D-Day: The Beaches

The armed forces used code-names to refer to planning and execution of specific military operations to prepare for D-Day. Operation Overlord was the code-name for the Allied invasion of northwest Europe. The assault phase of Operation Overlord was known as Operation Neptune. This operation, which began on June 6, 1944, and ended on June 30, 1944, involved landing troops on beaches and all other associated supporting operations required to establish a beachhead in France. By June 30th, the Allies had established a firm foothold in Normandy — 850,279 men, 148,803 vehicles and 570,505 tons of supplies had been landed. Operation Overlord also began on D-Day, and continued until Allied forces crossed the River Seine on August 19th. The Battle of Normandy is the name given to the fighting in Normandy between D-Day and the end of August 1944. Allied code names for the beaches along the 50-mile stretch of Normandy coast targeted for landing were Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword.



Utah Beach. Utah was the most western beach between Pouppeville and La Madeleine, three miles long, assigned to the U.S. 1st Army, 7th Corps. Casualties were the lightest of all landings – out of 23,000 troops, only 197 men were killed or wounded. It was divided into zones assigned Tare Green, Uncle Red and Victor.



Omaha Beach. Omaha was between Sainte-Honorine-des-Pertes and Vierville-sur-Mer, six miles long (largest). Taking Omaha was the U.S. 1st Army, 5th Corps' responsibility, with sea transport from the U.S. Navy and elements of the Royal Navy. The movie *Saving Private Ryan* portrays some events here. The 1st Infantry assault experienced the worst ordeal of D-Day operations. The Americans suffered 2,400 casualties, but 34,000 Allied troops landed by nightfall. Divided into Charlie, Dog, Easy and Fox zones.



Gold Beach. This beach ranged from Longues-sur-Mer to La Rivière, five miles long and included Arromanches where Mulberry Harbor was established. British 2nd Army, 30th Corps landed here and by nightfall, 25,000 troops had landed and pushed the Germans six miles inland. The Brits had just 400 casualties. Divided into How, Item, Jig and King zones.



Juno Beach. Juno spanned either side of the port of Courseulles-sur-Mer from La Rivière to Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer, six miles wide. Out of the 21,400 men from the Canadian 3rd Infantry Division and British 2nd Army, 1st Corps who landed, 1,200 were injured. Divided into Love, Mike and Nan zones.



Sword Beach. Sword stretched five miles from Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer to Ouistreham at the mouth of the River Orne. Nine miles north of Caen, it was a major route hub of Northern France. With help from French and British commandos, the Brits landed 29,000 men from its 2nd Army, 1st Corps and suffered just 630 casualties. Divided into Oboe, Peter, Queen and Roger zones.



D-Day by the Numbers

Total Allied troops who landed in Normandy: 156,115

Total Allied airborne troops *(included in figures above)*: **23,400**

American: 73,000
(Omaha and Utah beaches + airborne)

British: 61,715
(Gold and Sword beaches + airborne)

Canadian: 21,400
(Juno Beach)

Total Allied aircraft that supported landings: 11,590

Naval combat ships: 1,213

Landing ships / craft: 4,126

Ancillary craft: 736

Merchant vessels: 864

Total naval vessels in Operation Neptune: 6,939

(Of the 6,939 ships involved in D-Day, 80 percent were British; 16.5 percent, U.S.; and the rest from France, Holland, Norway and Poland.)

Soldiers' home nations:
United States, Britain, Canada, Belgium, Norway, Poland, Luxembourg, Greece, Czechoslovakia, New Zealand and Australia
(+177 French commandos)

Involved Allied army divisions:

3rd British Infantry – Sword Beach

3rd Canadian Infantry – Juno Beach

4th Infantry – Utah Beach

1st & 29th Infantry – Omaha Beach

50th British Infantry – Gold Beach

6th Airborne – Dropped on east bank of the Orne River

82nd & 101st Airborne – Night drop on Cotentin Peninsula behind Utah Beach

2nd Ranger Regiment – Pointe du Hoc