

D-Day

A Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,384

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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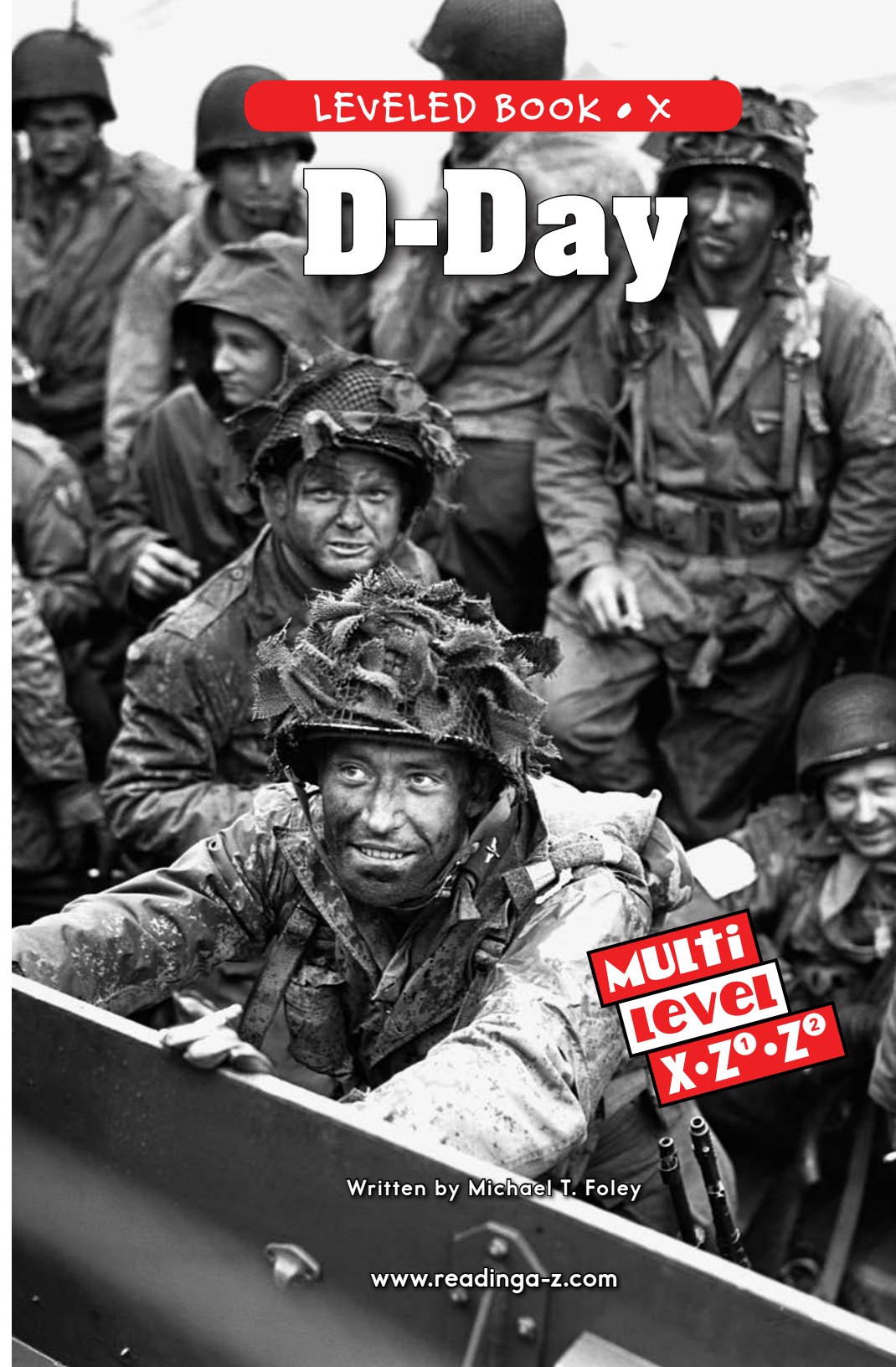
LEVELED BOOK • X

D-Day

**Multi
level
X•Z⁰•Z²**

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Focus Question

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

Words to Know

Allies	infantry
Axis powers	invaded
captured	liberation
casualties	mines
disable	mission
foothold	paratroopers

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Correlation

LEVEL X

Fountas & Pinnell	S
Reading Recovery	40
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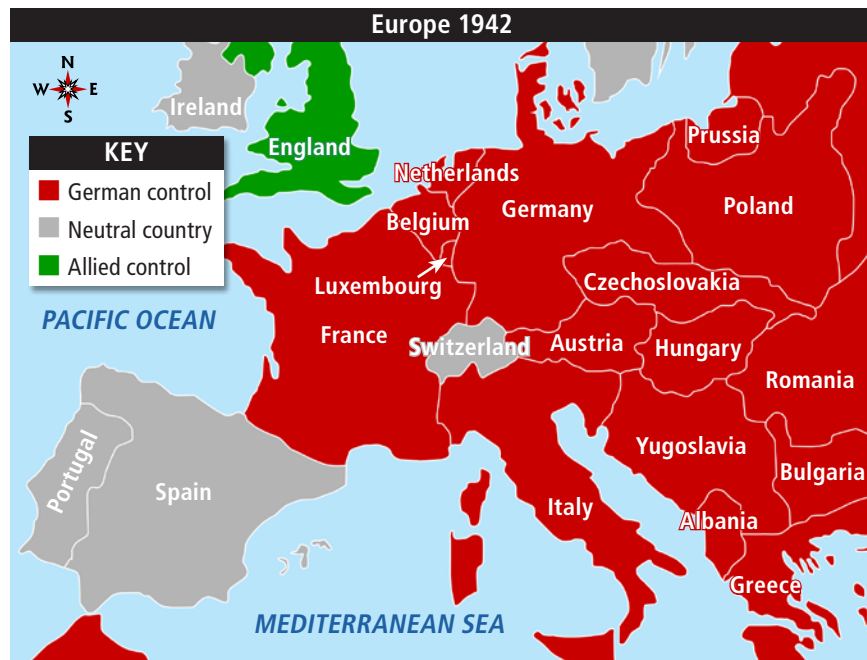
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Introduction

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 trained soldiers who had spent their whole lives in the military. They were teachers, store clerks, housepainters, and other people from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada fighting 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 not soldiers before the war, shot at them. The world as these men knew it would soon change. 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”

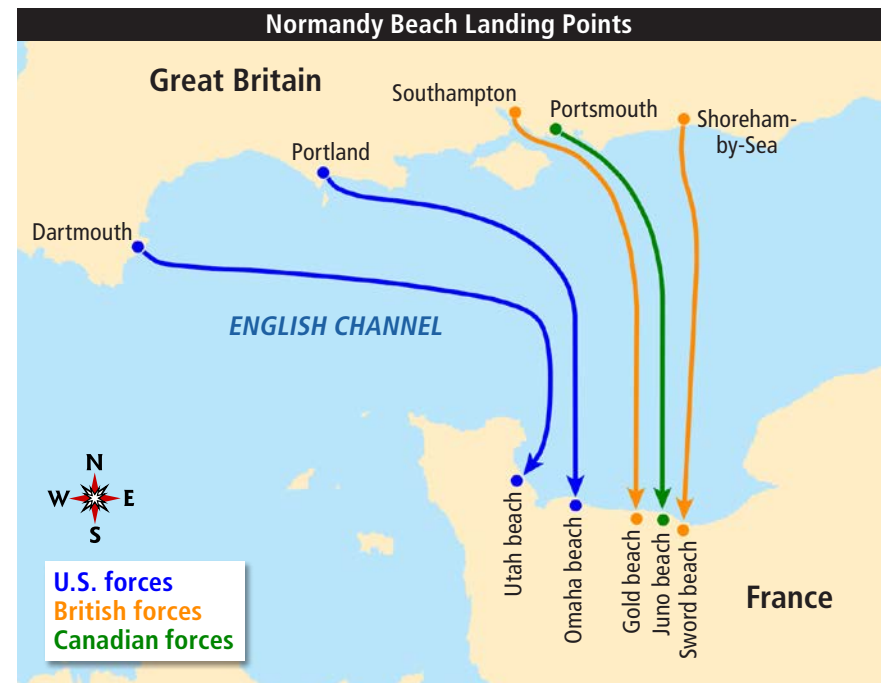
In military terminology, the “D” in “D-Day” stands for “day.” This special code was used for the day of any important military operation. The days before and after a particular D-Day—in this case, June 6, 1944—were indicated using plus and minus signs. For example, D – 3 meant three days before D-Day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



Background

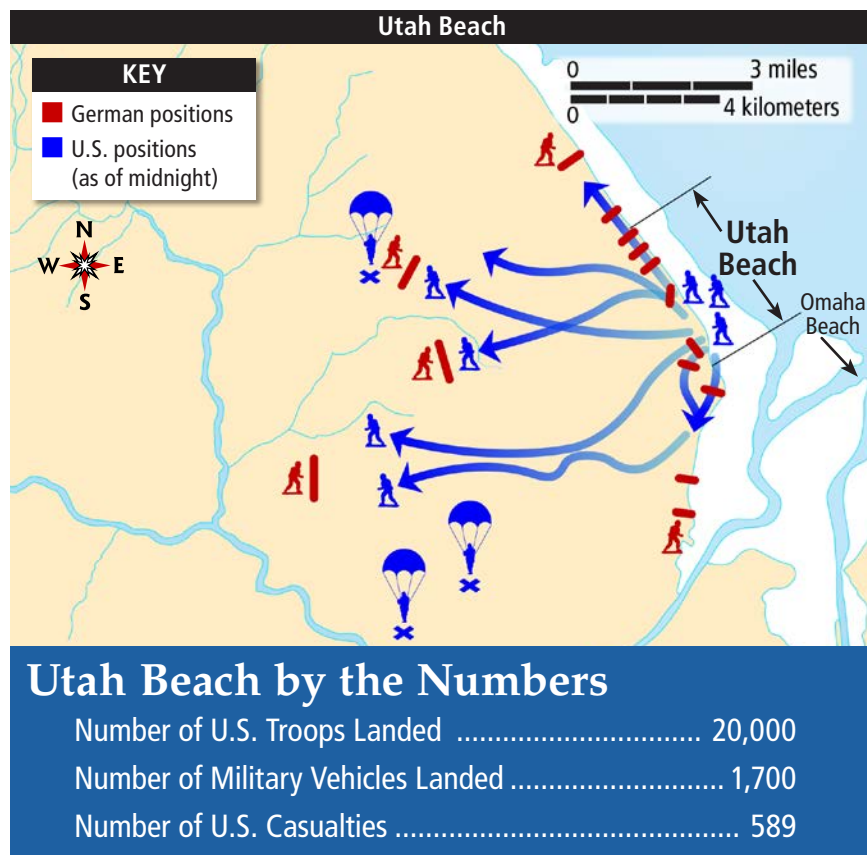
World War II, the biggest war in modern history, began when German troops **invaded** Poland in September 1939. German troops quickly **captured** Poland and then invaded France in June 1940. Over the next four years, Germany and the other **Axis powers**, Italy and Japan, took over most of Europe and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

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



Operation Overlord

The D-Day invasion on June 6, 1944, was one of the most important days for Allied forces during World War II. The Allies had to move more than 156,000 men and all their gear across the English Channel without the Axis powers learning about the plan too far in advance. The plan called for Allied air forces to parachute into zones across the north of France on the morning of June 6. Other troops would then leave the landing craft and storm across five beaches—Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword. The Allies hoped to gain a **foothold** along the French coast and move forward into German-occupied France.



The Beaches

Utah Beach

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

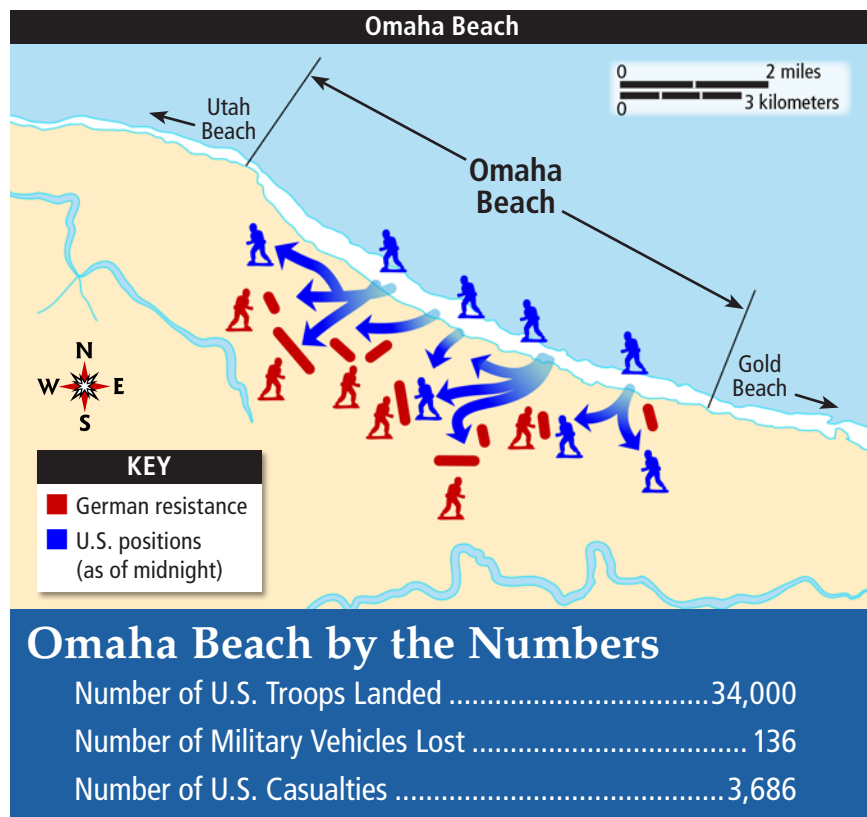
The U.S. 4th **Infantry** Division planned to land on Utah beach at 6:30 AM. Five hours earlier, **paratroopers** were dropped at many points 2 to 5 miles (3.2–8.0 km) inland. The paratroopers had to secure the main road from Valognes (vah-LOHN-yuh) to Carentan (kah-rohn-TOHN).



The Germans used searchlights to find the Allied planes dropping paratroopers.

German troops didn't know whether the paratroopers were the main attack force or a distraction.

Using the paratroopers' distraction, the troops who landed on the beach at 6:30 AM were supposed to push inland to meet up with the paratroopers. However, owing to the strong tide, their craft landed 2,200 yards (2 km) from the beach targets and the soldiers had to wade ashore. General Theodore Roosevelt Jr. told his men, "We'll start the war from here!" and ordered them to advance. To their benefit, it was not a heavily defended area on the beach. Compared to those on the other beaches, American **casualties** were few. By afternoon, the U.S. 4th Infantry had met up with American paratroopers, and the German troops were defeated quickly. The mission was a success, and the Americans advanced 4 miles (6.4 km) inland.



Omaha Beach

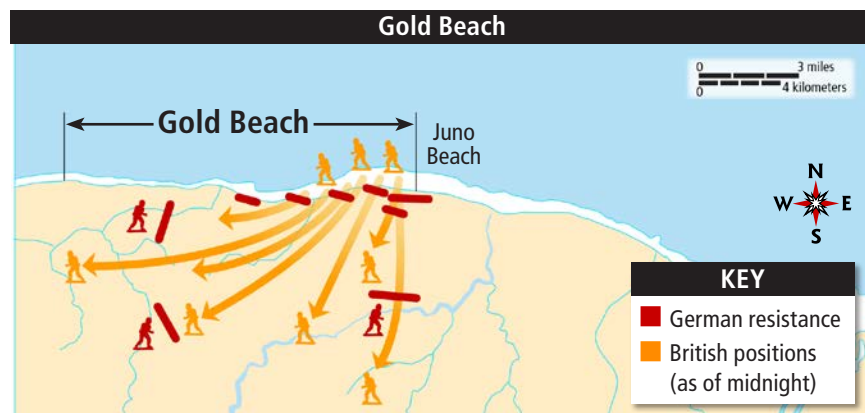
United States 1st Army

From the start, the U.S. 1st Army was at a disadvantage. All around Omaha Beach were 100-foot (30.5 m) cliffs, which made it very difficult for the Americans to attack. Also, the Germans had placed armed “dragon’s teeth”—3- to 4-foot (0.9–1.2 m) toothlike forms—around the beach to take out any landing craft. To make matters worse, German troops were firing from the cliffs.

The attack was planned for 6:30 AM, when the tide was low and the dragon’s teeth could be seen. The plan was to land infantry troops along with twenty-nine tanks. The armored tanks would have given Allied troops a huge advantage.

However, the tanks were released from their landing craft too far away from the beach. All but two tanks flooded and sank to the bottom of the ocean. Nothing could be done to save the tanks or their crews, and the troops didn’t get their armored cover from the tanks.

The weather added to the trouble the Allies were facing. Powerful winds carried many of the landing craft way off target, which caused mass confusion among the troops. The Americans were being easily picked off by the Germans. Their losses were so great that General Omar Bradley considered stopping the mission. The only way to make it through was by running across the beach toward the cliffs while dodging heavy German gunfire. Those who did make it had to scale the cliffs. U.S. ships got as close as they could and attacked the German troops at point-blank range. The ships brought important relief by distracting the Germans, who were focused on the Americans on the beach. By night, the Americans had gained a hold on Omaha Beach.



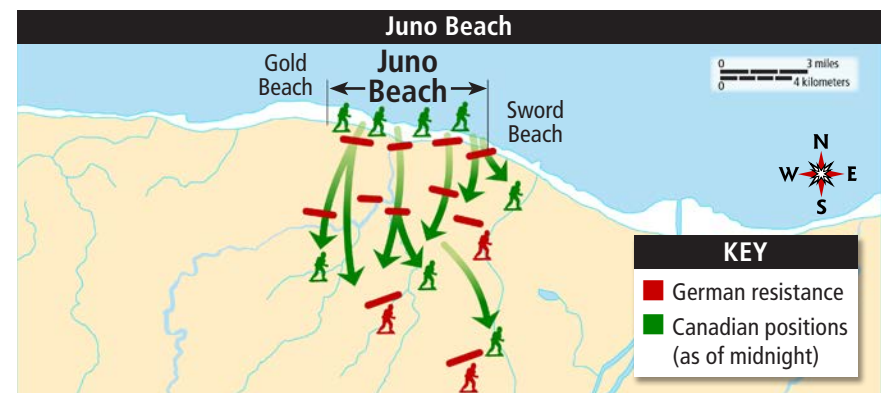
Gold Beach by the Numbers

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

British forces faced a huge problem at Gold Beach. Because of strong winds, the German **mines** on the beach were covered by water. The troops could not go in and **disable** them as planned. Twenty armored cars were damaged by these hidden mines. The situation could have been worse had many of the German troops not been taken out by sea and air attacks. By afternoon, the British had taken control of most of Gold Beach and quickly pushed inland. They also successfully captured the fishing village of Arromanches (ar-roh-MAHNSH), which was later used by the Allies to unload supplies.



Juno Beach by the Numbers

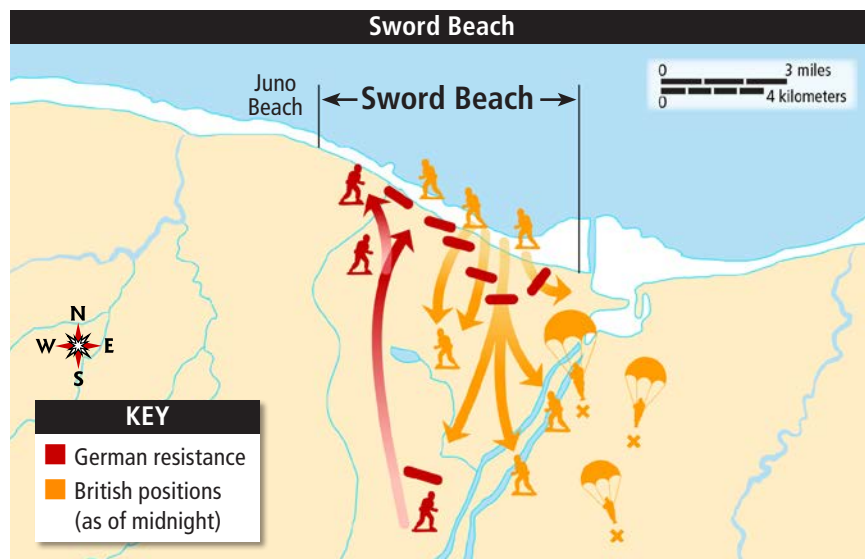
Number of Canadian Troops Landed	21,400
Number of Military Vehicles Landed	3,200
Number of Canadian Casualties	961

Juno Beach

Canadian 3rd Infantry

The Canadians were tasked with taking Juno Beach. They were to move inland and form a link between the British-occupied Gold and Sword Beaches. However, the bad weather and rising tide covered the German mines and made them difficult to destroy. The mines damaged or destroyed almost one-third of the landing craft.

Many Canadian soldiers struggled to wade ashore. The first wave of Canadians on the beaches had about a 50/50 chance of staying alive. However, the Canadians were not going to give up. They advanced farther inland than troops on any of the other four beaches.



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 attacked 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 area ran through the city, and control of them was important for the Allies. The raid began at 7:25 AM as troops stormed the beaches. Paratroopers landed inland and joined the British troops on the beach. Thankfully, there was little German opposition compared to that on the other beaches.

By 8:00 AM, most of the fighting was over. By 1:00 PM, British troops had linked up with paratroopers. Everything was working well for the British troops.

Sword Beach was not safe for long, however, as the Germans launched a counterattack. It failed, but it stopped British troops from linking up with Canadian troops from Juno Beach that day. The mission was a huge victory for the Allies even though the Canadian forces did not reach Caen. Allied forces were able to secure the beach and advance 4 miles (6.4 km) inland. They met up with the Canadians the following day. Allied troops would later capture Caen on July 20, 1944.

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 were light, and the tides were 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.

Conclusion

Though the cost in Allied and Axis soldiers' lives was high, Operation Overlord was a big success. Allied forces succeeded in gaining a foothold in France. They could then begin to push back the Germans and free occupied France. While this operation was a huge military victory for the Allies, it was also a day of sadness. Owing to the action on D-Day, it was difficult to record the numbers of casualties on either side. The term *casualties* refers to the troops who were killed, wounded, missing in action, or prisoners of war. Historians think there were between four thousand and nine thousand German casualties and more than six thousand Allied casualties.

The war dragged on for about another year as Allied troops continued to capture German-occupied zones in Europe. Germany finally surrendered on May 8, 1945, and Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945, finally ending the war. D-Day and the **liberation** of France were important turning points in World War II. Without the efforts of Allied soldiers on D-Day, the war may have ended differently.

German military officers signed the surrender papers in Rheims, France.



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)
Axis powers (<i>n.</i>)	the countries, including Germany, Italy, and Japan, that fought against the Allies in World War II (p. 5)
captured (<i>v.</i>)	caught or took control of by force (p. 5)
casualties (<i>n.</i>)	people injured, killed, or missing during a war, accident, or disaster (p. 8)
disable (<i>v.</i>)	to make something unusable (p. 11)
foothold (<i>n.</i>)	a position from which a person can advance toward a goal (p. 6)
infantry (<i>n.</i>)	soldiers trained and given weapons and gear to fight on foot (p. 7)
invaded (<i>v.</i>)	entered aggressively to conquer, weaken, or injure (p. 5)
liberation (<i>n.</i>)	the act of setting free (p. 15)
mines (<i>n.</i>)	bombs hidden underground or underwater that explode when touched or moved (p. 11)
mission (<i>n.</i>)	a set purpose for doing something; a special task or assignment (p. 4)
paratroopers (<i>n.</i>)	soldiers trained to jump out of airplanes and fight behind enemy lines (p. 7)