# Omaha beach invasion

Sport & Tourism

ASSIGN BUSTER

Early morning hours on June 6, 1944, paratroopers from the British 1st Airborne Division silently dropped and drifted towards the Pegasus Bridge, one of the few bridges that led over the Seine towards Normandy. Moments later, they stormed the bridge with heavy casualties. The Allied invasion of Hitler's " Fortress Europe" has just begun (Dube, 2005).

On those hours, lantern-equipped pathfinders dropped all over the Cotentin Peninsula. Alone and unaided, they were dropped to mark the way for the thousands of men coming in behind them.

At dawn, the sea invasion began as an Allied Armada disgorged thousands of troops at five beaches along France's Normandy coast. Allied forces stormed the shores and battled the German defenses in a fight that would go down as the “ Longest Day” in history.

The beach’s terrain proved to be an important factor in the assault (Lewis 2000). Its crescent form is bounded at either end by rocky cliffs and its tidal area is gently sloping. At the western end the shingle bank rested against a stone, which fades further into wood, resembles a sea wall which ranged from 4 feet to12 feet in height. Precipitous bluffs then raised high up to 170 feet, dominating the whole beach and cut into by small wooded valleys.

The Germans, earlier anticipating for an attack in the beachheads, constructed three lines of obstacles in the water. This consisted of Belgian Gates with mines lashed to the uprights, logs driven into the sand pointing seaward and hedgehogs installed 130 yards from the shoreline. The area between the shingle bank and the bluffs was both wired and mined with the latter also scattered on the bluff slopes (Gerrard, Bujeiro and Zaloga, 2003).

Their troops were concentrated mostly around the entrances to the draws and protected by minefields and wire (Dube, 2005). Each bunker was interconnected by trenches and tunnels. Machine guns, light artillery pieces and anti-tank guns completed the disposition of artillery targeting the beach. No area of the beach was left uncovered, and the disposition of weapons meant that flanking fire could be brought to bear anywhere along the beach.

The Allied forces' plan of attack includes dividing the Omaha beach into ten sectors. The assault landings were to start at 06: 30, which was coined as the " H-Hour". Before that, the beach defenses will be bombarded by naval and aerial support forces. The objective was for the beach defenses to be cleared two hours after assault. By the end of the day the forces at Omaha were to have established a bridgehead five miles deep into the enemy territory. To execute this plan the Omaha assault force totaled 34, 000 men and 3, 300 vehicles with naval support provided by 2 battleships, 3 cruisers, 12 destroyers and 105 other ships (Vat and Eisenhower, 2003).

However, during the initial attack, nothing went according to plan (Lewis, 2000). Ten of the landing crafts have gone astray before they reached the beach and some were flooded by the rough seas. Some had even sunk. Smoke and mist hinders the navigation of the assault crafts while a heavy current served to push them to the east. The initial bombardment proved to be ineffective. Their mark fell too far inland, thus they hardly touched the coastal defenses. When the landing craft came closer to the shore, the were under increasingly heavy fire from automatic weapons and artillery

With thefailureof the initial assault, a second one started coming ashore about two hours later. Their mission was to bring in reinforcements, support

weapons and headquarter elements. Some relief against the mostly unsuppressed enemy fire was gained simply because with more troops landing the concentration of fire was spread more about the many targets available (Dube, 2005). The survivors among the initial forces were not however able to give much covering fire and the landing troops still suffered in places the same high casualty rates as those in the first wave. The failure to clear sufficient paths through the beach obstacles added to the difficulties of the second wave now that the tide was beginning to cover those obstacles. The loss of landing craft as they hit these defenses before they reached the shore began to contribute in the rate of attrition. As in the initial landings, navigation is still difficult and the disturbing miss-landings continued to upset the Allied forces.

From the German's vantage point, at Pointe de la Percee, which is overlooking the entire beach, the assault seemed to have been stopped at the beach. An officer there noted that troops were seeking cover behind obstacles and counted ten tanks burning. However, casualties among their defenders were mounting, chiefly as a result of the allied naval fire. At the same time they were also requesting reinforcement, but their request could not be met because the situation elsewhere in Normandy was becoming more urgent for the defenders (Dube, 2005).

As the battle progresses, events of the landing were starting to influence the next phase of the battle. The draws, which would serve as the pathway from the beaches to the inner territory, remained strongly concentrated by the defenders. The allies needed to go through these draws to achieve their main target for the day. Also, the issue ofleadershipbegan becoming a

problem. Miss-landings and blunders in the original plan caused disorganization, andcommunicationbetween units was compromised (Lewis, 2000).

Despite the apparent disadvantage of the Allied forces' position, continual waves of landings and naval artillery support eventually weakened the German defense.

By early afternoon the strong point guarding the draw at Vierville was silenced by the navy, but without enough force on the ground to mop up the remaining defenders the exit could not be opened (Dube, 2005). Traffic was eventually able to use this route by nightfall, and the surviving tanks of the tank battalion spent the night near Vierville. The advance of the initial assault teams cleared away the last remnants of the force defending the draws. When engineers cut a road up the western side of this draw, it became the main route inland off the beaches. With the congestion on the beaches thus relieved, they were re-opened for the landing of vehicles.

After the inland infiltration, clashes pushed the grip out barely a mile and a half deep in the enemy area to the east, and the whole beachhead remained under artillery fire. In the evening, the Allies completed the planned landing of infantry, although but losses in equipment were high, because of bad sea conditions. Of the 2, 400 tons of supplies scheduled to be landed on D-Day, only 100 tons was actually landed. Casualties were estimated at 3, 000 killed, wounded and missing. The heaviest casualties were taken by the infantry tanks and engineers in the first landings. The Germans suffered 1, 200 killed, wounded and missing. On the second day, the engineers constructed the first airfield to be built after D-Day, on the cliff near St.

Laurent, and this was used by the Ninth Air Force to support the ground troops as, over the next two days, they accomplished the original D-Day objectives (Lewis, 2000).

The complete invasion had not been materialized yet, and the objectives of the D-Day were not achieved. Hundreds of Allied troops are still coming, fighting is ominous, and both sides are unprepared. The D-Day, the “ Longest Day” has ended, but the war on Liberation has just begun.

## References

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