



LEVELED BOOK • Z<sup>2</sup>

# D-Day

MULTI  
level  
X•Z<sup>1</sup>•Z<sup>2</sup>

Written by Michael T. Foley

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## Focus Question

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

## Words to Know

aerial  
Allies  
amphibious  
artillery  
Axis powers  
casualties  
commandos  
decoy  
drafted

foothold  
fortifications  
infantry  
liberation  
mines  
mourning  
Panzer  
paratroopers  
repel

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### Correlation

LEVEL Z2	
Fountas & Pinnell	Y-Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+



## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
Background .....	5
Operation Overlord .....	6
The Beaches .....	7
<i>Utah Beach</i> .....	7
<i>Omaha Beach</i> .....	9
<i>Gold Beach</i> .....	12
<i>Juno Beach</i> .....	14
<i>Sword Beach</i> .....	16
Conclusion .....	18
Glossary .....	19

## 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 began when German troops invaded Poland in September 1939. The German troops quickly captured Poland and then successfully 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 desperately trying to stop the Axis powers. In order to win the war in Europe, the Allied nations would have to first free France from German rule. If Allied forces were successful in recapturing France, the German troops would be trapped between Allied-occupied France and the Soviet Union.

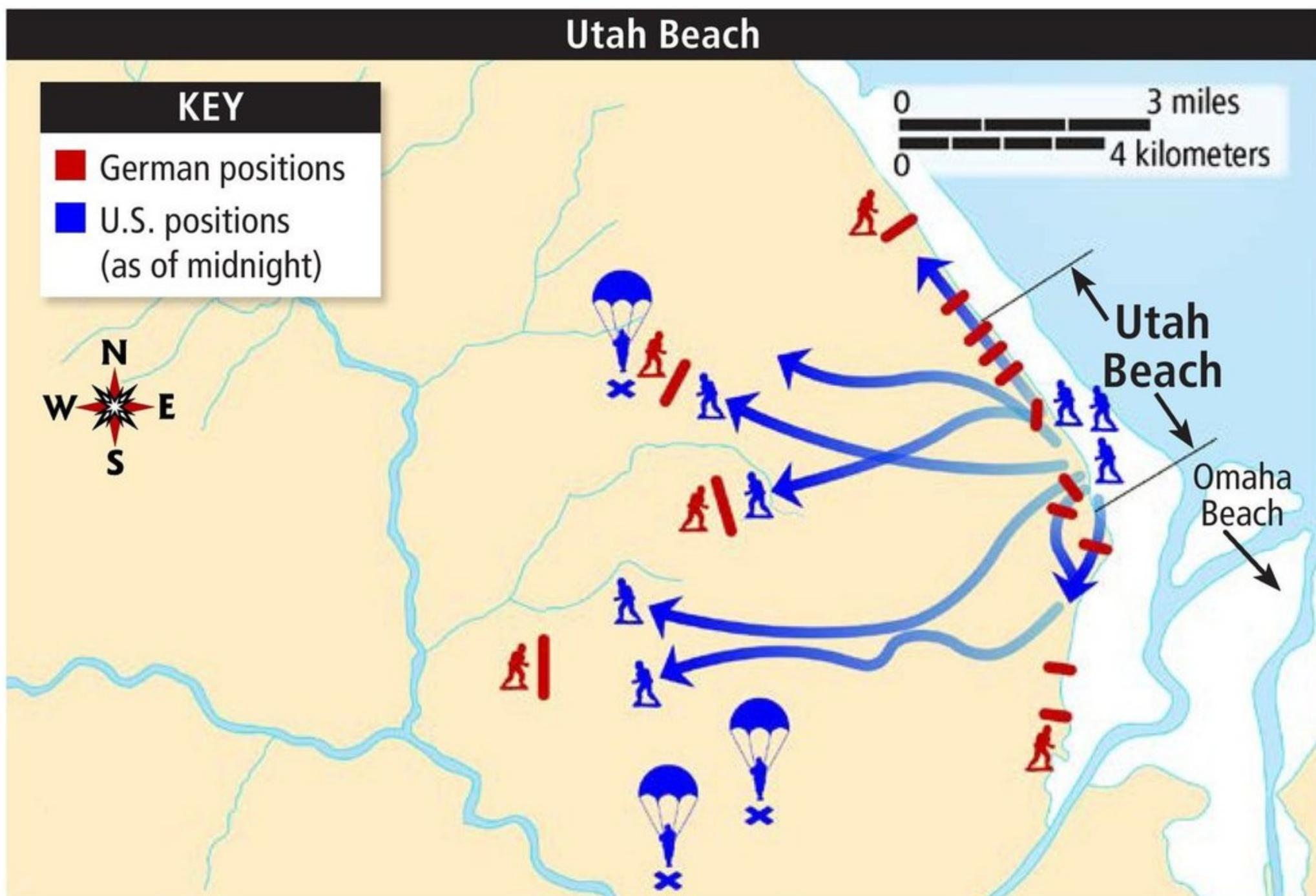
## Operation Overlord

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, **artillery**, 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. By the end of the day, the Allies hoped to establish a **foothold** along the French coast and begin their advance into German-occupied 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

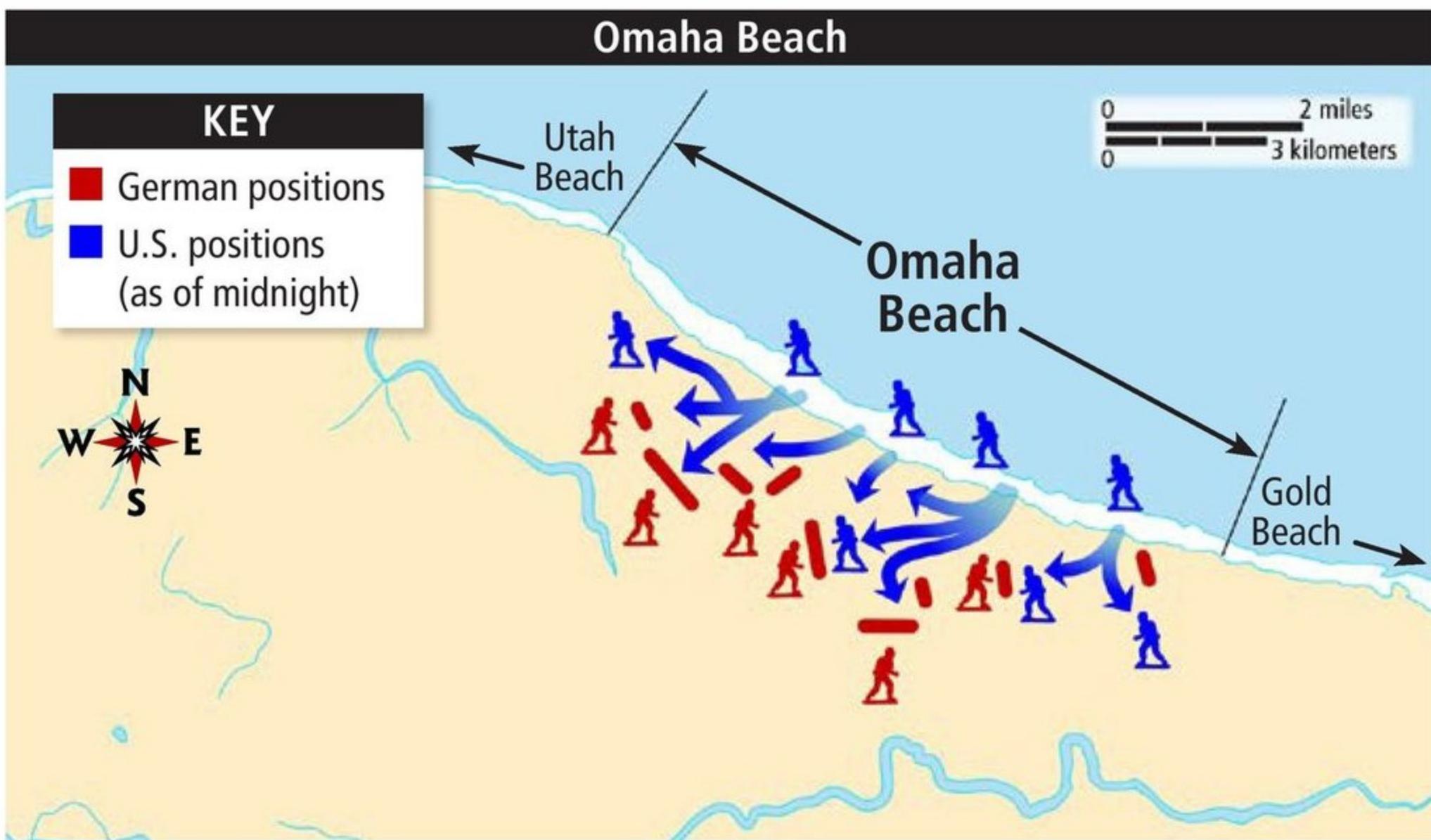
### *Utah Beach*

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

At 6:30 AM, the U.S. 4th Infantry Division was scheduled to land on Utah Beach, the westernmost of the D-Day beaches. 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 soldiers could not be certain whether the paratroopers were the main attack force or a **decoy** force whose purpose was to distract the Germans from a larger assault.

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, the seaborne landing did not go as planned. Owing to strong currents caused by the poor weather, the **amphibious** craft landed 2,200 yards (2 km) from the intended targets on the beach, and 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. Fortunately, it was not a heavily defended area of the beachfront, so American **casualties** at Utah Beach were minimal in comparison to those at 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 and 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, faced incredible odds. For one thing, Omaha Beach was overlooked by 100-foot (30.5 m) cliffs, which made it very difficult for the Americans to attack the area. Additionally, the Germans had placed “dragon’s teeth,”—3- to 4-foot (0.9–1.2 m) toothlike concrete obstacles—around the beach to take out any landing craft. These dragon’s teeth were also

heavily mined with explosives. To make matters even worse for the Americans, the beach was heavily guarded by Germans firing from the tops of the cliffs as well as from thirteen resistance nests—small, self-contained defensive positions.

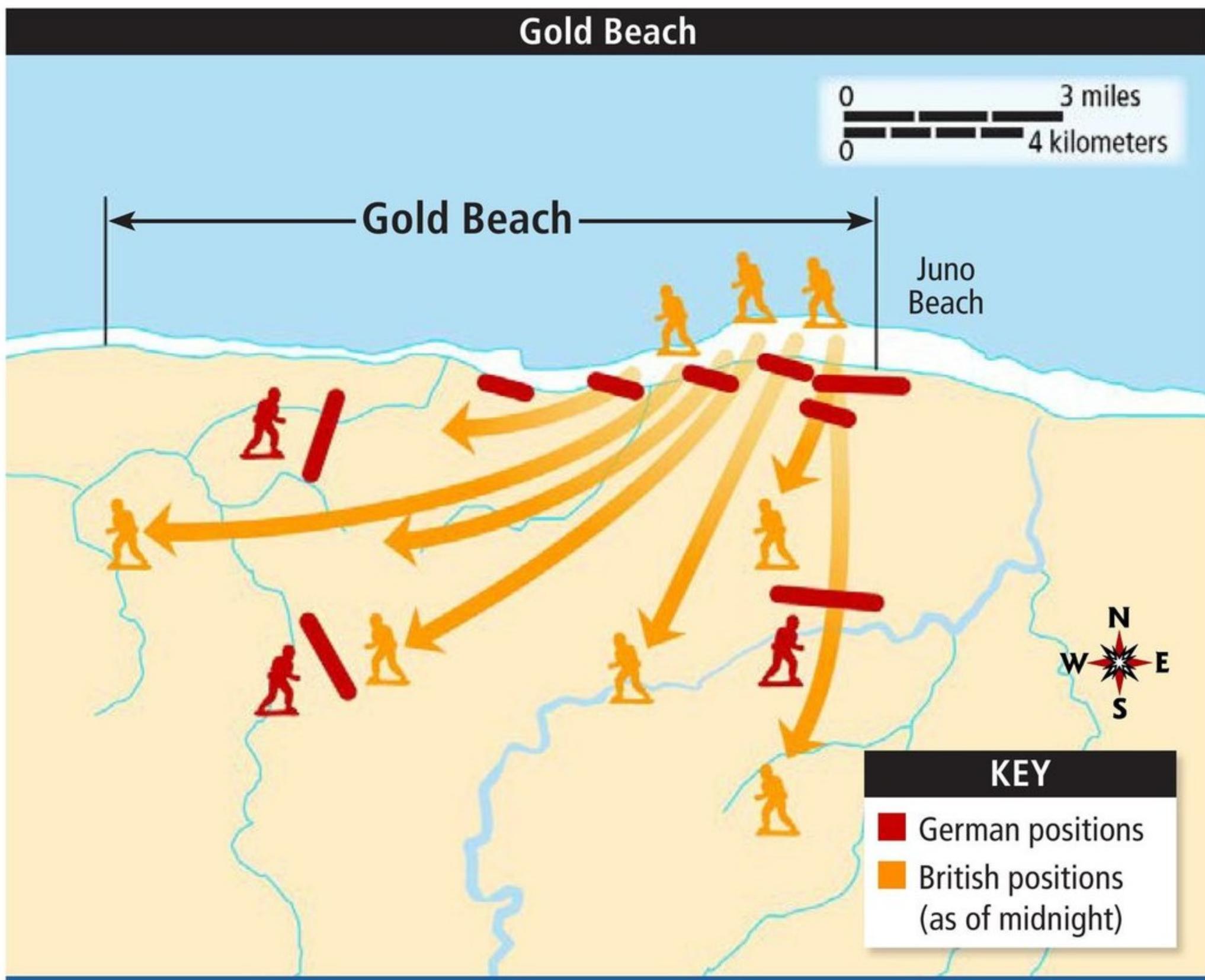
The odds were firmly stacked against the Americans before the first shot was fired. The attack on Omaha Beach was scheduled for 6:30 AM, when the tide was low and the dragon's teeth were visible. The plan was to land infantry troops alongside twenty-nine amphibious Sherman tanks. The armored tanks would have given Allied troops a huge firepower advantage against the Germans. However, disaster struck when the tanks were released from their landing craft too far from the beach. All but two of the twenty-nine

## Bad Weather Delays D-Day Invasion

Originally, the D-Day invasion date was scheduled for June 5. The Allies chose that date for a reason: they wanted to land on the beaches when visibility was good, winds from the northwest light, and the tides low. Because of the tides, June 5 through 7 were the best dates. 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 would ruin any chance of a naval landing, and low-level clouds would prevent pilots from seeing targets to drop paratroopers and attack enemy positions. The poor weather conditions caused the operation to be pushed back to June 6. Unfortunately, the weather was not much better that day.

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 also contributed to the difficulties faced by the Allies. Powerful winds and the rising tide carried many of the landing craft far off target, and when the troops did land, there was mass confusion as to which unit was where and what it was meant to do. American troops were being picked off by the Germans at a devastating rate. The losses were so severe that Lieutenant General Bradley considered abandoning the entire operation. The only way off the beach was to sprint across it toward the cliffs while dodging heavy German gunfire. The Americans who did manage to make it that far had to then scale the towering cliffs. As 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 were extremely important, as they provided a measure of distraction and relief from the Germans' sole focus on defeating the Americans on the beach. By afternoon, the German battle efforts were weakening. By nighttime, the Americans had gained a hold on Omaha Beach.



## 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*

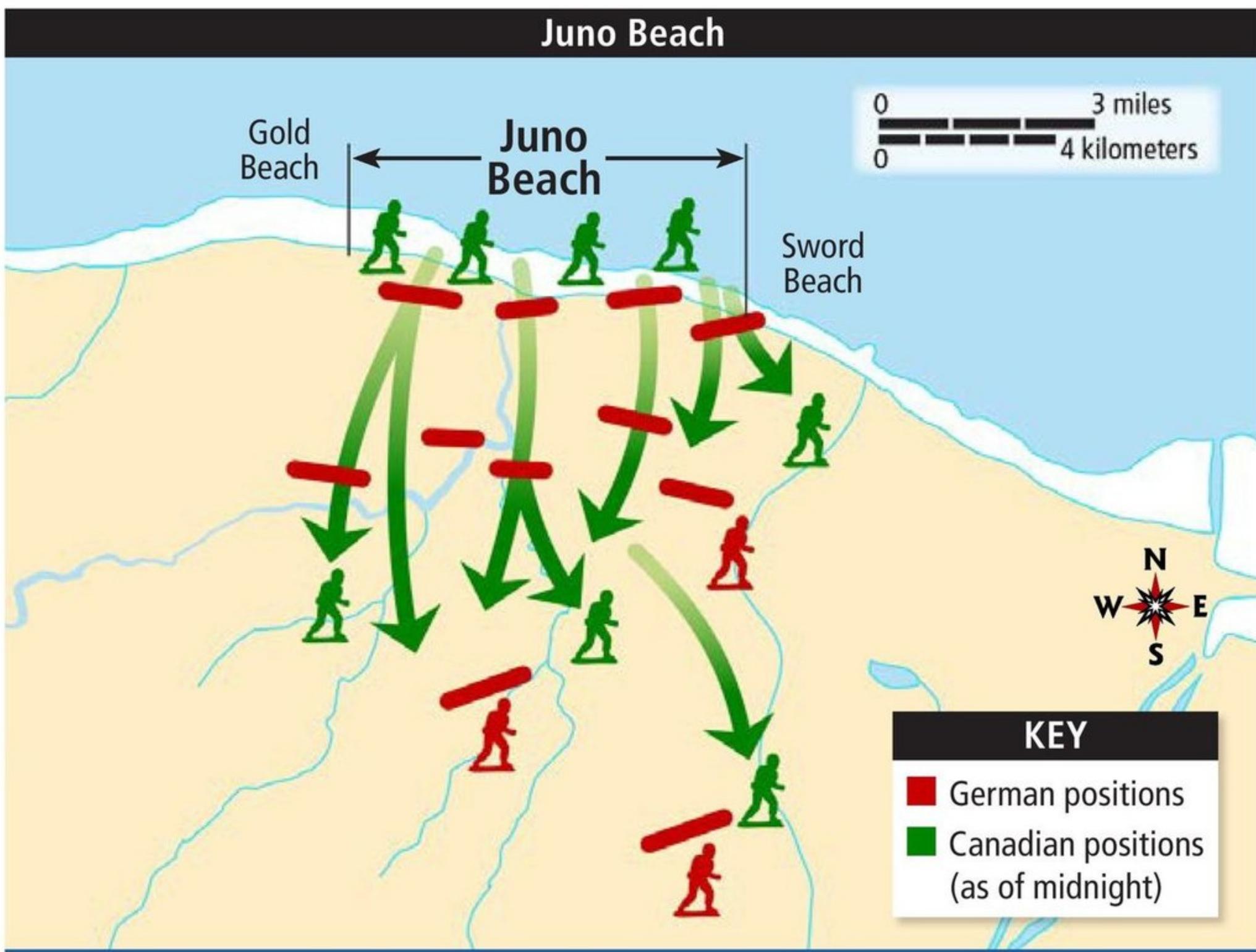
Gold Beach was one of two beaches secured by British troops and was the middle of the five beaches. Landing time at Gold Beach was 7:25 AM. However, British forces immediately faced a major problem: the weather. Owing to incredibly strong winds, the German **mines** and other obstacles on the beach were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



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.

expected. 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 a disaster for the British troops had German defenders not been taken out by incredibly accurate naval and **aerial** attacks. By afternoon, the British had taken control of 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. British troops were then able to link up with the Canadian forces that landed at Juno Beach.



## 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*

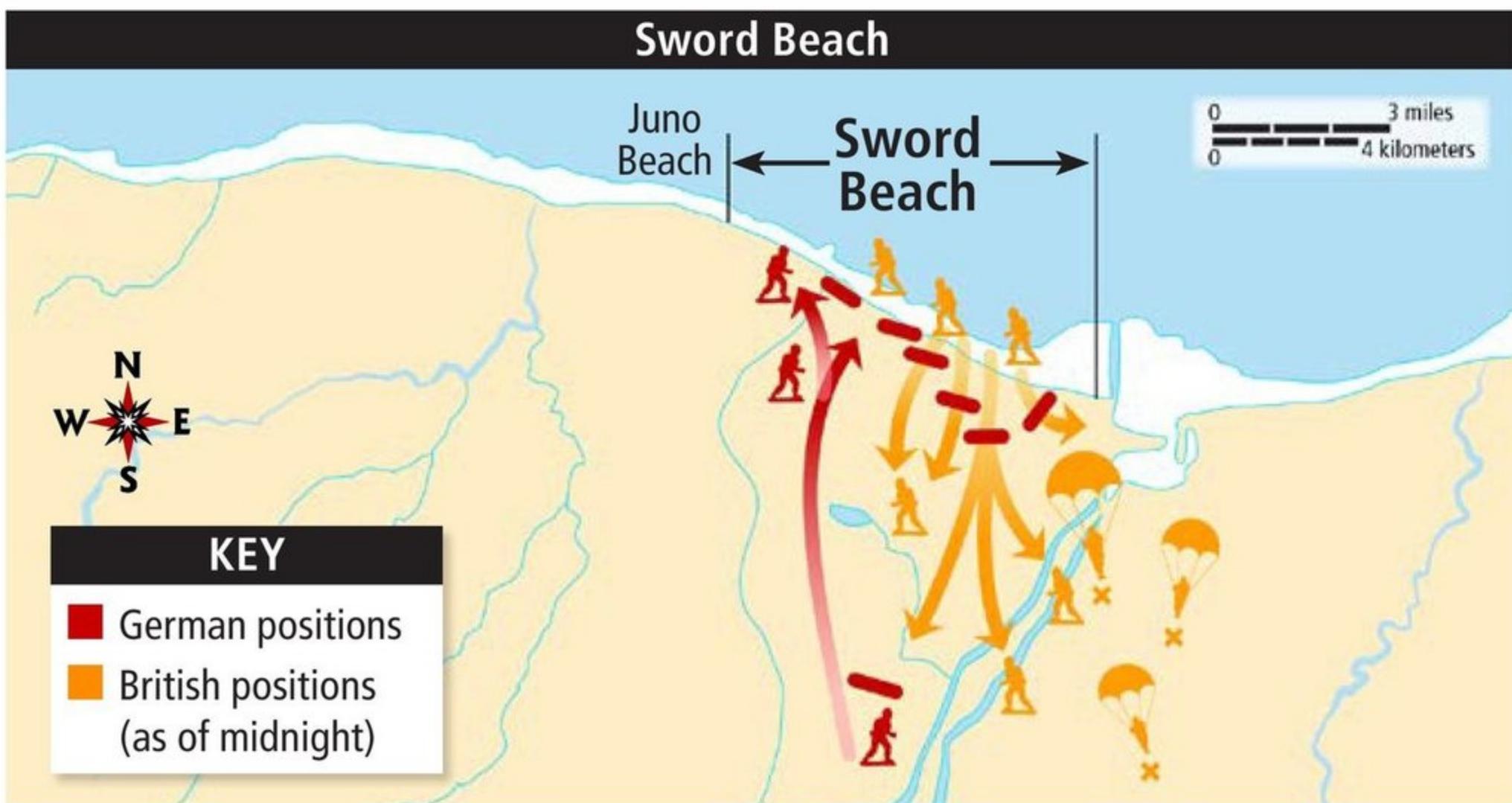
The Canadians were tasked with taking Juno Beach. The plan was to move inland and form a link between the British-occupied Gold and Sword Beaches. However, the Canadians faced a major challenge before they even reached the beach. When they landed at 7:55 AM, the bad weather and rising tide caused German mines to be partially underwater, leaving the Canadian



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

demolition engineers unable to destroy them. The mines took an extremely heavy toll on Canadian landing craft, leaving 30 percent destroyed or damaged.

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, and those who weren't hit kept fighting their way off the beach and farther inland. Once they made it off the beach, German resistance died down, and 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, a critical bridge, and then link 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), which was 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 troops stormed the beaches. Paratroopers from the 3rd and 5th Parachute Brigades landed inland and joined the British troops on the beach. Fortunately, the British met little German resistance at Sword in comparison to that on the other beaches. By



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

8:00 AM, most of the fighting was over. By 1:00 PM, British **commandos** had linked up with paratroopers farther inland. 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, as their vehicles were open to attack from Allied tanks and fighter planes that had already arrived at Sword. The German counterattack, although a failure, prevented 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 same day, the mission was still considered a huge victory for the Allies. Allied forces managed to stabilize the beach, advance roughly 4 miles (6.4 km) inland, and **repel** the German counterattack 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 liberate occupied France. While this operation was a tremendous military victory for the Allies, it was also a day of **mourning**. Because of the large amount of activity on D-Day, it was difficult to record accurate casualty numbers on either the Allied or the Axis side. The term *casualties* does not exclusively mean deaths, but rather 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, to officially end 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 would have had a much different outcome.

## Glossary

<b>aerial</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	taking place in the air (p. 13)
<b>Allies</b> ( <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)
<b>amphibious</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to military operations involving troops entering enemy territory from the water (p. 8)
<b>artillery</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	large guns that fire heavy shells over long distances (p. 6)
<b>Axis powers</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the countries, including Germany, Italy, and Japan, that fought against the Allies in World War II (p. 5)
<b>casualties</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people injured, killed, or missing during a war, accident, or disaster (p. 8)
<b>commandos</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	members of a military unit specially trained for quick raids in enemy territory (p. 17)
<b>decoy</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	a person or object used to trick or lure someone or something away from a target (p. 8)

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

# D-Day

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,994

## 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.

The logo for Reading A-Z features the word "Reading" in a large, bold, red sans-serif font. Above the letter "e", there is a small graphic of a sun with rays. To the right of "Reading", the letters "A-Z" are written in a smaller, bold, black sans-serif font.

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