

BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 1 ★ Issue 5

World War II: *D-Day*

DATE:

June 6, 1944

LOCATION:

Normandy Coast of France

OPPOSING FORCES

Allied: 156,000 American, British, Canadian, and French troops; 6,939 Allied ships; and 11,590 aircraft (including 2,395 transport planes and 867 gliders) under the command of Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Primary subordinate commanders: Adm. Sir Bertram H. Ramsay (Allied Naval Forces), Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley (U.S. Army Group), Gen. Sir Bernard L. Montgomery (British Army Group), and Air Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory (Allied Expeditionary Air Forces).

German Forces: Approximately 300,000 troops across the invasion area in Army Group B, under the command of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. Rommel reported to Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt (Commander-in-Chief, OB West).

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Prior to D-Day, World War II had been raging across the European continent for over four years. Since Adolf Hitler's forces invaded Poland on 1 Sept. 1939, most of Western Europe had fallen under Nazi control. The Allies knew they would have to invade the continent and attack into the heart of Germany to break Hitler's grip on Europe and defeat the Nazi regime. Operation Neptune/Overlord, commonly referred to as "D-Day," would be the invasion to secure a foothold in northern France and allow for the final offensive. The Normandy invasion would be the largest combined air-sea assault landing in history. This massive feat would finally enable the Allies to deploy forces on the continent, of sufficient size and scale, to bring about the beginning of the end of Hitler and his Third Reich.

STRATEGY & MANEUVER

Actions by the Allies – In the late 1930s, as soon as war with Germany seemed unavoidable, American leaders developed a "Europe First" strategy. Remarkably, this strategic framework survived the shock of Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war against Japan. As early as 1941, American and British chiefs of staff held secret meetings to coordinate ideas on attacking into Germany – ideas that would form a basis for a joint British-American invasion of the European continent.¹

Taking a lesson from WWI, U.S. and British leaders agreed, early

in the planning process, the Allies chose Normandy for several reasons. It was close to Cherbourg and its deep-water port, it was near enough to allow continuous air support from bases in England, and it had beach characteristics that would support an amphibious landing. The Allies were careful to avoid the obvious, more narrow crossing site at Pas-de-Calais.



Gen. Eisenhower

Neptune/Overlord would be a two-pronged attack, beginning with a large-scale parachute and glider assault behind the Normandy beaches to seize key terrain and disrupt the Germans' ability to maneuver and reinforce their positions. This vertical envelopment would be immediately followed by an amphibious assault across the English Channel to penetrate and destroy German coastal defenses and secure the lodgment area.

Going into the operation, the Allies held several advantages. Through the Ultra code-breaking tool, the Allies were decrypting German field communications. This allowed Eisenhower to understand enemy troop locations and dispositions. The Allies also created an elaborate deception plan known as Operation Bodyguard. Using fictional field forces, fake radio traffic and troop movements, and even dummy paratroopers, this plan worked to deceive the Germans of Allied intentions.

The most notable component of Operation Bodyguard was Operation Fortitude South with the fictitious 1st U.S. Army Group, commanded by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, which worked to convince the Germans that the invasion would come at Calais. Lastly, the Allies held a distinct advantage in both air and sea power



Field Marshal Rommel