

Were the Normandy landings a success?

As midnight fell on 5th June 1944, 3 airborne divisions, American and British, dropped into the Normandy countryside. Their objective was to soften up German forces and to take tactical positions which would ensure the success of the seaborne invasion force, the landings to follow on the 6th would go down in history. But were the D-Day landings the great success we take them for? Overall, yes.

Firstly, the Germans knew an allied invasion in the west was coming, but they did not know where. The Germans concluded that the most plausible option would be the Pas de Calais area - it was the closest crossing point between France and England and was the most convenient to use. Knowing the west was under threat to secure the Germans' position they had scrapped the Siegfried Line and the Todt organisation - who were responsible for military engineering, had made a new substantial line of defence: the Atlantic Wall. Hitler had put one of his most trusted generals, Erwin Rommel in command of this defence.

The allies knew that a seaborne invasion had to be precisely planned. Joseph Stalin - the communist dictator of Russia had called the allies to take the pressure off the East after the Germans success on the launch of operation Barbarossa and called for the start a new front in the west, going back to the first statement the allies landed in Dieppe - this operation turned to be a disaster as the allies had underestimated the Wehrmacht's capability but as a positive the allies had learnt from the landings that they were not to rush an invasion: properly plan, make precise intelligence and also as another plus from this a new set of special tanks were invented called "Hobart's Funnies" - these were named after the commander of the division they were assigned to. These tanks had special features to overcome problems which tanks had encountered in the Dieppe landings as an example one had a folding plank so tanks could pass over shell holes.

The first job headquarters faced for the Normandy landings was to deceive the Germans into thinking the invasion was coming at Calais, and not the correct location of Normandy. The Normandy area enabled the allies to block key German resources and established a viable presence in the west. The allies used the most fascinating and daring technology to answer their problem of deception.

One of the most hilarious tactics was the use of false divisions, the allies used inflatable tanks: these were used before in North Africa to also deceive the Germans, who cheekily were commanded by Erwin Rommel. Divisions like this were placed at the port where if they were to cross at pas de Calais this is where they would assemble. Furthermore, to muddle the Germans even more, the double agent Garbo sent false reports of an invasion to attack Calais to the Germans.

Another fascinating deception tactic was that the allies bombed Calais and dropped tin foil known as “chaff” to fool the German radars and scream that an invasion was imminent. Another interesting way the allies prepared that the army had asked for pictures of people on holiday in Normandy to assess the landscape.

To sum up this part of the operation, the allies had used some rather interesting and daring techniques to prepare for the landings. The effort paid off and the Germans did not expect a thing in the Normandy area.

So, they had made the Germans think they were landing in pas de Calais and had a lay of the land of Normandy where they would attack, but their job was not done yet they still had some problems. To solve these complications amazing feats of engineering had to be overturned, the allies wanted to liberate France and then further and to do so they would first have to make a stronghold but then actually had to hold them and press on to be successful. To do this, the allies had to have a port to filter in supplies which would be used to advance and liberate Europe, but you may be thinking right now, well if the allies were to land in Normandy - which has no major harbour how could they get supplies?

The British had successfully invented portable ports called Mulberry's these were to be temporarily used while major ports could be captured at Antwerp and until that could be re-built after if it were captured it would be inevitably sabotaged by the German forces also in this stage the allies had made P.L.U.T.O meaning pipeline under the ocean this was used to fuel the allied forces.

After this enormous effort and witty thinking the allies were ready to sail to Normandy but how were the landings executed? The landings were not actually planned for the 6th June actually bad sea conditions had prevented the allies from landing but despite this the Germans were out of luck too, Erwin Rommel the commander of the Atlantic wall was away in Germany celebrating his wife's birthday and beforehand they had agreed that the panzer divisions were to be kept inland away from the main beach heads and could only be activated on Adolf Hitler's orders.

The fighting started like this, at midnight on the 5th the allies dropped paratroopers into the countryside to capture bridgeheads and secure strongpoints which would allow the Germans to commit troops to the beachheads. When deploying the troops missed their drop zones but, in the confusion, captured many of their objectives. Next on the 6th, the land forces would land on 5 main beach heads, contrary to popular thought many people believe there were only 5 beaches on D-Day in fact they are wrong!

The American rangers went to capture positions called pointe du hoc which were a series of German gun emplacements and gun pits which would ultimately slow the progress of the invasion down, also there was another beach called Band which was

captured for the same reasons by the British commandos. Interestingly, the main beaches were code named after fish: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, Sword and Band - originally Juno was codenamed “Jelly” but this was refused by the Canadians and changed to Juno. The different beaches were going to be taken by different forces, Utah and Omaha by the Americans, the British for Gold and Sword and as mentioned the Canadians for Juno. Many Poles and other minorities also fought to get revenge for the Nazis as they had forced them to flee. Many Poles fought in the Battle of Britain against the Luftwaffe - the German air force.

One British officer was dubbed “Mad jack” as he had landed on D-Day with a sword and bow and arrow, Jack Churchill the man behind the legend said afterwards “any British officer who enters battle without a sword is improperly dressed!”

After the day, the allies had captured all 5 beachheads, the Americans had the best and worse luck, the most resistance was on Omaha and the least on Utah. Omaha was barely captured and furthermore the allies had as part of the funnies made tanks which were adapted to float to help the troops, unfortunately these were all sunk, and their remains can be seen underwater with state-of-the-art 3D scans on the coastline. The losses from the day went like this:

Killed	Survived	Deployed
British 16000	British army 67115	68715
British airborne 800	British airborne 17200	18000
US army 19621	US army 53379	73000
US airborne 2498	US airborne 15502	18000

All of the beaches were captured but the forces barely linked up after being blocked by fierce resistance of the 21st German panzer grenadier division.

I want to take a new paragraph just to dedicate this to the French resistance who played a vital role in the success of D-Day, the German panzer divisions were kept inland as mentioned but the French resistance slowed the 2nd SS panzer division Das Reich from advancing to the front by 2 weeks which gave the allies more time to establish viable omnipresent positions. As a fierce reprisal the division then massacred innocent French civilians in revenge for the resistances’ role.

To conclude, the allies successfully deceived the Germans, they had prepared correctly, made sure and eliminated potential positions which could slow the invasion down, made new tanks to combat problems, and made great engineering feats. In the next part of operations, the allies took all of the beachheads and established a secure presence in Normandy where they could be re-supplied and further liberate Europe all the while making the Soviets happy by creating a war on 2 fronts. Need not to say, as coming near the end of the war the Germans were still a capable fighting force and to defeat them was not easy.

But the operation did not run smooth, many allied paratroopers missed their drop zones and were instantly captured by the Germans or killed, many soldiers gave their lives in fact at least 10,000 in the landings and furthermore after the landings cities which contained strong German resistance was bombed by the RAF which as a result many French citizens were killed, or their homes destroyed even fearing the Allies more than the Germans. But despite the negatives the overall fact is that Allies made the first step in liberating Europe, they had made a war on 2 fronts with the Germans - which would double the costs, manpower which could be before used on the eastern front against the soviets. Therefore, the Normandy landings must be considered a success.