

Nightmare at Omaha

The selection of a site for the largest amphibious landing in history was one of the biggest decisions of World War II. Allied planners considered coastlines from Denmark to Portugal in search of a sheltered location with flat, firm beaches and within range of friendly fighter planes based in England.

There had to be enough roads and paths to move jeeps and trucks off the beaches and to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of American, Canadian, and British troops set to stream ashore following the invasion. An airfield and a seaport that the Allies could use were also needed. Most important was a reasonable expectation of achieving the element of surprise.

Five beaches on the northern coast of Normandy, France, met all the criteria and were chosen as invasion sites. On D-Day the attack on four beaches—Utah in the west and Gold, Juno, and Sword in the east (inset, opposite page) went according to plan. But at Omaha Beach (map), between Utah and Gold, the landing of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division threatened to turn into what American general Omar Bradley feared was an "irreversible catastrophe."

Surrounded at four ends by cliffs that rose wall-like from the sea, Omaha was only four miles long. It was the only sand beach in the area, however, and thus the only place for a landing. Unless the Allies were to leave a 20-mile gap between Utah

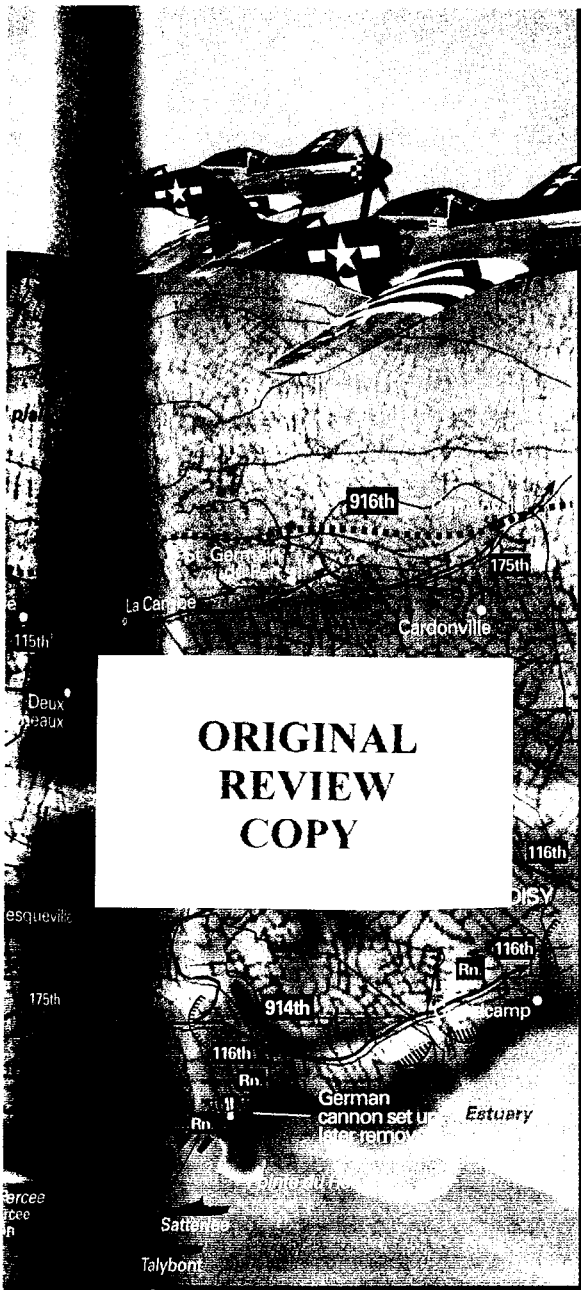


Troops crowd into a landing craft to head across the English Channel to Omaha Beach.

and Gold, they would have to come ashore at Omaha Beach.

To repel the Allies at the water's edge, the Germans built a fortress atop the cliffs at Pointe du Hoc overlooking Omaha from the west. They dug trenches and guns into the 150-foot bluffs lining the beach and along five ravines leading off it (see map).

Wading into the surf, the Americans advanced toward Omaha Beach, which had been divided into sectors with code names such as Dog Red and Easy Green. Many men were cut down as the doors of their landing craft opened. The survivors had to cross more than 300 yards across a tidal flat strewn with man-made obstacles. Winds and a current pushed landing craft into clumps as the men moved ashore. As a result, soldiers ran onto the beach in groups and became easy targets. Many died. Of the more than 9,000 Allied casualties on D-Day, Omaha accounted for about one-third.



ORIGINAL
REVIEW
COPY

D-Day Forces

A-L U.S. Company — 200 men	Battleship
116th U.S. Battalion — 900 men	Cruiser
Rn. U.S. Rangers	Transport
916th German infantry — forces associated with German battalion	Hedgehows
German resistance point	Town
German coastal defense	
U.S. stronghold	
Landing craft	
Landing craft — sunk	

Scale varies in this perspective



Bandaged and shell-shocked.

LEARNING FROM GEOGRAPHY

1. Why did the Allies choose Normandy as the site of the invasion?

A Day for Heroes

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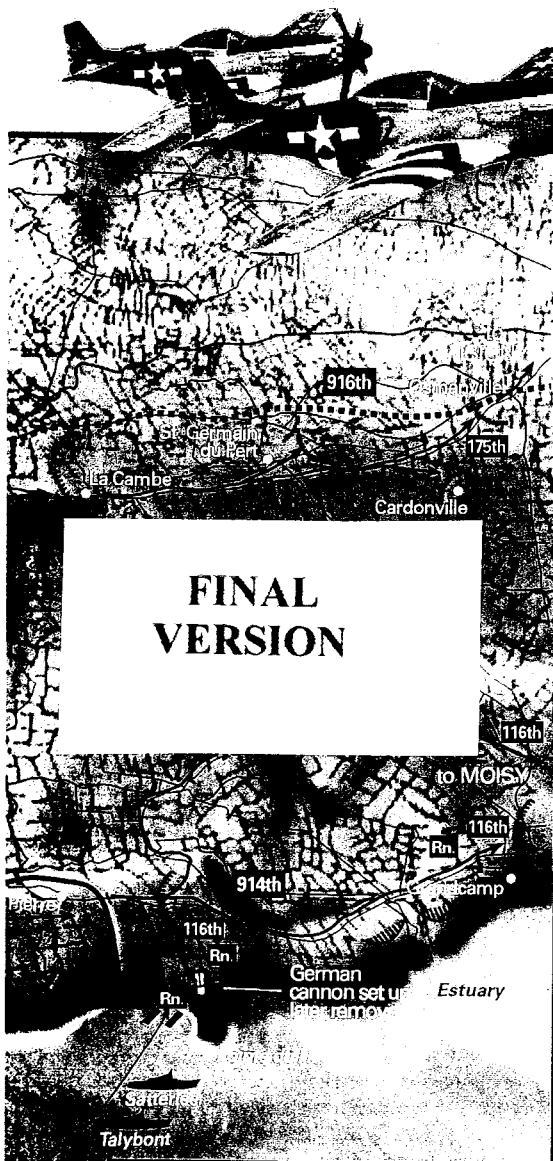


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“Every man who set foot on Omaha Beach that day was a hero.”



FINAL VERSION

D-Day Forces

A-L	U.S. Company — 200 men		
116th	U.S. Battalion — 900 men		
Rn.	U.S. Rangers		
916th	German infantry — forces associated with German battalion		
	German resistance point		Battleship
	German coastal defense		Cruiser
	U.S. stronghold		Transport
	Landing craft		Hedgerows
	Landing craft — sunk		Town

Scale varies in this perspective

Bandaged and shell-shocked, infantrymen from the American 1st



LEARNING FROM GEOGRAPHY

1. Why did the Allies choose Normandy as the site of the invasion?

2. Why was the landing at Omaha