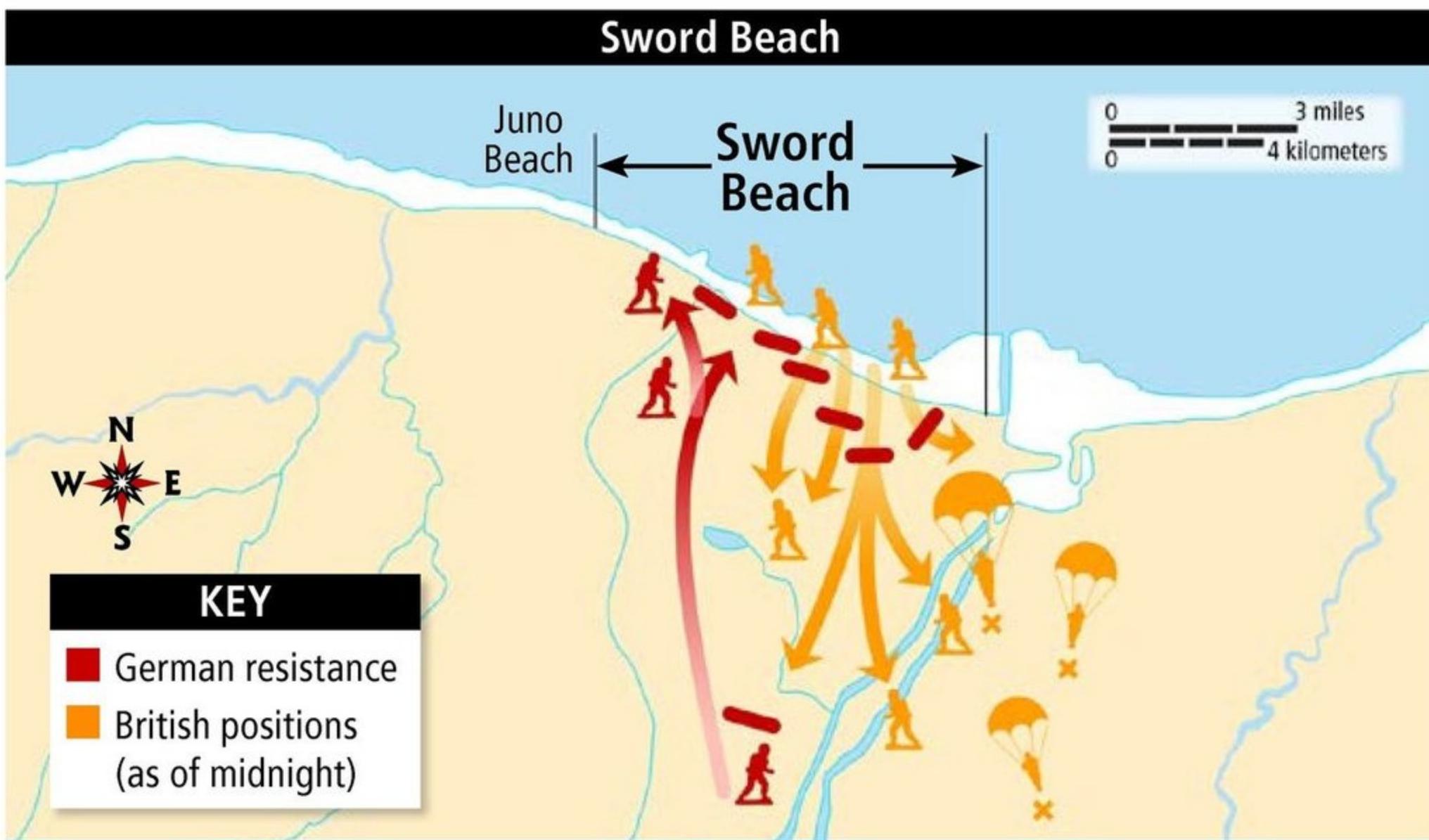
Canadian 3rd Infantry

The Canadians were tasked with taking Juno Beach. The plan was to move inland and form a link between the British-occupied Gold and Sword Beaches. Unfortunately, because of the bad weather and rising tide, the German mines were partially underwater. The situation left the Canadian demolition engineers unable to destroy them. The mines took a heavy toll, destroying or damaging 30 percent of the landing craft.



Using a bulldozer tank like this one, the Americans were able to get through the Germans' dragon's teeth defenses.

With the landing craft damaged, many Canadian soldiers struggled to wade ashore. The troops who did make it to the beach were hit by a powerful wave of German firepower. The first wave of Canadians on the beaches had about a 50/50 chance of surviving. However, the Canadians were not about to give up, so they kept fighting their way off the beach and farther inland. Once they made it off the beach, the Canadians took command quickly. Despite heavy losses, they advanced farther inland than the troops on any of the other four beaches. They managed to capture a number of towns and linked up with the British at Gold Beach.



Sword Beach by the Numbers

Number of British Troops Landed.....	29,000
Number of Military Vehicles Landed	2,603
Number of British Casualties.....	630

Sword Beach

British 3rd Army

Sword Beach was the other beach raided by British forces. The main goal of this mission was to capture the town of Caen (KAHN) 9.3 miles (15 km) inland. All the main roads in the region ran through Caen, and control of them was crucial for the Allies to advance successfully. The raid began at 7:25 AM as British troops stormed the beaches. Paratroopers from the 3rd and 5th Parachute Brigades landed inland and joined the troops on the beach. Fortunately, the British met little German resistance at Sword in comparison



After the D-Day invasion, it was common to see tanks in the streets of towns such as Tour-La-Ville in Normandy.

to that on the other beaches. By 8:00 AM, most of the fighting was over. By 1:00 PM, British **commandos** had linked up with paratroopers. Everything was going exactly according to plan.

However, Sword Beach was not secure for long, as the Germans launched a counterattack. The German 192nd **Panzer** Grenadier Regiment reached the beach by 8:00 PM. It proved to be only a temporary victory for the Germans. Their vehicles were open to attack from Allied tanks and fighter planes that had already arrived at Sword. The German counterattack failed, but it did prevent British troops from linking up with Canadian troops from Juno Beach that day as planned. While the British were unable to reach the town of Caen, the mission was still considered a huge victory for the Allies. Allied forces managed to stabilize the beach and advance roughly 4 miles (6.4 km) inland before meeting up with the Canadians the following day. Allied troops would eventually capture the town of Caen six weeks later, on July 20, 1944.

Conclusion

Although the cost in Allied and Axis soldiers' lives was high, Operation Overlord was a tremendous success. Through great sacrifice, Allied forces succeeded in gaining a foothold from which to begin to push back German forces and free occupied France. While this operation was a huge military victory for the Allies, it was also a day of **mourning**. Owing to the large amount of activity on D-Day, it was difficult to record accurate numbers of casualties on either side. The term *casualties* refers to all losses suffered by the armed forces: killed, wounded, missing in action, and prisoners of war. Historians estimate that the Germans had between four thousand and nine thousand casualties, and the Allies had more than six thousand casualties on D-Day.

The war dragged on for roughly another year as Allied troops continued to capture German-occupied territories in Europe. Germany finally surrendered on May 8, 1945, and Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945, officially ending the war. D-Day and the eventual **liberation** of France proved to be significant turning points in World War II. Without the efforts and sacrifices of Allied soldiers on D-Day, the war may have had a much different outcome.

Glossary

Allies (<i>n.</i>)	the countries, including Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union, that aided each other in defeating Germany, Italy, and Japan in World War II (p. 4)
amphibious (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to military operations involving troops entering enemy territory from the water (p. 8)
Axis powers (<i>n.</i>)	the countries, including Germany, Italy, and Japan, that fought against the Allies in World War II (p. 5)
casualties (<i>n.</i>)	people injured, killed, or missing during a war, accident, or disaster (p. 8)
commandos (<i>n.</i>)	members of a military unit specially trained for quick raids in enemy territory (p. 17)
decoy (<i>adj.</i>)	a person or object used to trick or lure someone or something away from a target (p. 8)

drafted (<i>v.</i>)	ordered into military service, especially during wartime (p. 4)
foothold (<i>n.</i>)	a position from which one can begin to advance toward a goal (p. 6)
fortifications (<i>n.</i>)	defensive structures built to make something stronger or more resistant to attack; forts (p. 11)
infantry (<i>n.</i>)	soldiers trained and given weapons and gear to fight on foot (p. 7)
liberation (<i>n.</i>)	the act of setting free (p. 18)
mines (<i>n.</i>)	bombs hidden underground or underwater that explode when touched or moved (p. 12)
mourning (<i>v.</i>)	grieving or feeling sad, especially for someone who has died (p. 18)
Panzer (<i>n.</i>)	a type of German tank used in World War II (p. 17)
paratroopers (<i>n.</i>)	soldiers trained to jump out of airplanes and fight behind enemy lines (p. 7)

D-Day

A Reading A-Z Level Z1 Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,848

Connections

Writing

Imagine you are a reporter interviewing a soldier who landed on a beach on D-Day.

Write several questions prompting the soldier to describe what he experienced. Then, respond to the questions from the soldier's perspective.

Math

Determine the percentage of soldiers from each battle who were not casualties. Then, determine the total percentage of Allied casualties during D-Day.

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