

# D-Day 1944 (4)

## Gold & Juno Beaches



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Ken Ford • Illustrated by Kevin Lyles

Series editor Lee Johnson • Consultant editor David G Chandler

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should be addressed to:

Kevin Lyles  
Hillview  
38 Boswick Lane  
Dudswell, Berkhamstead  
Hertfordshire  
HP4 3TE  
UK

The Publishers regret that they can enter into no  
correspondence upon this matter.

### KEY TO MILITARY SYMBOLS

 ARMY GROUP	 ARMY	 CORPS	 DIVISION	 BRIGADE
 REGIMENT	 BATTALION	 COMPANY	 INFANTRY	 CAVALRY
 ARTILLERY	 ARMOUR	 MOTORIZED	 AIRBORNE	 SPECIAL FORCES

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# ORIGINS OF THE BATTLE

**T**he amphibious landings on the beaches codenamed Gold and Juno on 6 June 1944 were just part of the great Allied invasion of France to liberate Europe from Nazi Germany's occupation. Other landings carried out by British and American units took place under the direction of the Supreme Allied Commander, Gen Dwight D. Eisenhower, along the Normandy coastline both to the east and the west. The invasion was the culmination of years of planning which began soon after the British Expeditionary Force had been evacuated from the continent in 1940 in the face of overwhelming superior German forces. In the intervening years, the British, and later the Americans, had been forced to continue the war in other theatres remote from mainland Europe. In the east, the brunt of the fighting was borne by the Russians who had to resist the vast majority of Hitler's forces virtually single-handedly. Pressure was increasingly applied to the western Allies to open a second front to relieve some of the strain felt by the Russians, but a full-scale assault on a strongly held shoreline was an undertaking that required much careful planning and a considerable amount of men and equipment. It took a great deal of time before all of the infrastructure necessary for an invasion could be put in place and a landing in north-west Europe was not realistically possible until early 1944. By the time the Allies felt that they had sufficient strength to launch the invasion, Germany had been in occupation in France for four years.

**Infantry storm ashore from landing craft during an exercise in early 1944. Several full-scale exercises were conducted before the invasion involving long sea journeys prior to an amphibious landing against simulated opposition. (Imperial War Museum, H38244)**





Troops in a sealed camp north of Portsmouth close to the embarkation ports take their meals from a field kitchen. Most of the camps had temporary tented accommodation, but some made use of existing permanent establishments with Nissen huts (Imperial War Museum, H38283)

Many sites along the coast of northern Europe were considered during the planning stages; most of them had merit, but each had drawbacks. The obvious choice for the landings was France. It was through France that the most direct route into Germany was possible and the shortest route of all would be via landings in the area of the Pas de Calais. It was here that the Channel was at its narrowest, being only eighteen miles wide, and the area was well within fighter range from England. German planners had also identified this area as being the likeliest stretch of coast for an invasion to land and had therefore concentrated on building a formidable array of defences there to repel



Crews from infantry landing craft come alongside a landing barge kitchen (LBK). This converted Thames barge was equipped to provide hot meals for ferry craft crews. On D-Day alone, this barge served over 1,000 meals to the sailors and marines who operated the exposed assault landing craft. The inclusion of LBKs in the invasion fleet demonstrates the amount of attention to detail that was required during the planning of operation Neptune. (Imperial War Museum, A24017)

any landings. The Pas de Calais was the strongest section of Hitler's much vaunted 'Atlantic Wall' and was consequently rejected by the Allies.

The next most promising area was Normandy. It had several good sections of beach where troops could come ashore, it was just within fighter cover from England and German defences there were less formidable. Once ashore, the invading armies would have to contend with the close-knit 'bocage' countryside made up of narrow lanes, small fields and high hedges, but once through this tight farmland area, the ground opened up into good tank country. The Allies deliberated and finally decided that the landings would be made in Normandy, selecting a stretch of coastline from the Cotentin peninsula to the mouth of the River Orne to make their landfall.

The operation was given the codename 'Overlord' and the naval component of the invasion was called 'Neptune'. Overlord called for British, American and Canadian forces to land in sufficient numbers to create a beachhead through which would pass the whole of the Allied 21st Army Group. In the British sector were 'Gold', 'Juno' and 'Sword' Beaches; in the American area were 'Utah' and 'Omaha'. Ten divisions would come ashore on D-Day, three airborne divisions to protect either flank of the lodgement, six infantry divisions across the beaches and one specialised armoured division to stiffen the initial assault.

American 1st Army, landing on the right of the attack, would come ashore either side of the River Vire with the object of closing the base of the Cotentin peninsula and isolating the important port of Cherbourg. The troops landed on Utah Beach would then turn northwards to secure the port itself. The Omaha Beach landings would build a bridgehead of sufficient depth to allow the concentration of the forces necessary to make a break out towards the Loire and Brittany. British 2nd Army would land on the left and make immediately for Caen. The city would be taken with a frontal assault from Sword Beach and a flanking movement from Juno Beach. The landings over Gold Beach would take Bayeux and then link with Juno and Sword to form a lodgement from which operations would be developed to the south-east towards Paris.

To make the assault, British 2nd Army would rely on a mix of high motivation and experience. British 50th Division, with a fine record of service in North Africa and Sicily, would land on Gold, whilst the inexperienced but well-trained Canadian 3rd and British 3rd Divisions would assault Juno and Sword. Both of these divisions had been preparing in England for over three years, and their training in the last year had focused specifically on making an assault landing from the sea.

# CHRONOLOGY

## 1943

- 23 April** LtGen Morgan appointed to head COSSAC (Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander) to plan for the invasion of mainland Europe.
- July** COSSAC produces a report which identifies the area of Normandy between the Orne River and the Cotentin peninsula as the proposed site for the invasion, codenamed 'Overlord'.  
Canadian 3rd Infantry Division selected as one of the assault divisions for Overlord.
- 6 November** British 50th Division arrives home from Sicily to begin preparations for its role as one of the assault divisions for Overlord.
- December** LtGen Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed as Supreme Commander for Operation Overlord. Gen Sir Bernard Montgomery appointed to command 21st Army Group which contains all land forces to be used during the invasion.

## 1944

- 19 January** MajGen Graham takes over command of 50th Division for the invasion.
- April** British 50th and Canadian 3rd Divisions move south to Hampshire and undertake exercises in the Channel.
- 3 June** Assault divisions leave their camps and begin embarkation onto ships that will take them to France.
- 4 June** Bad weather predicted in Channel for 5 June; invasion postponed until 6 June.
- 5 June** Forces G and J, the invasion fleets set to land on Gold and Juno Beaches, sail for France from the ports of Portsmouth and Southampton.
- 0050hrs, 6 June** British and American paratroops land east of the River Orne and on the Cotentin peninsula.
- 0300hrs, 6 June** Allied air forces begin their final aerial bombardment of the Atlantic Wall defences prior to the landings.
- 0330hrs, 6 June** Naval Forces G and J begin to arrive off the coast of Normandy.
- 0600hrs, 6 June** Naval bombardment of German coast defences and gun batteries begin.
- 0630hrs, 6 June** Assault troops begin to disembark from their transport ships and load onto the assault craft which will take them to the beaches.
- 0730hrs, 6 June** Gold Beach: assault companies of 69th and 231st Brigades, part of British 50th Division, touch down on King and Jig Beaches. Supported by armour from 8th Armoured Brigade and the specialised tanks of 79th Armoured Division.
- 0749hrs, 6 June** Juno Beach: Canadian 7th Brigade lands the leading companies of its first assault battalion, Winnipeg Rifles, to the west of Courseulles on Mike Red and Green Beaches to begin Canadian 3rd Division's attack.
- 0750hrs, 6 June** Gold Beach: 1st Hampshires and 1st Dorsets take heavy casualties from German fire from the Le Hamel strongpoint and are pinned down on Jig Beach. On King Beach, 6th Green Howards get some troops off the beach and move against objectives, whilst 5th East Yorkshires gradually move on La Rivière
- 0755hrs, 6 June** Juno Beach: Canadian 8th Brigade begins its landings with the assault companies of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada landing on Nan White and the North Shore Regiment landing on Nan Red.
- 0810hrs, 6 June** Juno Beach: the Regina Rifles of the Canadian 7th Brigade land its assault companies at Courseulles on Nan Green Beach on the eastern side of the River Seulles.
- 0815hrs, 6 June** Gold Beach: follow-up battalions of 2nd Devons and 7th Green Howards arrive over Jig and Mike Beaches and begin to move inland.



**Landing craft tank (LCT)** alongside 101 Berth in the New Docks in Southampton prior to D-Day. The build-up for the invasion started early in 1944, when LCTs were brought back to England from various theatres throughout the world. It was the availability of sufficient numbers of landing craft that was one of the main factors in deciding when the invasion would take place. (Imperial War Museum, A23730)



**Landing Craft Tank (Rocket)** armed with 1,064 5in. rockets. These craft followed the assault waves towards the shore and fired their salvos of rockets over the heads of the other landing craft whilst still 5,000 yards out to sea, plastering the beach and the area immediately behind the shoreline with a deluge of high explosive. (Imperial War Museum, B5263)

**0830hrs, 6 June** Gold Beach: 441st East Battalion, 716th Division, has borne the brunt of the British attack and is giving way all along the beach, but pockets continue to hold on to most of the strong points.

**0830 hrs, 6 June** Juno Beach: Canadian 7th Brigade lands its follow-up battalion, Canadian Scottish Rifles, on Mike Beach and the battalion moves inland towards St Croix sur Mer.

**0830hrs, 6 June** Gold Beach: 47 Royal Marine Commando arrives on Jig Beach and moves inland to the west on its mission to take Port en Bessin and join up with the Americans from Omaha Beach.

**0835hrs, 6 June** Juno Beach: 48 Royal Marine Commando lands on Nan Red, losing almost half its men in the process.

**0840hrs, 6 June** Juno Beach: Canadian 8th Brigade lands its reserve battalion, La Régiment de la Chaudière, on Nan White Beach.

**0900hrs, 6 June** News that British tanks are moving on Meuvaines Ridge is met with alarm by GenLt Kraiss at the HQ of German 352nd Division. He receives permission from Gen Marcks, Commander LXXXIV Corps, to release the corps reserve against the British on Gold Beach.





**An area of Juno Beach just to the east of Bernières showing the white spotted mosaic pattern caused by the explosions of over 1,000 5in. rockets, fired by an LCT(R) out at sea. (Imperial War Museum, MH24332)**

**0930hrs, 6 June** Gold Beach: all assault and follow-up battalions have men off the beaches and are attacking targets inland. Mont Fleury battery and the strongpoint at La Rivière lighthouse have been taken.

Juno Beach: all assault battalions are off the beaches and moving inland. Canadian 7th Brigade expands the right flank, but the Regina Rifles are heavily occupied in clearing the town of Courseulles; 8th Brigade is likewise engaged in clearing Bernières.

**0945hrs, 6 June** Juno Beach: 48 Royal Marine Commando regroups its surviving men and starts the advance on the Langrune strongpoint.

**1100hrs, 6 June** German LXXXIV Corps' reserve is moving towards the British on Gold Beach. It has combined the 915th Regiment with other support units into a Kampfgruppe (Battlegroup) commanded by Oberst Meyer.

**1115hrs, 6 June** Gold Beach: follow-up brigades of 50th Division – 56th and 151st Brigades – begin to land and assemble behind the beaches before their move inland.

**1130hrs, 6 June** Juno Beach: Canadian 9th Brigade now lands behind 8th Brigade and begins to create an enormous traffic jam as troops and vehicles all try to exit the beach through Bernières.

**1200hrs, 6 June** Kampfgruppe Meyer is attacked by Allied fighter-bombers during its advance to the area of Gold Beach.

**1300hrs, 6 June** Expansion of both beachheads is now underway, but progress inland is slow. Some of the enemy are gradually falling back into prepared defensive positions, whilst others have lost cohesion and are in full retreat.

**1500hrs, 6 June** Gold Beach: all brigades are moving towards their D-Day objectives – after a slow start. All are behind schedule.

**1600hrs, 6 June** Kampfgruppe Meyer arrives near Villiers le Sec and meets the advancing British 69th Brigade who are supported by tanks and fighter bombers. The two sides clash and in the ensuing action Meyer is killed and most of his Battlegroup wiped out.

**1630hrs, 6 June** Juno Beach: Canadian 3rd Division has all three of its brigades advancing on their objectives, but all begin to stall when the tanks of German 21st Panzer Division attack along its eastern flank on their drive to the coast. This armoured counter-attack causes some consternation in the Allied camp.

**2000hrs, 6 June** Gold Beach: British 50th Division advances on Bayeux and the road and railway line linking Bayeux with Caen, but stops short of its objectives. As night falls, all battalions dig in and prepare to resume the advance the next day.

**Nightfall, 6 June** Juno Beach: Canadian advance on Caen halts several miles short of its D-Day objectives. German resistance is such that all units dig in for the night.

# OPPOSING COMMANDERS

**G**eneral Dwight Eisenhower was chosen as Supreme Commander for Overlord because of his success with other landings in other theatres. He had commanded the Anglo-American seaborne assault on North Africa in 1942; led the landings in Sicily and commanded the Allied invasion of Italy in 1943. By the end of that year he had become the most famous and the most important general in the world. His successes were not as a direct result of his attributes as a battlefield commander, for he relied heavily on the advice of his subordinates regarding strategy and other matters, but as a result of his ability as an organiser and his noted diplomatic skills.

## ALLIED COMMANDERS

With Eisenhower appointed as Supreme Commander of Allied Forces for the invasion, it was thought proper to have British commanders for the land, sea and air components of the landings: Gen Sir Bernard Montgomery was given the task of leading the 21st Army Group which contained British, Canadian and American land forces; Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh Mallory was made Allied Expeditionary Air Force Commander and Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay was appointed as the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief. The Deputy Supreme Commander, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, was also British.

British and Canadian forces for the landings were combined in British Second Army, commanded by LtGen Sir Miles Dempsey. It contained two corps: British XXX Corps (LtGen Bucknall) and British I Corps (LtGen Crocker). The landings on Gold Beach were the responsibility of XXX Corps who chose to use an enlarged British 50th Division for the attack. Canadian 3rd Division made those on Juno Beach under the command of British I Corps, which also controlled British 3rd Division on Sword Beach. The American beaches Utah and Omaha were assaulted by US 1st Army commanded by Gen Omar Bradley.

**LtGen Miles Dempsey** was 48 years old and had previously served with Gen Montgomery on a number of occasions. In the Great War he was awarded a Military Cross as a young subaltern and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel between the wars. In 1939 he took his battalion to France and later commanded a brigade at Dunkirk. Back in England he was promoted to major-general and commanded both the 46th Infantry and 42nd Armoured Divisions before joining Eighth Army as a corps commander in 1942. He planned and executed the British assaults in the invasions of both Sicily and Italy where his XIII Corps fought with great distinction. At Montgomery's insistence he was brought back from Italy to take command of British 2nd Army for Operation Overlord.



**MajGen Keller, Commander Canadian 3rd Infantry Division, receives the CBE from King George VI in Normandy. Keller had taken over the division in September 1943 and trained it especially for the invasion. On his sleeve, below his Canada shoulder title, is his divisional insignia, a patch of French grey cloth. (Imperial War Museum, B5617)**





**LtGen Gerard Bucknall, Commander British XXX Corps. Bucknall had commanded British 5th Division in Sicily and Italy and was brought home to England by Monty to command XXX Corps for the invasion. His performance in Normandy was not without criticism and he was replaced by LtGen Horrocks in August 1944. (Imperial War Museum, H 38562)**

Dempsey's two corps commanders, Bucknall and Crocker, were also men who had worked closely with Montgomery in the Mediterranean. **LtGen Gerard Bucknall** was two years older than Dempsey and had served throughout the First War. Between the wars he was appointed to a number of staff posts before being given British 5th Division in Sicily in 1943. He fought with the division in Italy and impressed Montgomery so much that he was brought home to command XXX Corps for the invasion, even though the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Gen Sir Alan Brooke, thought Bucknall was not suited for higher command. **LtGen John Crocker** enlisted as a private in World War I, was later commissioned into the Machine Gun Corps and won both a Distinguished Service Order (DSO) and Military Cross (MC) on the Western Front. He left the Army in 1919, but later joined the Royal Tank Regiment and rose to become the highest-ranking World War II commander to have come from that regiment. Crocker was a great trainer of men and rose rapidly to become lieutenant-general and took command of IX Corps in Tunisia. In August 1943 he was given I Corps with the express purpose of training it for Overlord.

**RIGHT LtGen Miles Dempsey (left), Commander British Second Army, talks to MajGen Percy Hobart, Commander British 79th Armoured Division, during an exercise in England. Hobart's division was composed of specialised tanks and armoured vehicles designed to tackle enemy fortifications and obstacles. The division contributed units to all of the British and Canadian assaults during D-Day. (Imperial War Museum, H38215)**



**LEFT General Montgomery, Commander Allied 21st Army Group, in conversation with MajGen Graham, Commander British 50th Infantry Division. (Imperial War Museum, B5787)**



**Gruppenführer Fritz Witt (centre) confers with two of his regimental commanders, Obersturmbannführer Max Wünsche (left) and Standartenführer Kurt Meyer. Witt commanded the 12th SS Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend*, a newly raised tank division composed of members of the Hitler Youth. Although untried in battle before the invasion, the division fought with remarkable zeal and determination in Normandy. (Bundesarchiv, 146/88/28125a)**

## GERMAN COMMANDERS

The German Army's command structure with regard to the defence of France was unnecessarily convoluted and complicated. At its head, its supreme commander, the Führer Adolf Hitler, exercised complete control over all arms and all matters relating to their deployment. His paranoid nature led him to distrust most of his commanders and he interfered with the conduct and implementation of most operations. Hitler's control of all German armed forces was exercised through the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW) commanded by Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Keitel, and through his chief of staff, Generaloberst Alfred Jodl.



**Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel, Commander German Army Group B, during an inspection of the coastal defences of Hitler's Atlantic Wall. Rommel was convinced that the best hope of defeating the Allied invasion lay in crushing it on the beaches before the Allies could establish a viable bridgehead. To do this coastal fortifications needed to be as strong as possible. (National Archives, Washington)**



**General der Artillerie Erich Marcks, Commander German LXXXIV Corps. His Corps' sector of Normandy included the entire Allied landing zone. (National Archives, Washington)**

**Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt** was Commander-in-Chief (West), responsible for the defence of North-West Europe and was head of all German forces in that sector. Reporting to von Rundstedt was **Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel** who commanded Army Group B and was given the responsibility for the tactical conduct of the war in France and the Low Countries. His role was also to ensure that the fortifications along the coast, Hitler's vaunted Atlantic Wall, were of sufficient strength to repel an invasion. The German garrison defending Normandy came under the command of German Seventh Army. **Generaloberst Friedrich Dollmann** had commanded the formation since the outbreak of war in 1939. Dollman's subordinate commander responsible for the area opposite the invasion beaches was **General der Artillerie Erich Marcks**, whose LXXXIV Corps was responsible for the whole of the Normandy coastline from east of the River Orne to the Brittany Peninsula. In the sector containing Gold and Juno beaches, Marcks had two divisions at his disposal, 716th and 352nd Infantry Divisions.

Although the chain of command appeared logical, its operation was often anything but. Rommel, for instance, was subordinate to von Rundstedt, but also dealt directly with Hitler. Armoured formations nominally under von Rundstedt's command could only be committed with the express authorisation of the Führer, which had to be sought through Jodl at OKW. This did not augur well for the speedy release of those Panzer divisions in the Normandy area in the event of an invasion. Rommel at least felt that the rapid employment of these formations was vital to successfully defeat any Allied assault.

# OPPOSING ARMIES

**T**he two armies that faced each other across the beaches in the early hours of 6 June 1944 were vastly different in almost every way. One was very well equipped, tremendously well supported both from the sea and from the air, had been trained to a peak of fitness and had sky-high morale, whilst the other was sadly lacking in all of these attributes. One was being launched on a great crusade, whilst the other was trying to defend the indefensible.

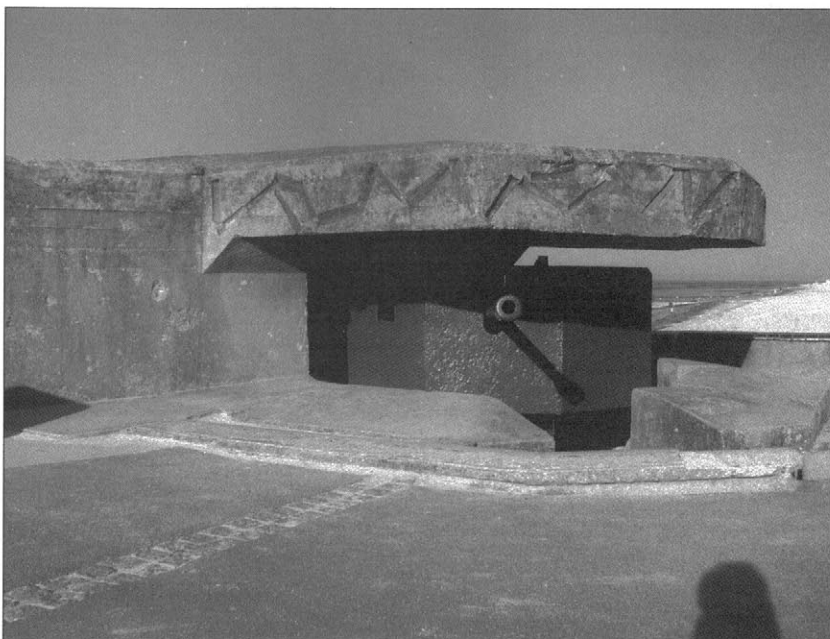
## THE BRITISH ARMY

The assault landings that were made on Gold and Juno Beaches had been meticulously planned and the units selected to make the assault had been a long time training for that moment. Lessons learned earlier in the war, most notably from the disastrous raid on Dieppe in 1942, had taught higher command that an amphibious landing by the army could only be launched with integrated support from the navy and the air force. It was also clear that specialised armour and landing craft would be required to help the troops storm ashore. Churchill was determined that no invasion could take place until every detail had been covered



**A PzKpfw VI Tiger tank passing through a Normandy village. The concept of using armoured forces against a seaborne invasion was a hotly debated subject. Commander-in-Chief (West), GFM von Rundstedt, wanted to mass available Panzer divisions and make a strong thrust against any lodgement destroying Allied forces inland on ground of his choosing, Commander Army Group B, GFM Rommel, thought that any invasion should be attacked by armour immediately it arrived whilst the troops were still on the beaches. (Bundesarchiv, 101/301/1951/24)**

German 50mm gun in an emplacement along the seafront at St Aubin. This gun formed part of the strongpoint WN27 and was supported by mortars, machine guns, wire entanglements and minefields. The design of the casemate is simple and effective: it has thick overhead protection against plunging fire; its seaward walls are of solid concrete impervious to naval shellfire and its open sides allow it to fire along the beaches on either side, able to catch invading troops and tanks in enfilade as they came ashore. (Ken Ford)



and the assaulting troops and subsequent follow-up reinforcements were completely ready. In spite of great pressure from its Allies, Britain delayed the date of the invasion throughout 1943 until mid-1944. When the time finally came to launch the great attack, everyone was as ready as they would ever be.

On Gold, the attacking force was the British 50th Division, a veteran of the Gazala and El Alamein battles in North Africa in 1942; on Juno, it was the untried Canadian 3rd Infantry Division that made the assault. These two divisions were the strike force of their respective corps: British 50th Division was part of British XXX Corps and Canadian 3rd Division formed part of British I Corps. I Corps also contained the assault division attacking Sword Beach – British 3rd Division. Landing behind these divisions was the remainder of the two corps. In XXX Corps, 7th Armoured Division came ashore after the initial landings, with 49th Division following on behind. On British I Corps' front, 51st Highland Division followed up the D-Day landings.

British 50th Division was originally composed of territorial battalions from Northumberland and Durham. Its divisional badge was two capital 'Ts', representing the two great rivers, the Tyne and the Tees, in red on a black square. The division had seen plenty of action, having fought in France in 1940, in the North African desert in 1942 and in Sicily in 1943. In early 1944, Gen Montgomery brought the division back from the Mediterranean to the UK to join 2nd Army for the invasion. In June 1944 the division comprised three infantry brigades: 69th Brigade with 5th East Yorkshires and the 6th and 7th Green Howards; 151st Brigade containing 6th, 8th and 9th Durham Light Infantry; and 231st Brigade with 1st Hampshires, 1st Dorsetshires and 2nd Devonshires. Also under command for the invasion was 56th Infantry Brigade. This was an independent Brigade that contained 2nd South Wales Borderers, 2nd Gloucestershires and 2nd Essex. The brigade stayed and fought with the division until 20 August when it was transferred to 49th Division. Also attached to the



division for the attack was 8th Armoured Brigade, containing 4th/7th Dragoon Guards, 24th Lancers and the Sherwood Rangers. 47 Royal Marine Commando, from 4th Special Service Brigade, was also part of the initial assault.

The commander of 50th Division was MajGen Douglas Graham. He had served in the First War and finished the conflict as a captain having won both the Military Cross and the Croix de Guerre. Between the wars he was gradually promoted through regimental appointments and served as a brigadier in North Africa. In 1942 he was promoted to major-general and took command of 56th (London) Division. In September 1943 his division carried out an assault landing at Salerno as part of the invasion of Italy. Graham was wounded during the battle and returned to England. In January 1944 he took command of 50th Division with orders to train it for the invasion of France.

On Juno Beach responsibility for the assault was given to the Canadian 3rd Division. The division had left Canada for England in July 1941 to join with the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions and form I Canadian Corps. For the next two years it carried out an extensive programme of training. When, in 1943, the corps left for the Mediterranean, 3rd Division remained behind. It had been earmarked for the invasion of France and continued training specifically for this role. Its commander was MajGen Rodney Keller. He had been commissioned in 1920 and served in a number of roles gradually gaining promotion through staff appointments. In June 1941 he was given a battalion and then made brigadier just six weeks later. He took over the 3rd Division in September 1943.

The division consisted of three infantry brigades: 7th Brigade with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, the Regina Rifle Regiment and the Canadian Scottish Regiment; 8th Infantry Brigade with the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, Le Régiment de la Chaudière and the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment and finally 9th Brigade containing the Highland Light Infantry of Canada, The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders and the North Nova Scotia Highlanders. Armoured support for the attack was provided by Canadian 2nd Armoured Brigade consisting of 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars), 10th Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse) and 27th Armoured Regiment (the Sherbrooke Fusiliers). Also attached to the division for the assault was 48 Royal Marine Commando.

## **THE GERMAN ARMY**

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In contrast to the readiness of the Allies, the German Army in Normandy needed at least another year before it could realistically hope to repulse an amphibious landing. On paper it was ready, for the propaganda machine had almost convinced everyone that a great Atlantic Wall of fortifications had been built strong enough to keep out any invader, but the reality was very different. During 1942 and 1943, work on the wall had often been given second place to other construction projects and it was not until Rommel was appointed in late 1943 to inspect the effectiveness of the fortifications, that construction work on the wall increased in pace and quality. Even then, only a fraction of the strongpoints, minefields and gun sites that were needed

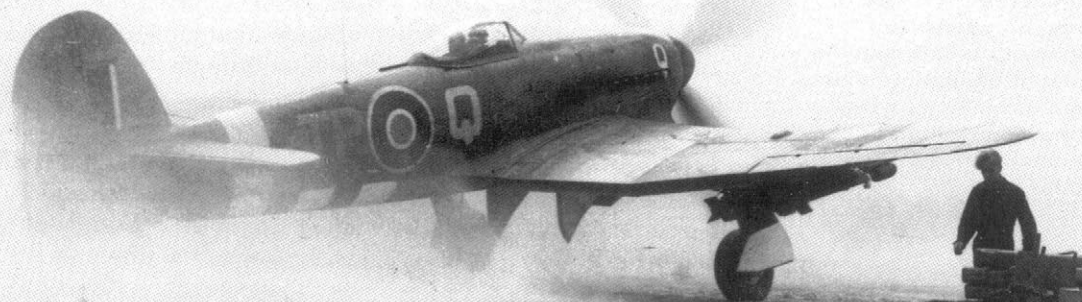
were actually constructed. It was an enormous task, for Hitler did not know just where the Allies would make their attack, so the fortification of the coast line had to stretch from Norway to the Spanish border and also along the Mediterranean shores of France.

Even if construction of the defensive wall had been complete, the Germans would still have had great problems. There were simply not enough troops to garrison such a line effectively. The war in Russia dwarfed the conflict in the west and the Eastern Front was consuming huge numbers of men at a horrendous rate. Retaining divisions in static defences in France and the Low Countries whilst the German forces in the east were bled white and generals were screaming for reinforcements was unsustainable and little by little the strength of those divisions guarding the coast was whittled away, often to be replaced by old men and conscripted foreigners.

Defending the areas of Gold and Juno Beaches was the German 716th Infantry Division, commanded by Generalmajor Wilhelm Richter. Richter had served in the German Army since before World War I and had been an officer since 1914. He later served in Poland, Belgium and Russia and was involved in the final stages of the advance on Moscow. He assumed command of the 716th Division in March 1943.

The 716th Division was a static division raised specifically for the purpose of defence. Like the 15 other static divisions formed during the same period of 1941, its duties were to garrison the occupied territories and to guard against invasion. Once in place, it was left to establish itself in the locality. It had few motor vehicles of its own, for its transportation needs were few. What little mobility there was came from horse-drawn vehicles. Richter defended his part of the Normandy coast with his two

**A Hawker Typhoon operating from a Normandy airstrip. The total Allied domination of the skies over France created immense difficulties for the Germans in their attempts to reinforce their forces in Normandy and enabled the Allies to win the race to build-up forces. (Imperial War Museum CL472)**





**A direct Allied assault on a major port was not practical. The German demolition of the facilities at Cherbourg and Brest, combined with their determined defense of the other major ports of northern France, denied them to the Allies. Anticipating this problem the Allies manufactured two artificial harbours codenamed 'Mulberry', which were towed across to Normandy and assembled within days of the landings. The one shown here was located opposite Arromanches on the western edge of Gold Beach, the other was located off the American Omaha Beach. (Imperial War Museum, BU1029)**

regiments, the 726th and 736th Infantry Regiments. Both of these regiments were supplemented with a battalion of volunteers from the German occupied territories in the east – particularly Poland and Russia: 441 East Battalion was attached to 726th Regiment and 642nd East Battalion joined 736th Regiment.

Gold Beach marked the boundary between Richter's 716th Division and Generalmajor Dietrich Kraiss's 352nd Division. Just before D-Day, 726th Regiment was attached to 352nd Division. The 1st and 3rd battalions held the coast from near Le Hamel towards Omaha, whilst its 2nd battalion was located to the rear of Omaha Beach at Chateau Jacuville, acting as the regimental reserve. Along Gold Beach itself, 441st East Battalion garrisoned the defences with its headquarters in La Rivière. Occupying Juno Beach were elements of 441st East Battalion and 2nd Battalion, 736th Regiment. The bulk of this regiment was also defending Sword Beach and the area just across the River Orne attacked by British 6th Airborne Division. The guns and men of 716th Division's 1716th Artillery Regiment were spread throughout the division's sector, sited mainly in mobile batteries inland from the coast.

The area inland from the landing beaches was dominated by just one major town, Caen. This town was the key to the whole of the proposed Allied invasion zone, as Caen was the nexus of a series of roads linking Normandy to the eastern part of France. It also guarded the route through to the open ground of the Falaise Plain which was good tank country and an important objective for the British landings. It was no surprise then that the Germans also understood the significance of Caen and had their closest armoured division, 21st Panzer Division, located just west of the town. The division was commanded by Generalmajor Edgar Feuchtinger, a veteran of the 1940 campaigns and the fighting in

Russia. 21st Panzer Division had been reconstituted after the original division had been destroyed in North Africa. It was composed of 125th and 192nd Panzergrenadier Regiments and 100th Panzer Regiment. However, its tanks were neither the best nor the most modern, they were mostly PzKpfw IVs and captured French tanks. Nor was its transport much better, again consisting mostly of captured French vehicles.

The armoured divisions of the strategic reserve were in an altogether different class to 21st Panzer Division. The 12th SS Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend* was a fully equipped and superbly trained division, comprising 12th Panzer Regiment, 25th and 26th Panzergrenadier Regiments, supported by a full artillery regiment and reconnaissance, antiaircraft and antitank battalions. The division was a new unit, raised in June of 1943 and had never been in action. Its strength was primarily recruited from the military fitness camps of the Hitler Youth organisation; the average age of its soldiers was 18 years. The large numbers of young men who had volunteered to join this elite unit resulted in its manpower being higher than required at around 20,000. It was equipped with the best weaponry and equipment available and led by a widely respected commander, Gruppenführer Fritz Witt, and supported by senior commanders who had gained impressive reputations in action on the Eastern Front: men like Standartenführer Kurt 'Panzer' Meyer and Obersturmbannführer Max Wünsche, both distinguished Waffen SS officers in their own right. Meyer and Wünsche, both holders of the Knight's Cross, had shown themselves to be courageous and capable commanders. Meyer commanded 25th Panzergrenadier Regiment and Wünsche led the 12th Panzer Regiment. Gruppenführer Fritz Witt was an early volunteer to the elite *Leibstandarte*, Hitler's bodyguard formation, and had risen from company commander in Poland in 1939 to a regimental commander of 1st SS Panzergrenadier Regiment in Russia. He had also seen active service in France, Yugoslavia and Greece. The energetic divisional commander soon raised his men to a peak of fitness and confidence, believing it to be far more important to train them in realistic field exercises with live ammunition than to bore them with the finer points of military drill. When the division finally went into action it quickly earned a fearsome reputation from the Allied troops who encountered it.

Panzer Lehr Division was an elite formation consisting originally of units from the various armoured training schools. Raised in January 1944 with the specific role of resisting Allied landings in France, like the *Hitlerjugend* Division, the Panzer Lehr Division was composed of experienced and superior quality men and equipped with the good tanks, mostly PzKpfw V Panthers. In June 1944 it comprised 901st and 902nd Panzergrenadier Regiments and 130th Panzer Regiment. The division was commanded by Generalmajor Fritz Bayerlein, who had served with both Guderian and Rommel, as well as having commanded the 3rd Panzer Division on the Eastern Front. A holder of the Knight's Cross with Oakleaves, Bayerlein was a highly respected armour commander. In June 1944, Panzer Lehr was at full strength and based just over 125 miles from the Channel, posing a serious threat to the Allied landings.

# OPPOSING PLANS

Overlord was the greatest combined operation in history. The transportation of two armies across a hostile waterway and onto enemy-held territory involved the close co-operation of all three services. It was the army's job to carve out a beachhead, the navy's task to transport it there and the air force's role to protect the enterprise from enemy interference.

Heading the naval operation, codenamed Neptune, was Admiral Bertram Ramsay. Under his command were seven battleships, two monitors, 23 cruisers, 105 destroyers, 1,000 smaller naval ships, over 4,000 landing ships and craft and more than 800 merchant vessels. It was the largest armada the world has ever seen. To counter this, Admiral Theodore Kranke, Commander German Naval Group West, had just three torpedo boats, one minesweeper, 29 S-boats (fast torpedo boats), 35 R-boats (motor minesweepers) and 35 auxiliary minesweepers and patrol boats. It was not surprising that apart from a swift attack by a few torpedo boats in which a destroyer was sunk, the German navy was unable to make any effective impact on the landings.

**A gaggle of young German prisoners perform a double-take as their famous adversary, General Montgomery, passes in a jeep. For the early stages of the Allied invasion, from 6 June to 1 August, Montgomery commanded all land forces. (Imperial War Museum, B5179)**





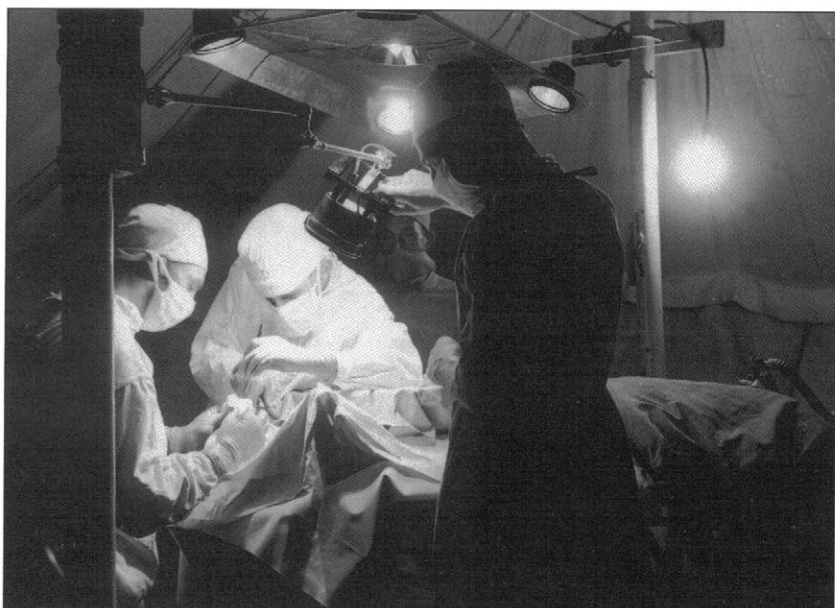
**A Bren gunner of British 50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division. His division's formation badge on his sleeve, a red 'TT' on a black square, refers to the division's 'home' in the area of Tyneside and Teesside, two of the great rivers of the north-east of England. Its 151st Brigade contained the 6th, 8th and 9th battalions of the Durham Light Infantry also from England's north-east. (Imperial War Museum, B5382)**

The German air force was equally impotent. By June 1944 the Luftwaffe in the west was a spent force largely incapable of offensive operations. What strength it retained was directed against the daily US and British bombing raids on Germany and its occupied territories. The Allies had complete air superiority. Their strategic bomber forces, US 8th Air Force and British RAF Bomber Command, pounded the Reich industries and cities, whilst their tactical air forces, US 9th Air Force and British 2nd Tactical Air Force, supported land operations. Before the invasion, a programme of raids had crippled the transport infrastructure within France and the Low Countries, whilst standing patrols interdicted troop movements and supply routes.

With virtual command of the sea and air, it was now the task of Eisenhower to take command of the land. Operation Overlord planned to have nine divisions in the assault on 6 June, with elements of two more divisions landing in follow-up waves before the end of the day. Once a lodgement had been achieved, Montgomery's 21st Army Group had two main objectives: the Americans' beaches were to link up and then move to cut the Cotentin peninsula and take the port of Cherbourg, whilst the British and Canadians would seize the towns of Bayeux and Caen and begin to expand the beachhead south-eastwards. Both Bayeux and Caen were D-Day objectives, for the possession of these two towns would control the road network inland from the beaches. In broad terms, British 50th Division would attack Bayeux from Gold, whilst the Canadians on Juno Beach would move against Caen. British 3rd Division, landing on Sword Beach to the east, would also advance on Caen.

With the initial objectives taken, the battle of the build-up would then begin. Eisenhower's team had to ensure that enough men and materiel were landed over the beaches to counter the expected arrival of German reinforcements. Rommel's Army Group B would be hindered in bringing forward new divisions by Allied air activity. During

Operating theatre of a mobile field hospital. The casualties suffered on D-Day were lower than many had predicted; indeed considering the number of men involved they could be thought light. However, within a matter of weeks, as the fighting inland intensified, the casualty rates would mirror those of the worst days of World War I. (Imperial War Museum, CL306)

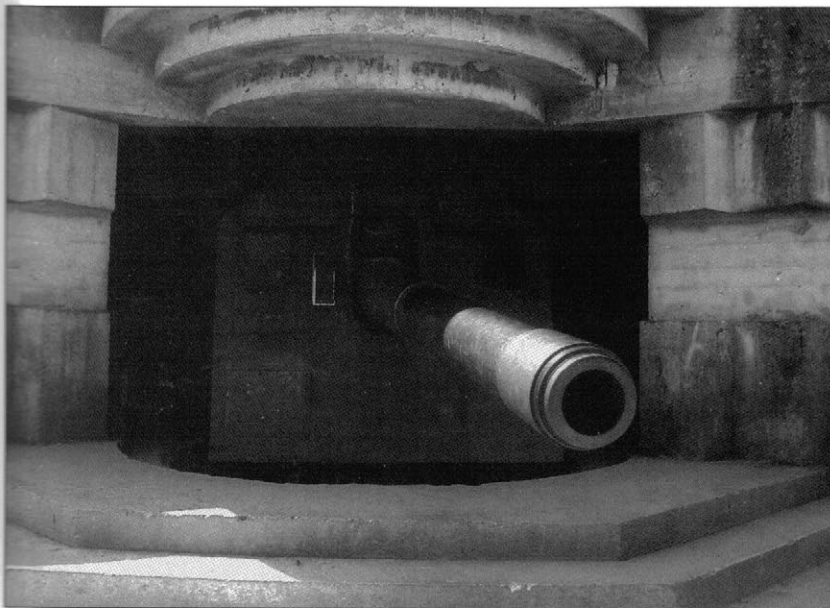


the hours of daylight, the air over Normandy would be patrolled by squadrons of fighter bombers ready to pounce on any German troop movements. Rommel would be compelled to move his reinforcements piecemeal by night, their arrival into the battlefield limited to a gradual trickle rather than as a concerted counter-attack.

## BRITISH XXX CORPS PLANS

British 50th Division would land on Gold Beach at 0725hrs on 6 June. Gold was the westernmost beach of the British landing area, stretching ten miles across from Port en Bessin to La Rivière. Much of Gold was useless for landings as the shoreline from Port en Bessin to well east of Arromanches was dominated by high chalk cliffs. The length of seafont chosen for the assault was the stretch of beach from Le Hamel to La Rivière, which included the areas known as 'Jig' and 'King'. The division's 231st Brigade was to land two battalions abreast on the western sector, Jig, with 1st Hampshires on the right and the 1st Dorsets on the left. 2nd Devons were the follow-up battalion landing after the assault formations had moved inland. King sector was the landing beach for 69th Brigade. Again the initial attack was to be on a two-battalion front, with 6th Green Howards on the right and 5th East Yorkshires on the left. 7th Green Howards was the reserve battalion that would follow the assaulting waves ashore.

Port en Bessin marked the westernmost point of the British sector and this small port became the objective of 47 Royal Marine Commando. Its task was twofold: first, it was charged with capturing the harbour and town itself, and second, it was to make contact with the American army over on Omaha Beach to link up the British and US landings. The Commando was to land behind the assault waves of 231st Brigade on Jig Beach and move immediately inland in a wide encircling movement to approach Port en Bessin from the rear. Speed



**One of the original 152mm naval guns dating from 1928 in its M272 type casemate in the German battery at Longues. Its 13-mile range covered both Omaha and Gold Beaches, as well as the anchorage of the entire Allied fleet supporting these landings. During D-Day it put up a spirited fight, trading shot for shot with a number of the Allied warships. (Ken Ford)**

was of the utmost importance and it was instructed not to get caught up and delayed in the fighting. It was ordered to avoid contact with the enemy wherever possible until it made its attack upon the port.

The assault waves of infantry landing across the open beaches were to be heavily supported every step of the way. Prior to the landings, almost right up until the moment the landing craft beached, known strongpoints were to be bombed by heavy and medium bombers, continuing the programme of destruction that had been in progress over the preceding weeks. Soon after dawn, naval warships would add the power of their guns to the destruction of the enemy when they opened fire on gun batteries, strongpoints and beach defences. Royal Navy cruisers would concentrate on eliminating the gun batteries at Mont Fleury, Ver sur Mer, Arromanches, Vaux sur Aure and Longues. Closer inshore, Fleet and Hunt class destroyers would bombard beach defences. As the assault landing craft (LCAs) loaded with men made for the beaches, rocket firing landing craft (LCT(R)) would each fire over 1,000 5in. rockets, plastering the area behind the beaches with high explosive. Added to this deluge of fire would be the shells of the divisional artillery from the self-propelled guns of the 86th Field Regiment carried in landing craft tanks (LCT).

Once they hit the beaches, the infantry would have more support from the tanks of 8th Armoured Brigade. The 4th/7th Dragoon Guards supporting 69th Brigade and the Sherwood Rangers supporting 231st Brigade were equipped with amphibious tanks called Duplex Drive (DD) Shermans. These tanks were made buoyant with a canvas screen and propelled through the water by twin screws. When they reached the shore, the screens were collapsed, the propellers disengaged and they then instantly became normal gun tanks able to attack enemy pillboxes. The DD tanks were to be launched 5,000 yards out from the beaches and swim ashore, approaching virtually unseen because of their low freeboard. They were timed to arrive just before the infantry at 0720hrs to give close armoured support to the troops just when it was needed.



Landing immediately behind the assault waves were LCTs carrying a variety of specialised armour from the 79th Armoured Division. This unit provided supporting tanks to all the landing beaches, each able to give assistance in a range of tasks. 'Crab' flail-tanks cleared a path through minefields; 'Crocodile' flame-throwing tanks could be used against pillboxes, machine gun positions and other field fortifications, armoured bulldozers cleared beach obstacles and specialised Armoured Vehicle Royal Engineers (AVREs) tackled such things as laying spans of bridging, rolling fascines into antitank ditches, firing large explosive charges against concrete emplacements and laying carpets of metal matting to allow other vehicles to cross soft ground. On Gold Beach, 79th Armoured Division provided 'B' and 'C' Squadrons of the Westminster Dragoons with their flail tanks, whilst the AVRE tanks came from 6th Assault Regiment, Royal Engineers.

Following the two assault brigades ashore were the two reserve brigades. 56th Infantry Brigade would land on Jig Beach, pass through 231st Brigade and make for Bayeux. From King Beach, 151st Brigade would advance south-west to seize the Caen road and railway between Bayeux and the River Seulles.

## BRITISH I CORPS PLANS

LtGen Crocker's British I Corps was to land on two beaches: the Canadian 3rd Division was to assault Juno Beach, whilst British 3rd Division was to attack Sword Beach. Juno Beach stretched for six miles from just outside La Rivière in the west to St Aubin in the east. The shallows in front of Juno Beach allowed approach through only two narrow channels: one into the port of Courseulles and one off Bernières sur Mer. Canadian 3rd Division would use these to launch their two-brigade attack. Canadian 7th Brigade would land on a two-battalion front either side of the harbour entrance at Courseulles, one battalion on Mike Beach, the other on Nan Green Beach. Canadian 8th Brigade would also land two battalions, one at Bernières in sector Nan White and one on Nan Red Beach close to

This casemate along Juno Beach between Courseulles and La Rivière was able to fire along the shoreline on either side. Normally, its thick concrete side facing seawards would have made it resistant to naval shelling, but it was built on a very slight promontory which has enabled a warship, far away to the east off St Aubin, to fire into its weaker flanks with high-calibre shells. (Ken Ford)



St Aubin. Once a beachhead had been established, both brigades would land their follow-up battalions. The reserve brigade, Canadian 9th Brigade, would come in next and land over Nan Beach.

Canadian 7th Brigade's landings were scheduled for 0735hrs. The Regina Rifles were to assault the town beach in front of Courseulles and then clear and hold the town, most of which was on the eastern side of the harbour, whilst Royal Winnipeg Rifles were to attack on the right and to advance and occupy the village of Graye sur Mer which lies about a mile inland. Behind them, the follow-up battalion of the Canadian Scottish Regiment was to land behind the Winnipegs and strike out for the villages of St Croix and Creully to meet up with British 50th Division linking Gold and Juno beaches.

At 0745hrs on Nan Beach Canadian 8th Brigade would land two battalions in front of and to the east of Bernières: the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada on the right would assault and clear the village, whilst the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment attacked on the left, cleared St Aubin and advanced on Tailleville. Behind would come the follow-up battalion, La Régiment de la Chaudière, who were to make for Bény sur Mer. From this position, the reserve brigade landing over Nan Beach would launch its drive on Caen and the airfield at Carpiquet with the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, the Highland Light Infantry of Canada and the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders. Landing after the assault battalions would be 48 Royal Marine Commando, who would come ashore on Nan Red and move east to attack the strongpoint at Langrune, then link up with Sword Beach.

To support the landings on Juno, the Canadians had specialised armoured assistance from 'B' Squadron 22nd Dragoons, 'A' Squadron Westminster Dragoons and part of 5th Assault Regiment, Royal Engineers, all from British 79th Armoured Division. The Canadian 3rd Division also had its own dedicated armoured support from Canadian 2nd Armoured Brigade to help the attack once it was ashore, with DD tanks from 6th and 10th Armoured Regiments landing with the assault waves.

**During and immediately after the landings, whilst the fighting was within range of warships at sea, the Royal Navy provided bombardment forward observation officers inland to co-ordinate naval gunfire with the troops on the ground. This party of seamen, all from the Royal Navy, are wearing army-type battledress. On their sleeve they show the 'Combined Operations' gun, anchor and eagle badge and a 'Royal Navy' shoulder title. The sergeant is spotting enemy positions, the officer is plotting them on a map and the signaller is passing co-ordinates back by land line to a transmitter in the rear, where they will be relayed on by radio to the warship at sea. (Imperial War Museum, A14342)**



## GERMAN PLANS

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By the spring of 1944 the Germans were convinced that an Allied invasion was imminent. As they could not know where the invasion would come they had to prepare as far as possible to counter it anywhere along the coast of occupied Europe. Hitler and most of the High Command were convinced that the Allies would land in the area of the Pas de Calais and had therefore located strong German forces close by ready to mount a counter-attack. After the Pas de Calais, Normandy was the most likely target, but the fortifications there were not as good as those further north, so Rommel ordered that they be improved.

The Atlantic Wall was the outer crust of Fortress Europe. Its role was to disrupt and confuse the Allied assault when it came. Manning the fortifications would only require second-rate troops as their task was to delay the invaders while a strong counter-attack was mounted to drive the landings back into the sea. The static German 716th Division was assigned this holding role on Gold and Juno Beaches, whilst the task of mounting a counter-attack in Normandy was given to the armour of 21st Panzer Division, assisted by 12th SS Panzer Division and the Panzer Lehr Division. The bulk of 21st Panzer Division was located south of Caen, within an hour's drive of the coast. Its main role was as part of the strategic reserve for any invasion in France and as such would react as ordered by the Army Group Commander, Generalfeldmarschall Rommel, but it was also to act immediately if there was an actual invasion in its sector and in such an event would come under the command of LXXXIV Corps. The other two armoured divisions could only be released to counter an invasion with the explicit permission of the German High Command. Hitler was positive that the Allies would precede the real landings with a feint assault in order to draw away reserves and was adamant that the Panzers should only be released when the location of the main Allied effort could be determined with certainty.

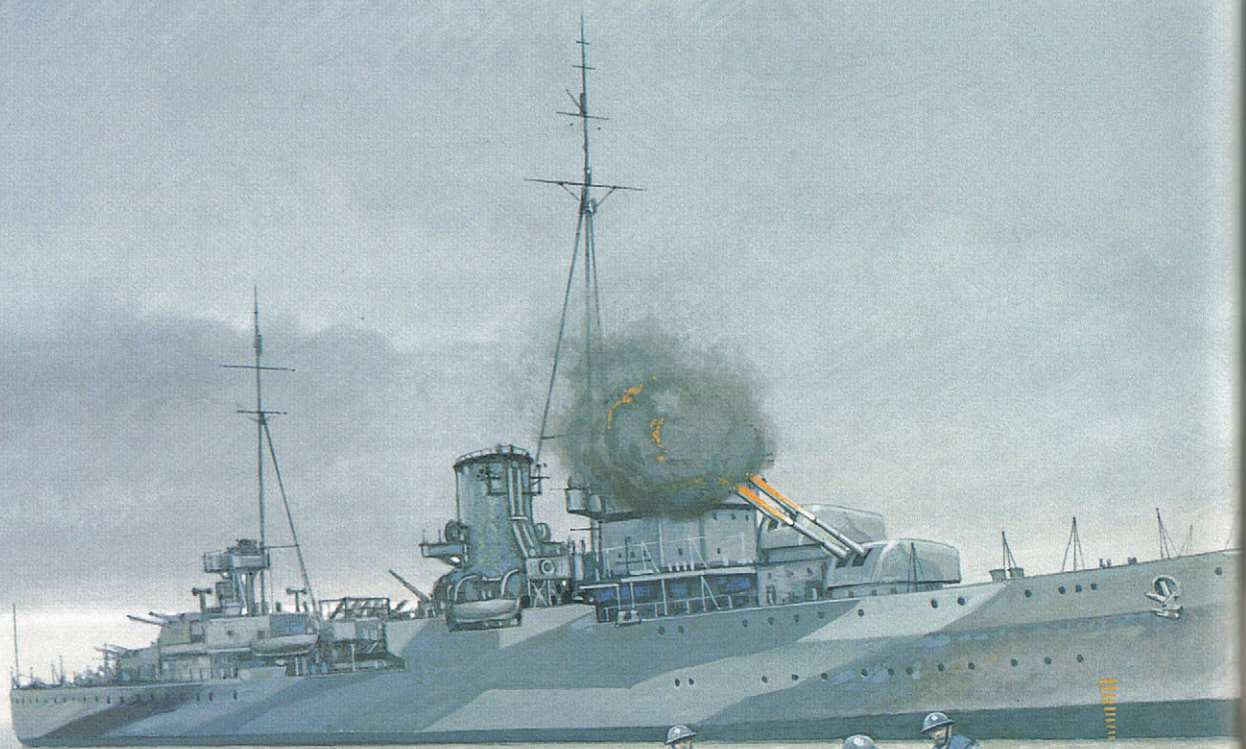
The men of German 716th Division were responsible for manning the fortifications of the Atlantic Wall along the stretch of coast designated Gold and Juno beaches by the Allies. The wall along this part of the coast followed a common pattern. Along the beach, between the low- and high-water marks, were the sea defences. These consisted of a variety of steel, wooden and explosive obstacles designed to damage or destroy approaching landing craft. Above the high-water mark were minefields and wire emplacements to delay the advance of the assaulting infantry. This killing zone was swept by machine guns and mortars located in concrete pits and casemates for protection. At intervals larger guns dominated long stretches of beach able to fire high explosives against vessels and armoured vehicles. These were housed in thick concrete bunkers designed to shield the guns from naval bombardment. Finally there were the Widerstandsnester (WN), or resistance points, sometimes sited on the beaches and sometimes positioned inland, but always well placed to dominate the choke-points around the exits from the beaches with interlocking fire.

# THE LANDINGS: GOLD BEACH

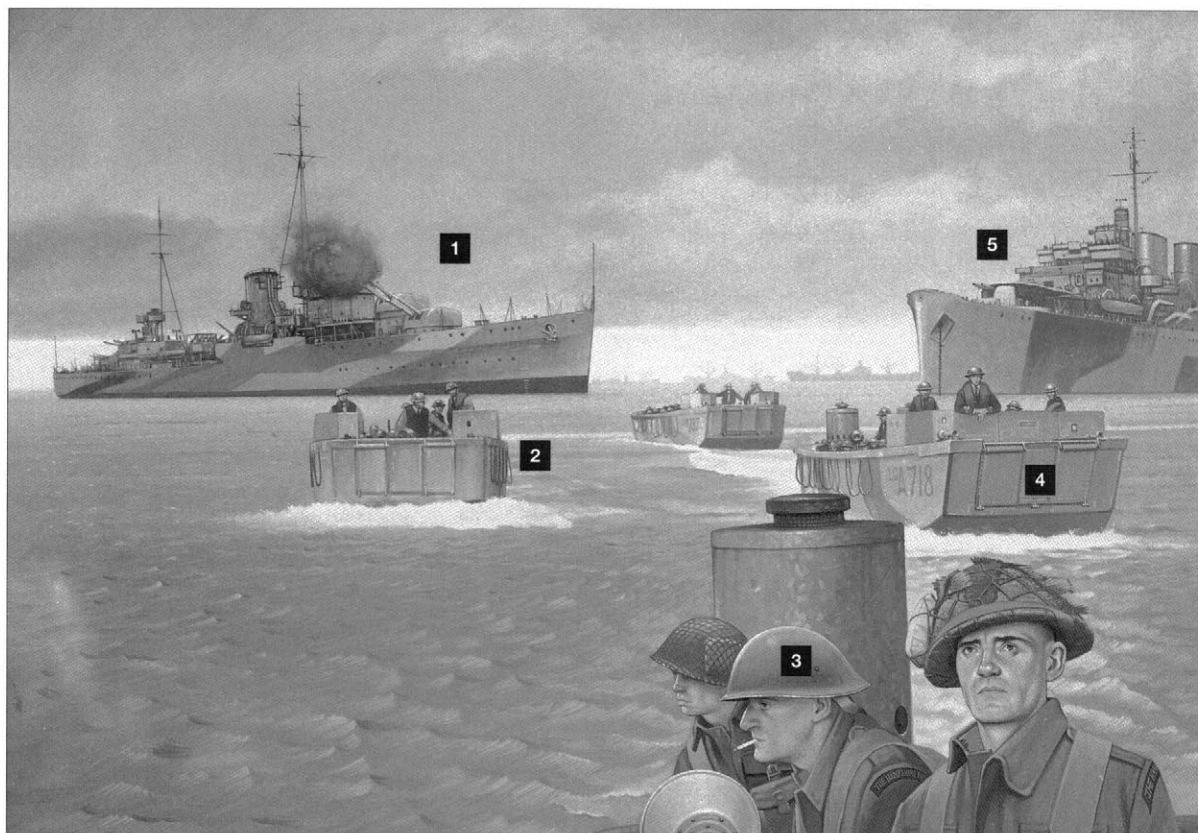
**F**orce 'G', containing the ships carrying the assault waves to Gold Beach, arrived at the point from which the landing craft were to be launched just before dawn on Tuesday 6 June. At 0535hrs HMS *Bulolo*, with Commodore Douglas-Pennant, the Naval Commander Force 'G', on board dropped anchor seven miles out from the beach amid a great armada of vessels. At the heart of this fleet of ships were the eight large infantry landing ships, LSI(L). Each of these converted merchant ships, ranging in size from 10,000 to 14,000 tons, carried 18 assault landing craft (LCA) slung from their davits. Almost immediately, troops began to fill the craft and prepare for the landings. Closer to shore, the cruisers *Orion*, *Ajax*, *Argonaut*, *Emerald* and *Flores* adjusted their positions and swung their turrets southwards, fixing a bead on the German coastal batteries that were their targets. The coastline was quiet; complete tactical surprise had been achieved.



Landing Ship Tank (LST) loaded with medical personnel and transport from British 50th Division approaches the Normandy shore. These very large craft with a loaded displacement of over 3,700 tons were able to beach for unloading. They were capable of carrying 300 troops and 60 tanks or vehicles. A number of them were fitted for casualty evacuation; this was probably one of them. (Imperial War Museum, A23891)







**HMS AJAX BOMBARDING GERMAN GUN POSITIONS ON THE NORMANDY COAST** (pages 30–31)

The cruiser *HMS Ajax* (1) joins in a long-range gun duel with the German 152mm gun battery at Longues to the west of Port en Bessin. The guns at Longues had been in action since first light when they engaged the French cruiser *Georges Leygues* and the American destroyer *Emmons* at 0537hrs. *HMS Ajax* bombarded the battery as part of Force G's pre-arranged fire plan. The cruiser was able to bring all eight of her 6in. guns to bear on the German position, firing 112lb shells at the rate of between four and six rounds per minute. Her maximum effective range was 24,800 yards and her gunnery control so effective that she actually put a shell right into one of the casemates. After completing her initial D-Day counter-battery mission, *HMS Ajax* turned her guns to support the infantry advance inland. Communications with the 50th Division was via naval Forward Observation Bombardment Officers who landed with the leading troops and were able to radio back the co-ordinates of enemy positions and areas of resistance to the cruiser. Men of the assault companies of the 1st Hampshire Regiment (2) pass in front of the *Ajax* on their way to Jig sector of Gold Beach. This was the third assault landing to be made by the 1st Hampshires. As part of 231st Brigade they had already carried out amphibious landings in Sicily and Italy. The battalion had had a long war. It was in Egypt when war was

declared in September 1939, took part in Gen Wavell's campaign in North Africa in 1940 and then undertook garrison duties in Malta until 1943. After Sicily and Italy it was called home in November 1943 to prepare for operation Overlord. This was the first time the battalion had been back in England for 23 years. The men are wearing the recently introduced Mark III steel helmet (3), which was issued to assault units of 21st Army Group for D-Day. Of basically the same pattern as used in WWI, the earlier Mark I and II helmets were designed to give the men in the trenches protection from shellfire and missiles falling from above. The Mark II helmet gave somewhat improved all-round protection. The troops are carried in Landing Craft Assault (LCA) (4), small wooden boats each capable of transporting 30 fully laden infantrymen from their landing ship to the shore. With a top speed of just six knots, the craft were vulnerable to enemy fire. The Royal Navy manned these LCAs, but many others during the operation had Royal Marine crews. In fact Royal Marines manned almost two-thirds of landing craft used in the D-Day landings. The Landing Ship Infantry (LSI) (5) in the background was the armed merchant ship that carried the Hampshires across the channel along with the LCAs. The assault craft were launched fully loaded with men from davits along the ship's side. LCIs came in a variety of sizes and were often small liners or cross-channel ferries varying from 10,000 to 14,000 tons. (Kevin Lyles)



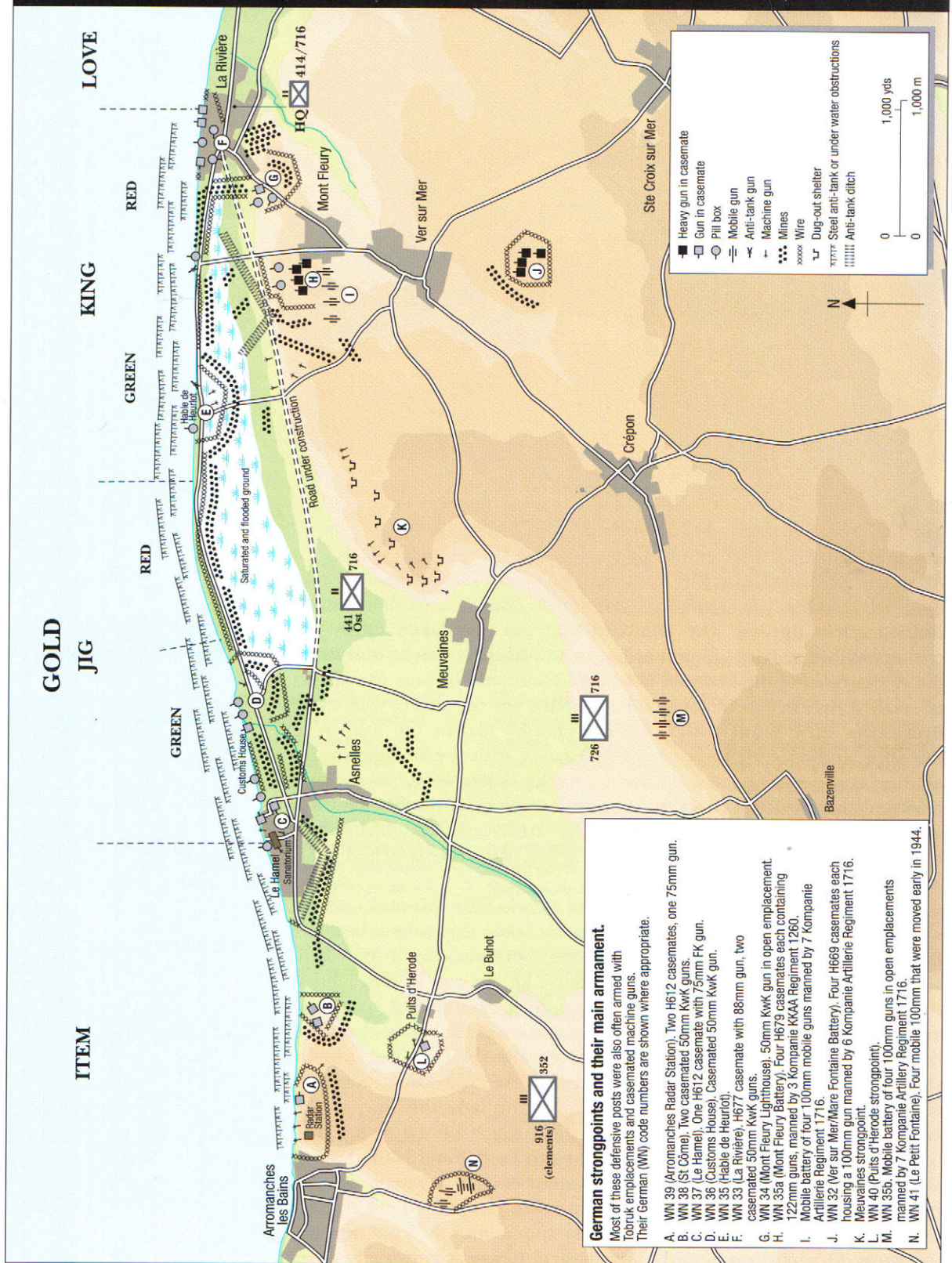
**Gold Beach, King Sector mid morning 6 June. The left foreground shows the track running inland from the beach up to the Mont Fleury battery through the antitank ditch. The extreme right of the picture shows the beach curving into Jig Sector, at about the position of strongpoint WN 35 at Hable de Heurlot. (Imperial War Museum, MH 24333)**

In the first few minutes after dawn, just as the sun rose into an overcast and storm-laden sky, medium and heavy bombers droned overhead to begin their bombing runs on the strongpoints of Hitler's Atlantic Wall. Sheets of yellow flame and billowing clouds of smoke and dust began to mark the shoreline and the rumble of huge detonations rippled across the sea. The bombardment was now taken up by the cruisers and their 6 and 8in. guns began to add their weight of shell to the destruction of the German defences. Then, one by one, the flotilla of small vessels began to assemble and make for the shore, with spray flying over their blunt bows from the choppy sea. In the lead were the tank landing craft carrying the DD tanks, with the smaller assault landing craft weaving amongst them. On the flanks were rocket-firing craft and tank landing craft with 4.7in. guns. Protecting the flotillas from air attack were LCT(F)s, the cannon firing anti-aircraft flak ships, and as the ships closed inexorably on the beaches, they too switched their attention to the beach defences.

At 0730hrs, the leading waves hit the beach. The DD tanks, which were to be launched 5,000 yards out and become the vanguard of the landings, were released much closer to the shore because of the rough seas, other landing craft took their charges all the way in and landed them straight onto the beach. The changes of plan caused confusion and delayed their arrival. They reached the beach at about the same time as the infantry and almost simultaneous with the LCTs carrying the specialised armour of 79th Division. All of these craft jostled together for landing space and weaved alarmingly through the underwater obstacles which had broken through the surface of the water. The orderly lines of craft that had ploughed relentlessly towards the French shore for the past six miles now broke up as each vessel made its own final run-in and attempted to touch down safely. Here and there craft hit mines mounted on poles and great water spouts shot up from beneath the ships. Others swung crazily over as steel hedgehogs ripped jagged



# GERMAN DEFENCES - GOLD BEACH



**GOLD**  
JIG

**ITEM**

**KING**

**RED**

**LOVE**

- German strongpoints and their main armament.**  
Most of these defensive posts were also often armed with 100mm emplacements and casemated machine guns. Their German (WN) code numbers are shown where appropriate.
- A. WN 39 (Aromanches Radar Station). Two H612 casemates, one 75mm gun.
  - B. WN 38 (St Côte). Two casemated 50mm KwK guns.
  - C. WN 37 (Le Hamel). One H612 casemate with 75mm FK gun.
  - D. WN 36 (Customs House). Casemated 50mm KwK gun.
  - E. WN 35 (Hablo de Heurto).
  - F. WN 33 (La Rivière). H677 casemate with 88mm gun, two casemated 50mm KwK guns.
  - G. WN 34 (Mont Fleury Lighthouse). 50mm KwK gun in open emplacement.
  - H. WN 35a (Mont Fleury Battery). Four H679 casemates each containing 122mm guns, manned by 3 Kompanie KKAAs Regiment 1260.
  - I. Mobile battery of four 100mm mobile guns manned by 7 Kompanie Artillerie Regiment 1716.
  - J. WN 32 (Ver sur Mer/Mare Fontaine Battery). Four H669 casemates each housing a 100mm gun manned by 6 Kompanie Artillerie Regiment 1716. Meuvaines strongpoint.
  - K. WN 40 (Puits d'Herode strongpoint).
  - L. WN 35b. Mobile battery of four 100mm guns in open emplacements manned by 7 Kompanie Artillerie Regiment 1716.
  - N. WN 41 (Le Petit Fontaine). Four mobile 100mm that were moved early in 1944.



holes in their hulls. All around them the air zipped and cracked with bullets as the Germans opened fire on the invaders.

## 231ST BRIGADE'S LANDINGS

On Jig Green Beach, the leading waves of 231st Brigade came towards the shore intent on landing on a 900-yard stretch of sand immediately to the east of Le Hamel. The 1st Hampshires were on the right, the 1st Dorsets on the left. The two battalions were ordered to capture the beach and move inland, the Hampshires swinging westwards to take the strongpoint and villages of Le Hamel and Asnelles, whilst the Dorsets attacked the beachfront strongpoint of La Cabane des Douanes (Customs House) and made a wide sweeping movement towards the high ground overlooking Arromanches. As the landing craft approached the beach it soon became clear that something had gone badly wrong.

231st Brigade should have landed on a beach whose major German strongpoints had been knocked out by aerial bombing, but the hail of fire that met the Hampshires and Dorsets that morning clearly showed that the aerial attack had been a failure. None of the German defences had been silenced and they now unleashed a torrent of machine gun, mortar and shellfire. Worse was to come, for the DD tanks that should have already been ashore attacking the enemy were still struggling free of their landing craft or wading through the surf dodging obstacles. The firepower from the Royal Marine Centaur tanks was also missing. Of the

**Men of 47 Royal Marine Commando land on Jig Beach from LCAs. The tank landing craft behind them are carrying support from the engineers of 79th Armoured Division. At left a bulldozer is towing a trailer filled with fascines, whilst another waits to exit LCT858. (Imperial War Museum, B5246)**

16 craft that should have arrived on Gold Beach with the leading elements, only two came ashore, all the others had been delayed or had turned back because of rough weather. Another complication for the infantry was that the beach-clearing team of flail and AVRE tanks from 79th Division soon became bogged down or knocked out from the heavy shellfire that now raked the beach.

The fire coming from Le Hamel together with the steady easterly current tended to push the assault waves to the left of their landing places. Both the Hampshires and the Dorsets landed well to the east of their intended positions. This resulted in the assault wave of the Hampshires landing close to Les Roquettes and almost on top of the strongpoint of La Cabane des Douanes. Thus it fell to the assault companies of the Hampshires to attack the initial objective of the Dorsets.

A Company landed in the thick of very heavy fire coming from the strongpoint. It was rapidly pinned down on the beach, unable to get forward to cut its own path through the minefields and wire, and move westwards to attack the strongpoint at Le Hamel. B Company landing alongside was caught in the same way. Immediately in front of the troops were two pillboxes and concealed machine gun posts and behind them the beach was being swept by fire from Le Hamel. It was clear to the exposed infantry that they had to get off the beach to stand any chance of survival. On the left a platoon managed to work its way onto the flank of the pillboxes and silenced them, allowing others to storm the wire perimeter of the strongpoint. Point blank fire eliminated the small garrison and the Hampshires began to force their way off the beach and inland.

The sanatorium at the centre of the position at Le Hamel proved to be the greatest of the Hampshires' problems. The strengthened and heavily defended building controlled a powerful array of weapons. Down on the sea front a massive H612 casemate with a 75mm gun swept the beach with concentrated shellfire. It had already knocked out several tanks and withstood all of the naval gunfire attempting to destroy it. Its aperture faced eastwards, with the long barrel of its gun pointing along the length of Jig Beach. Its reinforced concrete sides, which faced seaward, resisted even the largest calibre shell. Around the sanatorium and the casemate were several 'Tobruk' positions housing mortars and machine guns. Their occupants were safe behind reinforced concrete and their weapons commanded wide arcs of fire. It was a formidable strongpoint to assault from any direction.

The 75mm gun at Le Hamel continued to add to its tally of kills. It had already knocked out two flail tanks and they were shattered and burning at the water's edge. It had also shot off the bows of a landing craft trapping its complement of tanks inside. B Squadron of the Sherwood Rangers supporting the Hampshires lost four tanks on the beach and three 'drowned' during the run in to shore. A flail tank from B Squadron, Westminster Dragoons, commanded by Sergeant Lindsay, managed to beat a path through the dunes as far as the lateral road, but was knocked out by the 75mm when he turned right and headed for Le Hamel. This close-range German fire was now supported by artillery further inland, especially from the cliff tops to the west of Le Hamel. Shells from 88mm guns began to land amongst the troops and tanks, showering the beaches with high explosives and red-hot splinters of



shrapnel. At this point the second wave of assault craft swept onto the beach and into the inferno.

Twenty minutes behind the assault wave of the Hampshires came its other two companies, with C Company landing on the right and D Company on the left. Chaos greeted the troops as they left the landing craft. Every man had to run the gauntlet over an open beach swept by fire. Weighed down by their packs and sniped at by the enemy, the few hundred yards distance from the water's edge to the dunes seemed like miles. It was inevitable that casualties mounted to alarming proportions. The Hampshires' CO, LtCol Nelson Smith, was hit twice and evacuated. Also wounded were the forward observation officer for the supporting ships and a battery commander from the field artillery, thus leaving the battalion without the means of calling down support from the destroyers or from the self-propelled artillery of 147th Field Regiment in their landing craft circling offshore. The battalion's second-in-command, Major Martin, had not yet landed so Major Warren took over command. When Major Martin did eventually get ashore two hours later, he was immediately killed by a sniper.

Major Warren could see that it was impossible to make a direct attack on Le Hamel from along the beach for the minefields fronting the defences were too deep and too well covered by enemy fire and so he grouped his men behind the strongpoint at La Cabane des Douanes and decided to assault the sanatorium from the rear. Nevertheless, it took several hours for the Hampshires to push through Les Roquettes and along the lateral road to the west to arrive behind le Hamel, so fierce was the opposition.

The 1st Dorsets had landed to the east of their intended position, fortunately away from their original objective, the strongpoint at La

**Large H677 Type casemate and its 88mm gun which formed part of strongpoint WN33 on the western edge of La Rivière. It was sited to fire westwards along the length of King Sector of Gold Beach where 5th East Yorkshires came ashore. (Imperial War Museum, A23995)**



**King Sector, Gold Beach and the landing site of the 5th East Yorkshires of 50th Division, seen from the position of strongpoint WN33's 88mm gun casemate which dominated the beach from the east. Its seaward side was protected from naval gunfire by massive concrete walls. (Ken Ford)**

Cabane des Douanes. The opposition was still very troublesome, however. Like the Hampshires, their beach was strafed by the guns in Le Hamel, and like the Hampshires their tank support was in disarray. C Squadron of the Sherwood Rangers had lost five tanks swamped during the run in and a further two on the beach. The AVRE tanks from 6th Assault Regiment RE and the flails from the Westminster Dragoons both met with difficulties as they tried to create an exit from the beach. The first Crab flail tank struck a mine that its chains had failed to detonate and the AVRE following behind also struck a mine trying to get past the disabled flail and blocked the lane. Nearby, another Crab trying to clear an additional path became bogged down in the clay and the AVRE following behind was knocked out by shellfire.

The Dorsets were able to get off the beach much sooner than the luckless Hampshires. By landing further east than their intended position, and by not having to immediately attack the strongpoint at La Cabane des Douanes, they were able to move inland across the marshes and form up behind Les Roquettes in reasonable order. Once clear of the shoreline, enemy resistance became less concentrated but still limited any open movement by large bodies of troops. The Dorsets bypassed Le Hamel and advanced towards the enemy position at Buhot, clearing several machine gun posts and fortified areas as they went. Once Buhot had been taken, they moved on to clear the enemy from Puits d'Herode. As the morning wore on, the Dorsets were able to complete their wide sweeping advance to the west and got themselves on the high ground south of Arromanches. Here they came under fire from the German-held heights either side of the town.

With the Hampshires all ashore the 231st Brigade's follow-up battalion, 2nd Devons, was due to arrive. The battalion landed at 0815hrs onto a

beach still very much alive with German fire; offshore obstacles were still intact and Le Hamel remained unsubdued. The Devons had a hazardous time landing and a difficult time getting clear of the beach. One company joined with the Hampshires to stiffen their attack on the sanatorium complex while the remainder of the battalion moved round Asnelles and advanced inland two miles towards the important village of Ryes.

Landing just behind the Devons was 47 Royal Marine Commando, with its own special task. The unit was not tasked to assist the initial assault on the beaches, but merely to pass through the landings on the way to seize its particular objective, the town and harbour of Port en Bessin and link up with the Americans landing on Omaha. LtCol Phillips had been told to avoid contact with the enemy wherever possible and to press on to his objectives regardless. The Commando had a rough time on the run in to the beaches, losing four of its 14 landing craft on the way. Three of them hit mines near the surf and the fourth was sunk by shellfire; casualties were considerable. It landed at H Hour + 90 minutes further east than planned onto a beach crowded with LCTs and other craft, scattered with drowned and burnt-out vehicles and littered with dead bodies. A company of enemy infantry blocked the Commando's route to its rendezvous point at the church in Le Hamel. The Commando had to put in an attack against this position, suffering around 40 casualties in the process, but capturing about 60 German prisoners. It then took some time for the unit to reorganise. Much of its equipment had been lost in the sea and some key personnel were missing. Among the three officers and 73 marines that failed to make the rendezvous was the Colonel. His craft had been sunk and he was forced to swim for the shore. None the less, the Commando pressed on with the men it had, gathering German weapons as it went.

The route took the commandos on a wide detour around Le Hamel. Led by 'X' and 'B' Troops they made their way across country avoiding all villages and major roads. The first real opposition to their advance came in the afternoon at La Rosière to the south-west of Arromanches where they were held up by machine gun fire from two concealed posts.



**Sherman Crab flail tank of the Westminster Dragoons, knocked out on Gold Beach during the assault phase. The metal chains on the revolving drum at the front of the tank were designed to beat a path through minefields, detonating the charges as it went. (Imperial War Museum, B5141)**



By early evening they had reached the high ground to the south of Port en Bessin and dug in for the night around Point 72.

## 69TH BRIGADE'S LANDINGS

On the eastern sector of Gold, along the beach designated King Red, the 69th Brigade came ashore with its leading elements touching down at H-Hour, 0730hrs. The DD tanks of 4th/7th Dragoon Guards who were to support the brigade were due to be launched 5,000 yards off the beach at H-Hour -50, giving them 50 minutes to swim ashore to arrive alongside the infantry. C Squadron was to support the 5th East Yorkshires on the left, while B Squadron would similarly stiffen the attack by 6th Green Howards on the right. The follow-up battalion, 7th Green Howards, landing 50 minutes later, would be supported by A Squadron. Specialised armour was again provided by 79th Armoured Division with C Squadron Westminster Dragoons providing Crab flail tanks and 81st Squadron from 6th Assault Regiment, Royal Engineers, supplying AVREs.

The stormy weather of the previous days had left the sea very choppy and it proved too rough to launch the DD tanks. It was decided to land them directly on the beach and as the LCTs carrying the armour approached the shore the formation changed from two divisions in line ahead to a single line abreast. Resistance was fairly light as the craft prepared to beach, with none of the concentrated fire that was

Reinforcements coming ashore across Gold Beach. In the right foreground are some of the 'hedgehog' beach obstacles made of angled steel that were placed in the water below the high-water line to rip out the bottoms of light landing craft. (Imperial War Museum, A23947)

experienced further west on Gold Beach. However, once the tanks began leaving their landing craft, things began to hot up considerably. On the far east flank of the landings, a large casemated gun sited on the edge of La Rivière opened fire along the beach. Like its opposite number at the other end of Gold at Le Hamel, this H677 casemate was protected on its seaward side by massive reinforced concrete walls, rendering it impervious to naval gunfire. Its large 88mm gun fired along the beach, sited so as to enfilade any landings. The flails and AVREs of 79th Division, together with the DD tanks of 4th/7th Dragoon Guards, now began to fall prey to the gun.

Landing amongst the increasing chaos on the beach were the infantry. The 5th East Yorkshires came ashore just to the west of the strongpoint at La Rivière. Here they found the worst of the enemy fire and were forced to seek cover beneath the sea wall at the top of the beach. Any attempts to get over the wall met a strong enemy response. The situation improved when a flail tank from the Westminster Dragoons managed to approach close enough to the strongpoint's main casemate to fire a shell through its aperture, knocking out the deadly 88mm gun and demoralising its crew. Naval support was called for to

**A Cromwell tank leads a line of armour from 4th County of London Yeomanry inland from Gold Beach. The tanks, from 7th Armoured Division, have just crossed the antitank ditch at the rear of King Beach and are driving up towards 'Lavatory Pan Villa' and the site of the German gun battery at Mont Fleury. (Imperial War Museum, B5251)**





3. 5th East Yorkshires, supported by DD tanks from 4th/7th Dragoon Guards, move through La Rivière clearing the village and seaford defences. It takes most of the morning before the area is declared free of the enemy at a cost to the battalion of 90 killed and wounded.

2. 5th East Yorkshires land at 0730hrs on King Red Beach and with the support of armour from 79th Armoured Division, silenced a troublesome casemated 88mm gun that was firing along the beach.

5. 6th Green Howards move up the road towards the four-gun battery at Mont Fleury. On the edge of the battery strongpoint, Sergeant Hollis single-handedly clears two pillboxes in an action which contributed to his winning the only VC awarded on D-Day.

1. 6th Green Howards land at 0737 Hours on King Green Beach and meet strong German resistance. Machine gun fire sweeps along the beach from strongpoints on either side. Supporting armour comes under accurate fire from a casemated 88mm gun at La Rivière.

1b. Leading companies clear exit from beach and begin to move inland towards Mont Fleury.

1c. 6th Green Howards, supported by AVRE tanks from 6th Assault Regiment Royal Engineers attack strongpoint at Hable de Heurtot and eliminate several pill boxes and machine guns who were enfilading the landing sites with their fire.

5a. D Company, 6th Green Howards, takes the battery at Mont Fleury. The German garrison surrenders after little resistance. The battery is only partially completed and there is no evidence that its guns have been fired. Heavy bombers have devastated the area and the cruiser HMS Orion has registered 12 direct hits on the battery.

11. 69th Brigade's follow up battalion, 7th Green Howards, land on King Beach at 0820hrs. It quickly joins the move inland and help clear the villages of Ver sur Mer, Crépon and Villiers le Sec.

6. B Company, 6th Green Howards attacks and clears the strongpoint on the ridge near Meuvaines.

8. 6th Green Howards take the village of Crépon and Sergeant Hollis is later awarded a Victoria Cross for his actions during its capture.

9. The mobile gun battery on the hills to the west of Crépon is found abandoned; the guns have been removed.

#### GERMAN STRONGPOINTS

(shown in red, annotated in black diamonds)

- A WN35 - Hable de Heurtot
- B WN33 - La Rivière
- C WN34 - Mont Fleury lighthouse
- D WN35a - Mont Fleury Battery
- E Meuvaines strongpoint
- F WN32 - Ver sur Mer/Mare Fontaine Battery



## 69TH BRIGADE, 50TH DIVISION, KING SECTOR, GOLD BEACH

6 June 1944, 0730hrs–1500hrs, viewed from the southwest showing the landings by 5th East Yorkshires and 6th Green Howards, the assault battalions of 69th Brigade, and 7th Green Howards, the follow-up battalion. A series of coastal strongpoints at La Rivière, Mont Fleury Lighthouse and Meuvaines are subdued amid fierce fighting and the gun batteries at Mont Fleury and Ver sur Mer eliminated before the drive inland for the Bayeux-Courseulles road begins.

4. The remainder of 5th East Yorkshires move against the strongpoint around the lighthouse at the rear of La Rivière, silencing two guns and capturing 30 prisoners.

7. After helping clear the village of Ver sur Mer, 5th East Yorkshires captures the German gun battery to the rear.

12. Troops from Canadian 3rd Division landing on Juno Beach advance inland and cover 50th Division's eastern flank.

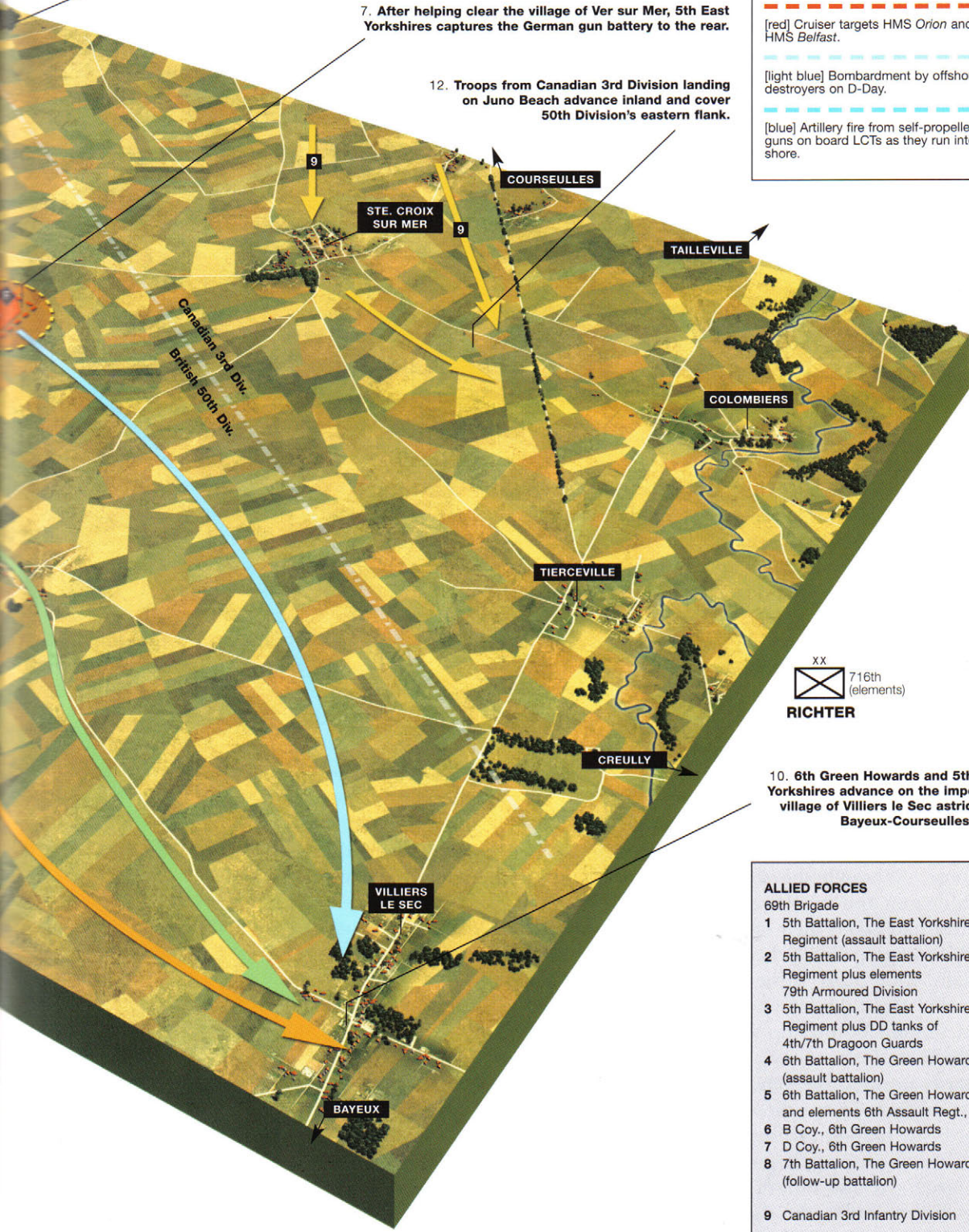
#### BOMBARDMENT TARGETS

[yellow] Pre-invasion strategic bombing targets.

[red] Cruiser targets HMS *Orion* and HMS *Belfast*.

[light blue] Bombardment by offshore destroyers on D-Day.

[blue] Artillery fire from self-propelled guns on board LCTs as they run into shore.

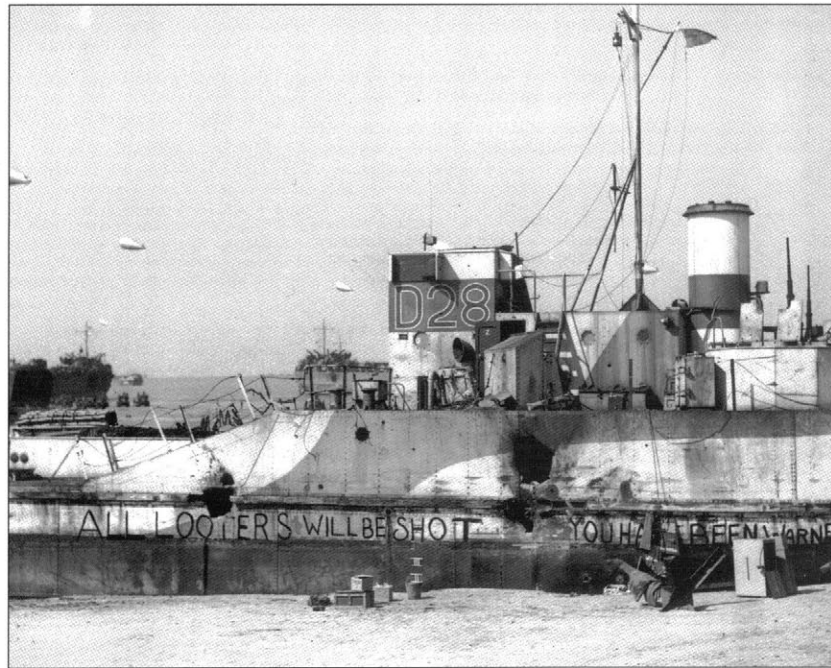


XX  
 716th  
 (elements)  
**RICHTER**

10. 6th Green Howards and 5th East Yorkshires advance on the important village of Villiers le Sec astride the Bayeux-Courseulles road.

#### ALLIED FORCES

- 69th Brigade
- 1 5th Battalion, The East Yorkshire Regiment (assault battalion)
- 2 5th Battalion, The East Yorkshire Regiment plus elements
- 79th Armoured Division
- 3 5th Battalion, The East Yorkshire Regiment plus DD tanks of 4th/7th Dragoon Guards
- 4 6th Battalion, The Green Howards (assault battalion)
- 5 6th Battalion, The Green Howards and elements 6th Assault Regt., RE
- 6 B Coy., 6th Green Howards
- 7 D Coy., 6th Green Howards
- 8 7th Battalion, The Green Howards (follow-up battalion)
- 9 Canadian 3rd Infantry Division



An LCT stranded high and dry on Gold Beach. The craft has taken several direct hits from German shellfire and has been knocked out. The sign, with its dire warning, shows that the ship is salvageable and will probably see more action during its lifetime. (Imperial War Museum, A23948)

occupy the defenders in the rear of the strongpoint whilst the East Yorkshires crossed over the sea wall and onto the lateral road running parallel with the beach. Infantry gradually closed on the wire defences and minefields around La Rivière and got into the interconnecting dug-outs and fortified houses of the village to begin clearing them of the enemy. An AVRE, firing massive Petard charges as it moved, led a group of DD tanks into the village and the remainder of the morning was spent flushing out the enemy. One by one the tanks bombarded the German positions and the infantry then rushed in to clear them. One company made a wide movement inland and came at the village from the rear, after first having attacked the strongpoint around the Mont Fleury lighthouse to the south. The East Yorkshires took 45 prisoners but it cost them six officers and 84 other ranks killed and wounded to gain their precarious foothold in Normandy.

To the west, 6th Green Howards received a rather more subdued welcome. Although the shellfire was not as intense, a great deal of machine gun and small arms fire from the enemy position at Hable de Heurtot had raked their landings. The supporting armour was close at hand and immediately began helping them silence the strongpoint. Captain King with three AVREs under command closed on the pill-boxes whilst the infantry of A Company of the Green Howards kept the defenders bottled up with small arms fire. A Petard charge wiped out the first of the enemy's concrete emplacements and then the Green Howards stormed the others, silencing the strongpoint completely. D Company forced a way directly off the beach and made its way cautiously towards the four-gun battery at Mont Fleury.

In the meantime, a group of Crabs were flailing exit paths from the beach. Whilst two of these were soon blocked by mined and bogged-down tanks, the easternmost exit was opened by a single Crab, commanded by Lt Pear, which then went on to reach the lateral road,

turned east towards La Rivière for a short way and then south along a track, beating a path as it went. It got over the antitank ditch that barred the way inland by using the German crossing place, which had not been blown, and then proceeded to clear a path up towards the Mont Fleury battery on the hill overlooking the beach. Just past a large house wryly named 'Lavatory Pan Villa' because of the circular shape of its driveway, Lt Pear's Crab was halted by a crater in the road. An AVRE with a bridge was quickly despatched to the site and a crossing was placed over the large depression allowing the advance to resume. The way was now open for vehicles to drive towards Ver sur Mer.

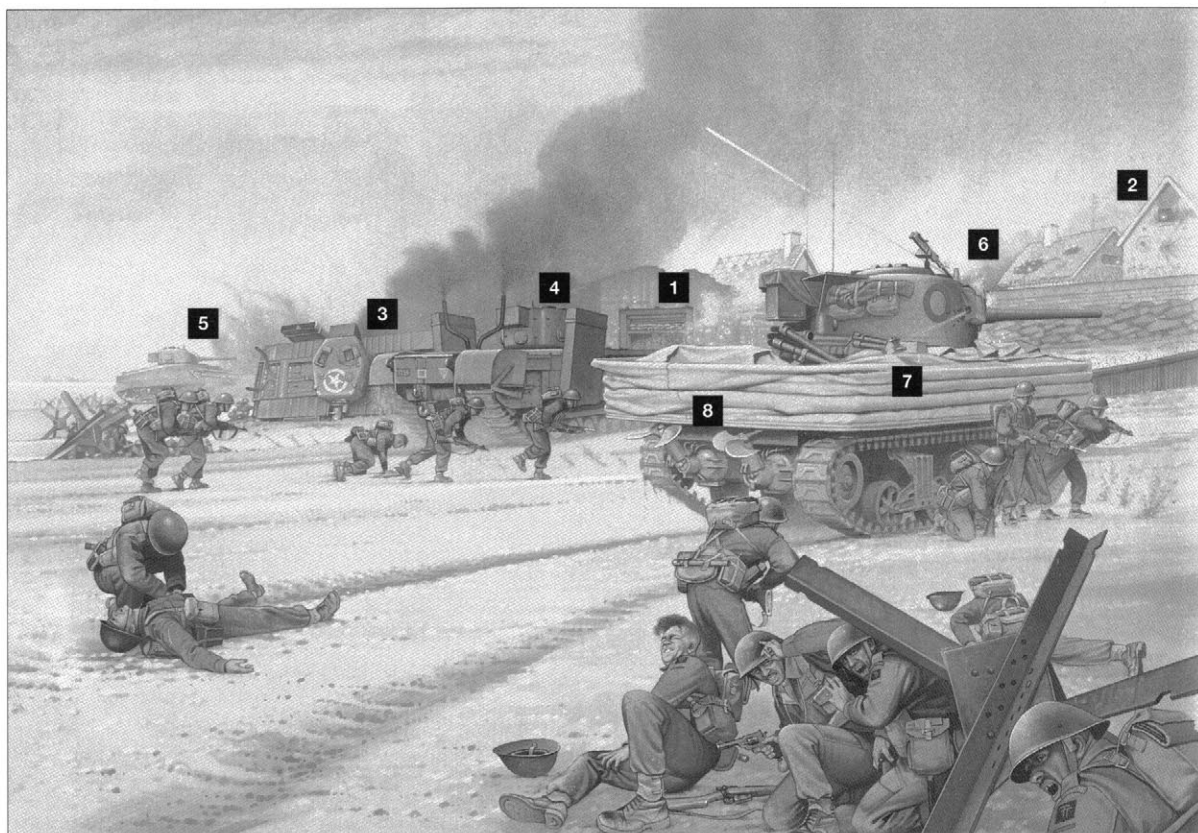
The Green Howards and the tanks of 4th/7th Dragoon Guards now quickly took up the advance. With an exit from the beach fully open streams of troops and vehicles were able to get clear of the shore. Twenty minutes after the first wave, B and C Companies began to land and all of the Green Howards' main objectives could now be attacked. D Company had by this time closed on the gun battery at Mont Fleury and cleared the area with little resistance. The heavy bombing of the site and the bombardment laid down on the battery by HMS *Belfast* had knocked the fighting spirit out of its garrison. Completely demoralised the battery, which was found to be only half completed, did not seem to have fired a shot at the landings. B Company now attacked the trench system and machine gun posts on the Meuvaines Ridge to the south-west, clearing the enemy from a small quarry on the way. After a stiff fire-fight the ridge was cleared. C Company meanwhile pressed on to occupy Point 52 to the west of Ver sur Mer and cover the main push inland by the tanks of the 4th/7th Dragoon Guards towards Crépon.

Forty five minutes after the 6th Green Howards had landed, its sister battalion, 7th Green Howards, also touched down on King Beach. This follow-up battalion completed the landings of 69th Brigade. The 7th Green Howards quickly found a way off the beach, but had some difficulty finding a suitable route inland. Eventually they advanced up the hill, past Lavatory Pan Villa and the Mont Fleury battery, and gained the open ground beyond. The battalion's first task was to attack the gun battery at Ver sur Mer. This they did and found that it was completely out of action with its garrison retired into concrete shelters. These demoralised Germans soon surrendered to the aggressive persuasion of the Green Howards and over 50 prisoners went into captivity.

With the two assault brigades of British 50th Division landed, the reserve brigades were due to come ashore in support. At around 1100hrs, both brigades began to land on beaches still raked by enemy fire, but it was only a fraction of the intensity that had met the assault waves. Le Hamel had still not been subdued so 56th Brigade, which was due to land on Jig Beach behind 231st Brigade, landed further to the east instead and came ashore near Hable de Heurtot. 151st Brigade set down on King Beach in the rear of 69th Brigade. Throughout the remainder of the morning more troops came ashore through exits and pathways cleared by the engineers. With these troops came a vast tail of support vehicles carrying stores and ammunition. No sooner had the chaos and disorder caused by enemy fire been cleared, than it was replaced by the chaos and disorder of traffic jams and bogged-down vehicles. But from this confusion there emerged a steady stream of infantry and tanks that inexorably forced their way inland.







#### **GOLD BEACH, H HOUR +15 MINUTES** (pages 46–47)

Armoured vehicles from British 79th Armoured Division and Sherman DD tanks from 4th/7th Dragoon Guards, part of 8th Armoured Brigade arrive on Gold Beach to support 5th East Yorkshires during the assault phase of the landings. The specialised armour of British 79th Armoured Division provided all of the British and Canadian beaches with direct fire support. It was a unique formation; its constituent units never fought together as a division but provided heavy firepower and special expertise to whichever division or brigade required it. Each of the tanks had specific tasks to perform but once they landed and began to take casualties confusion reigned. These troops are attacking the area around German strongpoint WN 33 on the extreme left of King Sector at La Rivière. The strongpoint is grouped around the type-H677 casemate (1) containing an 88mm Pak 43/41 gun. French houses within the strongpoint's perimeter have been reinforced with concrete and small arms and machine gun fire from these positions raked the beach (2). The elimination of the large German gun became the most important priority for the men and armour landing in front of it. The AVREs (Armoured Vehicles Royal Engineers) confronting the enemy casemate were standard Churchill tanks modified for particular tasks. They were armed with a 12in. spigot mortar known as a Petard, that could deliver a massive 26lb charge of high explosive – known as the Flying Dustbin – up to a range of 230 yards, although the effective range was about 85 yards. The tanks were capable of destroying the fortification with

devastating effect if they could get close enough. The first AVRE tank from 81 Squadron, 6th Assault Regiment Royal Engineers was knocked-out by the German 88mm gun (3). A second AVRE later succumbed to the same gun (4). On the extreme left is a Sherman Crab flail tank from C Squadron, Westminster Dragoons (5). This type of tank was fitted at the front with a revolving drum with attached lengths of chain As the name suggests this flailed the ground as it advanced exploding buried mines. The 88mm gun in strongpoint WN33 was eventually knocked out a short time later by a Crab tank commanded by Captain R.F. Bell, whose 75mm gun put a shell right through the embrasure of the casemate at short range. On the right a DD Sherman from 4th/7th Dragoon Guards (6) is attacking an enemy pillbox supported by men from the East Yorkshires. These Sherman tanks were fitted with canvas floatation screens (7) giving them an amphibious capability. They were propelled by twin screws at the rear (8). Once they had touched down on the beach, their screens were dropped and the propellers disengaged converting the DDs back into normal track-driven tanks. Co-operation between tanks and infantry was difficult. Once they were in close contact with the enemy the infantry usually went for cover and the tank crews battened down their hatches. The only way to communicate with the tank crew was via the telephone housed on the outside of the vehicle, which left the infantryman vulnerable to enemy fire. The tank commanders was just as disinclined to put himself at additional risk by opening his hatch to communicate with the infantry. (Kevin Lyles)



By the end of the morning the 24th Lancers had joined the 4th/7th Dragoon Guards and the Sherwood Rangers to complete the landings of 8th Armoured Brigade. This new regiment immediately went forward to join in the advance. The Dorsets and Devons had by then cleared a wide area behind Jig Beach to allow 56th Brigade to pass through and continue its move towards Bayeux. On the extreme right, however, the 1st Hampshires were still trying to force their way into the strongpoint around the sanatorium at Le Hamel.

The Hampshires were off the beach and behind the village but were unable to close on the outer defences of the strongpoint because of the intensity of the enemy's small arms and mortar fire. Battalion headquarters was set up in Asnelles while a new approach to the problem was considered. At 1345hrs a concerted effort was made to reach the strongpoint. B and C Companies advanced to the lateral road south of Le Hamel, but it took over an hour for the infantry to get into a position from which to make the final attack. At 1500hrs, B Company crossed over the lateral road and advanced grimly on the houses surrounding the sanatorium. The infantry got to within 50 yards of the main building, but were stopped by a torrent of fire. In a stroke of luck, at this critical moment the troops were joined by an AVRE tank which came down the road from Asnelles. With small arms fire peppering its sides, the tank closed on the sanatorium and began firing huge bunker-busting Petard charges at the building. This momentarily stopped the enemy machine gun fire and, during a pause, C Company managed to get into the strongpoint. The building was gradually cleared amid fierce hand-to-hand fighting, with few of the German defenders surrendering. The enemy retreated house-by-house firing as they withdrew towards the western end of the village. Additional attacks were made on the shrinking enemy garrison by B Company and by 1600hrs all active resistance in the area had been subdued. The great casemate and its 75mm gun that had caused so much havoc on Jig Beach eventually succumbed to a Petard charge fired through the rear door of the blockhouse.

**Commodore Douglas-Pennant, Commander Naval Force G, has come ashore from his HQ ship HMS Bulolo and is talking on the beach to some Royal Marine Commando Engineers. These commandos were trained in demolitions and as assault engineers to clear obstructions from the beach. Two of these obstruction clearance units – LCOCU 9 and 10 – were allocated to Gold Beach and arrived on the beach soon after the assault waves. (Imperial War Museum, A23944)**



Royal Navy Beach Group command post on Gold Beach organising the landing of follow-up units, stores and reinforcements. These are Royal Navy personnel, wearing army commando battledress complete with combined operations badges. They proudly display the White Ensign above their control post and the two officers retain their naval headdress. (Imperial War Museum, A24092)



Whilst the attack on Le Hamel was in progress, the remainder of the Hampshires had moved westwards along the coast and had cleared the gun positions of WN 38 at St Côme de Fresné and captured the Radar Station on the cliffs to the east of Arromanches. This now left 231st Brigade overlooking the town from both the south and east. At the same time, from the high ground on the other side of Arromanches, German fire began to interfere with the build-up of troops and naval gunfire was called for to put a stop to it. Patrols were sent down into Arromanches late that afternoon and met little resistance, so an artillery programme was arranged to give supporting fire and the town was entered by the Hampshires and captured later that evening.

By this time the Dorsets were occupying Ryes and the Devons had continued westwards towards the great gun battery at Longues. The guns at Longues had first opened fire on the invasion fleet approaching Gold Beach at around 0605hrs. Prior to that the battery had been subjected to both heavy bombing and bombardment from other warships. At 0537hrs, the French cruiser *Georges Leygues* had targeted the battery. This fire was then taken up by the American battleship USS *Arkansas*. Longues battery replied by firing its 152mm naval guns at the battleship and the US destroyer *Emmons*. Then another French cruiser, the *Montcalm*, joined in the skirmish. At 0605hrs the guns were turned on a closer target when the battery opened fire on the flotilla of ships anchored off Gold Beach. The first to feel the effects of the German coastal weapons was the HQ ship HMS *Bulolo*. So accurate were the initial salvos that *Bulolo* was forced to weigh anchor and move out of range. At this time the cruiser HMS *Ajax* began its bombardment plan and concentrated all of its guns on Longues. A long-range duel now began that was to last twenty minutes. At a distance of 11,000 metres the two adversaries swapped shell for shell. Victory went to the *Ajax* as the battery fell silent at 0620hrs. This was only a temporary respite, however, and at around 0700hrs it opened up once more on the Americans landing at Omaha. Once again *Ajax* pounded the battery, joined by HMS *Argonaut*. This time the action was decisive, with astonishing precision the two cruisers managed to knock out three of the four guns.

That should have been the end of Longues, but its one gun resumed firing later that afternoon, threatening Allied shipping and the landing beaches. Throughout the afternoon and into the early evening the lone gun kept up intermittent fire on the invaders. Finally, at 1900hrs it fell silent. The next day, 7 June, the garrison of 184 men, led by their commanding officer, surrendered peacefully to the 2nd Devons.

## THE MOVE INLAND

With the beachhead relatively secure, 50th Division could now push forward and attempt to secure the remainder of the day's objectives. The whole of the division was ashore just after midday and 56th Brigade was ordered to make its move on Bayeux and beyond to the River Drome. In the early afternoon it advanced through 231st Brigade's gains and set out into open country. The leading troops of the South Wales Borderers passed through La Rosière and turned southwards astride the road to Bayeux. As they approached the radar station at Pouligny, the enemy set fire to it and withdrew. The advance continued to Vaux sur Aure and a crossing point over the river was secured. The nearby gun battery was found to be deserted. It had been bombed by heavy bombers and shelled by the cruiser *Argonaut* earlier that day and it appeared that the garrison had simply abandoned the position. Meanwhile, on the left, the 2nd Essex had reached St. Sulpice and the 2nd Gloucestershires had followed behind and occupied Magny, both meeting only light enemy resistance on the way. Here the brigade halted and made preparations to hold the position for the rest of the night. Its progress had been slow, advancing just four miles in five hours and then stopping and digging in. It did send patrols as far as Bayeux but the D-Day objective remained untaken. One reason for the brigade's lack of urgency may have been the absence of its commander, Brig Senior. He had been ambushed

**Rhino Ferries bring follow-up vehicles and reinforcements to Gold Beach. These flat blunt-ended rafts transported all kinds of loads to the shore from larger ships anchored in deeper water. The scene shows King Beach near the exit towards Mont Fleury. The group of trees in the left background mark the area of the lighthouse behind La Rivière and the prominent house to the right of centre is 'Lavatory Pan Villa'. (Imperial War Museum, CL57)**





**Two RAF personnel inspect a German light anti-aircraft gun in a concrete pit on the Meuvaines Ridge overlooking King Sector of Gold Beach. Many of these types of concrete emplacements housing light weapons were built along the ridge as part of an inland strongpoint. Machine gun fire from the line of hills interfered with the move inland constantly until the 6th Green Howards swept along the escarpment and cleared them out. (Imperial War Museum, CL47)**

south of Crépon, wounded in the arm and had been forced to lie up to avoid capture. He rejoined the brigade the next day, but his injuries were severe enough for him to be repatriated to England.

To the left of 56th Brigade, 151st Brigade moved forward in two groups, supported by the self-propelled guns of 90th Field Regiment RA. Its objective was to seize the Caen–Bayeux road and railway between the Bayeux and the River Seulles. The brigade had come ashore over King Beach and had concentrated around Meuvaines. In the middle of the afternoon, the right-hand group, led by 9th Durham Light Infantry, advanced along the line of the Crépon–Bayeux road. On their left the other group, led by the 6th Durham Light Infantry and a squadron of Sherman tanks of the 4th/7th Dragoon Guards, pushed south from Crépon towards Villiers le Sec and then westwards on the road towards Bayeux. The move was not without incident, and between Bazenville and Villiers le Sec, the brigade was subjected to a determined enemy counter-attack, but after some fierce fighting the Germans retired.

The division's fourth brigade, 69th Brigade, moved out from its beachhead and secured the extreme left flank of Gold Beach's lodgement. 6th Green Howards continued its advance past the Mont Fleury battery on to another field battery further inland. The advance troops found this empty, the Germans had hitched their 88mm guns to their tractors and had retired. At Crépon the battalion concentrated ready to move with the rest of the brigade towards the River Seulles at Creully. By 1500hrs the brigade was in Villiers le Sec where 5th East Yorkshires had to beat off a strong enemy counter-attack. The squadron of 4th/7th Dragoon Guards which was supporting the move then went forward over the River Seulles and entered Creully. By nightfall the whole brigade had crossed the Seulles and had established itself in the villages of St Gabriel, Rucqueville and Coulombs. It had also made contact with the Canadians who had landed on Juno Beach.



**CSM Stanley Hollis VC, 6th Green Howards, was awarded the only Victoria Cross won on D-Day. His actions close to Mont Fleury battery where he cleared two pillboxes and a German trench, coupled with his attack on an enemy field gun and the rescue of two of his men at Crépon, earned him the highest decoration for valour that his country can award. (Imperial War Museum, HU2001)**

During the day, Colour Sergeant-Major Stanley Hollis of 6th Green Howards had made history. His was an eventful day that had begun when he landed on King Beach with the assault waves. His company exited the beach and advanced up the road that led towards Mont Fleury battery past 'Lavatory Pan Villa'. His company commander noticed that two pillboxes near the villa had been by-passed and remained untaken. Hollis went forward to investigate and the machine guns inside opened up on him. He rushed the first pillbox firing his Sten gun as he ran. He poked his gun through its aperture and sprayed the inside with his Sten, then jumped on the roof and tossed a grenade inside, killing the occupants. He then cleared a nearby trench of Germans and accepted the surrender of the other pillbox. Later that day in Crépon, he attacked a German field gun with a PIAT and then created a diversion so that two of his stranded men could be evacuated. Throughout the day, wherever there was action, CSM Hollis was in the thick of it. His bravery and valour earned him the award of the Victoria Cross, the only one granted during the whole of D-Day.

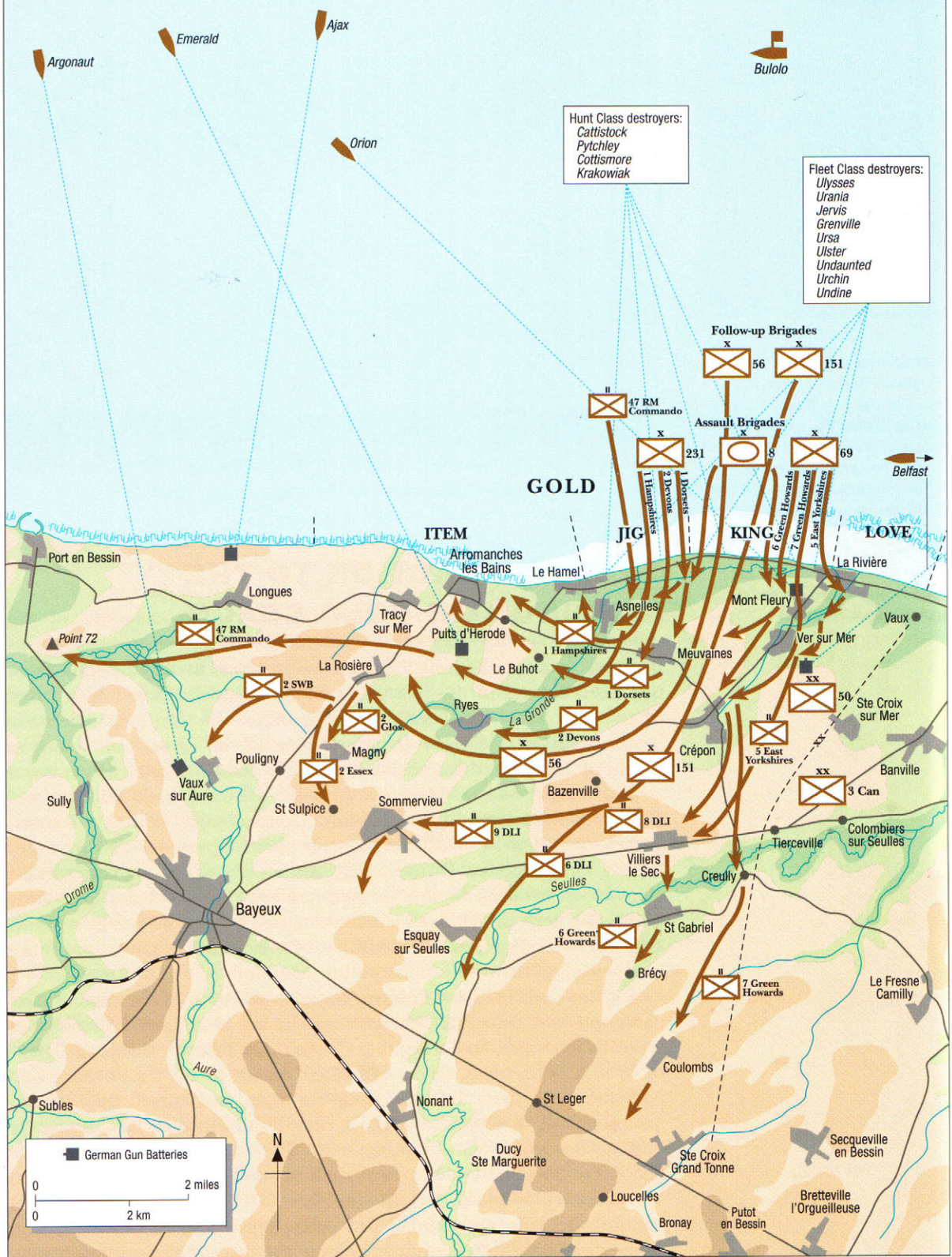
Once 50th Division was completely ashore, the beaches were given over to the arrival of transport, stores and reinforcements. During the remainder of the day advance elements of 7th Armoured Division arrived over the beaches. As night fell these new units gathered at their rendezvous points ready to join in the advance the next day.

## **GERMAN REACTION TO THE LANDINGS ON GOLD BEACH**

In the early hours of 6 June, German commanders in the Normandy area had been alerted to the fact that something unusual was taking place when news reached their various headquarters of Allied airborne landings east of the River Orne and west of the River Vire. With the arrival of Allied warships off the Normandy coast just after dawn, it was clear that an invasion of some considerable size was actually taking place. The commander of 716th Division, Generalmajor Wilhelm Richter, became involved in countering British paratroopers during the night. British 6th Airborne Division had landed amongst the easternmost elements of his division and his men had been in action since the early hours. Richter's difficulties increased markedly when he was given news later that morning that the British and Canadians had landed on three beaches, all of them within the sector defended by his division.

Richter's untried static division, made up primarily of old men, foreign conscripts and exhausted veterans, was having to resist the landings of three full-strength, well-trained and equipped infantry divisions. There really was no contest. Once the Allied assault infantry and tanks had penetrated the fixed defences along the coast and chased the German troops out of their concrete shells, the 716th Division had practically nothing left with which to resist them. The backbone of their defence had been the concrete and steel shelters. When forced to retreat into open country, their will to resist evaporated. Behind Gold Beach, Richter had just the 441st East Battalion of press-ganged Russian auxiliaries and elements of his 726th Regiment holding the coast. Behind these troops,

# BRITISH ASSAULT ON GOLD BEACH





**Troops from 50th Division inspect a 50mm gun in its concrete emplacement somewhere along Gold Beach. It has been struck by naval shellfire on its side, but damage seems to have been superficial. It was probably knocked out at close range by assault troops. (Imperial War Museum, B5252)**

field positions manned by 352nd Artillery Regiment, from 352nd Infantry Division, covered the beach. The shock of British 50th Division's landings quickly disrupted all cohesion in the German line, leaving just isolated islands of resistance with which to deny the Allies a lodgement. When these were captured one by one, the battle quickly became a rout. Those German forces that were able to retired as quickly as possible, falling back to other centres of resistance established behind them, but unable to provide any but token resistance to the British advance.

As early as 0900hrs, the headquarters of the adjacent German 352nd Division learned that British tanks were in operation around the area of Meuvaines. The division's commander, Generalmajor Dietrich Kraiss, viewed this news with alarm, for a breakthrough by British armoured troops from Meuvaines to the south would make it possible for them to turn to the west without great difficulty, capture Bayeux and roll up the 352nd Division's sector from the rear. The bulk of Kraiss's division was in action against the Americans on Omaha Beach and the airborne landings around the River Vire. The divisional reserve, a Kampfgruppe (battlegroup) of reinforced 915th Infantry Regiment, was also the corps' reserve and was employed under the control of General de Artillerie Erich Marcks and his LXXXIV Corps. It had already been committed against American paratroopers in the western part of the division's sector near Carentan since the early hours. Kraiss now requested the return of the battlegroup from Marcks so that he could send it against the British. With the Americans bottled up on Omaha and their paratroopers strung out and disorganised, Marcks agreed that the greatest threat was now in the east from the British.

Orders were given for 915th Infantry Regiment's Kampfgruppe to reverse its advance westwards and head east past Bayeux, form up at

Villiers le Sec and attack towards Crépon. The Kampfgruppe was commanded by Oberst Meyer and consisted of the two grenadier battalions of 915th Regiment and 352nd Fusilier Battalion, but before it had even reached Bayeux, it had to relinquish its I Battalion to 914th Regiment to counter the American landings on Omaha Beach. The column was then reinforced with ten self-propelled 75mm guns from 1352nd Assault Gun Company and was promised the support of a railway artillery battery at Torigny. When it was in position at Villiers le Sec, the remnants of 441st East Battalion and the surviving elements of II/1716 Artillery Regiment were also to come under command.

Sometime after midday, the clouds dispersed and the sun came out, and with the brighter weather came the Allied fighter bombers. The column was harried all the way to its rendezvous point at Villiers le Sec, finally arriving near the village in the late afternoon. By then British 69th Brigade was through Crépon and closing on the German assembly area. Before Kampfgruppe Meyer could deploy to begin the counter-attack however, it clashed with the British. A stiff battle ensued as the tanks and guns of 69th Brigade made contact with the Germans. Four tanks from 4th/7th Dragoon Guards were knocked out by the assault guns, but British pressure was such that the bulk of the Kampfgruppe was broken up in small defensive actions. Meyer radioed back to 352nd Division's HQ that the enemy had anticipated his attack and had overrun his spearhead with tanks supported by fighter-bombers. Close-quarters fighting was taking place and the British could not be held. Then things went quiet. Meyer was killed and the commanders of the 352nd Fusilier Battalion and the 1352nd Assault Gun Company were both then posted as missing. The Germans had suffered heavy casualties and had begun retreating. Out of the entire Kampfgruppe only about 90 men escaped. An attempt was made to recover Meyer's body as he had been carrying a map containing exact details of German organisations along the coast, but it fell into British hands.

By this time GenMaj Kraiss knew that he could not force the British back to the sea, but only try to contain their advance and prevent Bayeux falling into their hands. He subordinated the remnants of 915th Regiment to 726th Regiment for the night and ordered that a defensive line be established from Coulombs to Esquay then across to Bazenville and on to Asnelles. The reality was, however, that most of this proposed line had already been overrun by British 50th Division. To man the line Kraiss ordered forwards all troops present in Bayeux and, together with III/352nd Artillery Regiment, the remainder of 915th battlegroup and elements of 726th Regiment, they were to be concentrated into combat groups and employed in preventing any further advance towards Bayeux. To further bolster his line Kraiss was also given LXXXIV's 30th Mobile Brigade which was on its way northwards from Coutances on bicycles, but was not expected to arrive until early the next day.

# THE LANDINGS: JUNO BEACH

**T**he 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was designated to land on Juno Beach as part of British I Corps. The beach stretched from La Rivière in the west to St Aubin in the east, a distance of about 5 ½ miles. The coast here was low lying with a sandy beach edged by dunes, protected by an offshore reef of rocks which was exposed at low tide.

At the centre of Juno Beach lay the small port of Courseulles on the estuary of the River Seulles. To the east of Courseulles were the seaside villages of Bernières sur Mer and St Aubin sur Mer, small holiday centres with a few large villas strung out between them. Juno Beach was divided into three sectors: Love Beach from La Rivière to a point half-way towards Courseulles, Mike Beach from there to the harbour entrance and Nan Beach from the centre of Courseulles to St Aubin. German defences along this section of the coast quite naturally concentrated on denying an invader access to the harbour at Courseulles. Both sides of the seaward entrance to the port were heavily fortified.



Aerial view of the mouth of the River Seulles at Courseulles harbour, taken just after the assault waves have gone in. On the left of the picture is Nan Green Beach, to the right of the estuary is Mike Red Beach. (Imperial War Museum, CL40)



This DD Sherman was salvaged from the seabed where it had lain since sinking during the run in to Juno Beach on 6 June 1944. It was recovered in 1971 and dedicated as a memorial to Canadian forces that landed on D-Day. It now stands at the entrance to Courseulles harbour. (Ken Ford)



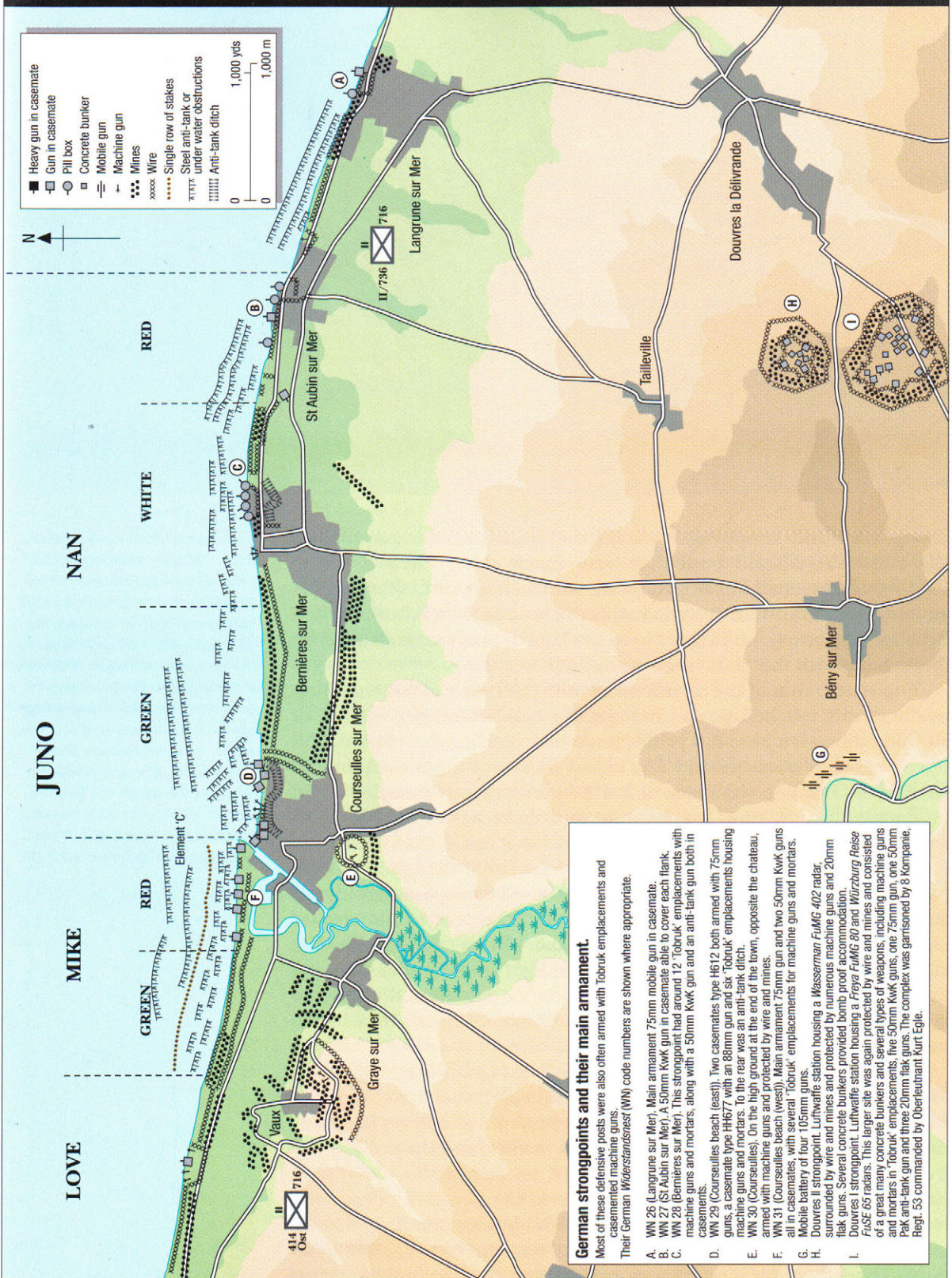
## CANADIAN 7TH BRIGADE'S LANDINGS

Naval Force 'J', commanded by Commodore G.N. Oliver in his HQ ship HMS *Hilary*, anchored 6½ miles off Juno Beach just before dawn. The two groups of ships carrying the attack waves of infantry, Group J1 with Canadian 7th Brigade and J2 with Canadian 8th Brigade, anchored in their lowering positions a little further inshore. Closer still were the bombarding group of naval ships that were to deluge the German strongpoints along the beaches with high-explosive fire. The cruisers *Belfast* and *Diadem* were to target gun batteries and the 'Hunt' and 'Fleet' class destroyers were to concentrate on beach defences. *Diadem* was programmed to fire at the German battery at Bény sur Mer, well inland from the beaches, and *Belfast*, after dealing with Ver battery behind Gold Beach, was to turn her attention to targets in the rear of Juno Beach. The destroyers, *Kempensfelt*, *Faulknor*, *Venus*, *Fury*, *Vigilant*, *Bleasdale*, *Algonquin*, *Glaisdale*, *Sioux*, *Stevenstone* and *La Combattante* were each given targets on the beach front from La Rivière to Langrune.

As on Gold Beach, the early morning light brought with it the heavy and medium bombers of the RAF and USAAF. Areas that had been bombed for weeks prior to the invasion now received a final deluge of intense bombing. Very soon the faint coastline visible from the ships at sea disappeared beneath clouds of dust and smoke, lit intermittently with great flashes of red and yellow flame. Then, as individual targets reappeared through the gradually dispersing cloud, the naval guns began their own bombardment of the concrete defences of Hitler's Atlantic Wall with their large-calibre weapons.

H-Hour on Juno was slightly later than on Gold and Sword. A greater depth of water was needed by the landing craft to clear the offshore reef, so it was decided that extra minutes would be required to allow the incoming tide to cover it with sufficient draught of water. The initial assault wave would go in ten minutes later than on Gold, at 0745hrs, whilst J2 Group would arrive ten minutes after that at 0755hrs. The

# GERMAN DEFENCES - JUNO BEACH



**German strongpoints and their main armament.**  
 Most of these defensive posts were also often armed with Tobruk emplacements and casemated machine guns.  
 Their German *Widerstandsnest* (WN) code numbers are shown where appropriate.

A. WN 26 (Langrune sur Mer). Main armament 75mm mobile gun in casemate.  
 B. WN 27 (St Aubin sur Mer). A 50mm KwK gun in casemate able to cover each flank.  
 C. WN 28 (Bernières sur Mer). This strongpoint had around 12 'Tobruk' emplacements with machine guns and mortars, along with a 50mm KwK gun and an anti-tank gun both in casemates.  
 D. WN 29 (Coursesuelles beach (east)). Two casemates type H612 both armed with 75mm guns, a casemate type HH677 with an 88mm gun and six 'Tobruk' emplacements housing machine guns and mortars. To the rear was an anti-tank ditch.  
 E. WN 30 (Coursesuelles). On the high ground at the end of the town, opposite the chateau, armed with machine guns and protected by wire and mines.  
 F. WN 31 (Coursesuelles beach (west)). Main armament 75mm gun and two 50mm KwK guns all in casemates, with several 'Tobruk' emplacements for machine guns and mortars.  
 G. Mobile battery of four 105mm guns.  
 H. Douvres I strongpoint. Luftwaffe station housing a *Wasserman FuMG 402* radar, surrounded by wire and mines and protected by numerous machine guns and 20mm flak guns. Several concrete bunkers provided bomb proof accommodation.  
 I. Douvres I strongpoint. Luftwaffe station housing a *Freya FuMG 80* and *Würzburg Reise FuSE 65* radars. This larger site was again protected by wire and mines and consisted of a great many concrete bunkers and several types of weapons, including machine guns and mortars in 'Tobruk' emplacements, five 50mm KwK guns, one 75mm gun, one 50mm Pak anti-tank gun and three 20mm flak guns. The complex was garrisoned by 8 Kompanie, Regt. 53 commanded by Oberfeldwebel Kurt Egle.



strong swell and choppy seas meant the launch of the amphibious DD tanks was delayed until they were much closer inshore. Those supporting Canadian 7th Brigade were launched about 1,000 yards out and partly swam and partly waded ashore. Those on Nan White and Red Beaches supporting 8th Brigade were not launched at sea but landed on the beaches with the LCTs bringing the AVRE tanks.

The later arrival of the assault waves onto the beach meant that their landing craft touched down amongst the beach obstacles instead of ahead of them. On Juno this problem was unavoidable; the combination of rocks, beach obstacles and tide meant there was no perfect time to land. If the invasion was made at low tide underwater obstacles would be exposed and useless, but infantry and tanks would have to cross hundreds of yards of open beach and rocks swept by German fire before they could get to grips with the enemy's defences. If the landings were made at high tide the assault waves would have less exposed ground to cover, but the landing craft could be ripped to pieces by underwater obstacles. The timing of the landings was therefore a compromise. The craft would touch down at midway between high and low tides, allowing the greatest number of beach obstacles to be visible and therefore avoidable, whilst giving the infantry and tanks the shortest area of open beach to cross.

Canadian 7th Brigade, commanded by Brig H.W. Foster, landed on Mike Red and Nan Green Beaches, either side of the Seulles's estuary to a barrage of German fire. The bombing by medium and heavy bombers, the naval bombardment, the salvoes of 5in. rockets and the artillery fire from field guns at sea in LCTs, all failed to silence the opposition. Ensnared in concrete and steel bunkers, German defenders were impervious to high explosives. The Royal Navy later admitted that, at most, only 14 per cent of positions fired at were put out of action by its guns. Those German infantry and artillerymen in open emplacements

**Canadian troops coming ashore from a LCI(L) - Landing Craft Infantry (Large) - on Nan White Beach near Bernières. An AVRE has placed a span bridging the sea wall enabling tanks to get off the beach. The picture was taken in the late morning and the incoming tide has reduced the width of the beach to just a few yards. As more landing craft came in bringing the follow-up brigade, Canadian 9th Brigade, this small strip of sand became hopelessly clogged with traffic. (Imperial War Museum, A23938)**

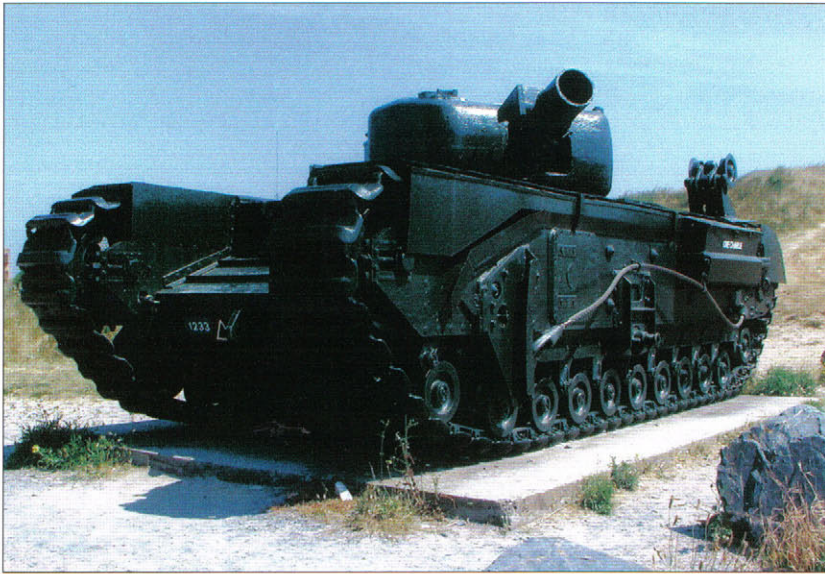


**Canadian Troops from 9th Brigade land on Nan White Beach to the west of Bernières. This part of the beach was the site of the assault landings made by A Company of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada three hours previously. (Imperial War Museum, A23939)**

had for the most part taken shelter from the storm of Allied fire and only emerged to man their weapons when the landing craft actually approached the beach. Then, at short range, they raked the frail wooden assault craft with small arms and mortar fire. Heavier weapons concentrated on the LCTs following behind. Hits were taken and ships began to swerve out of line, dodging enemy shells and the mine-topped spikes pointing menacingly out of the water.

On Mike Red and Green Beaches to the right of the mouth of the River Seulles, the Royal Winnipeg Rifles arrived before the first of their supporting armour at 0749hrs. The tanks should have landed five minutes before the infantry but they were late. The DD tanks of A Squadron from the 1st Hussars were delayed in arriving because of the change in launching plans. The Crab flail-tanks of B Squadron, 22nd Dragoons and the AVREs from 26th Squadron, 5th Assault Regiment Royal Engineers, both from British 79th Armoured Division, were late because of navigational problems during the crossing. All of this armour should have been on the beach attacking the German defences when the infantry landed giving covering fire to the exposed troops as they came off their craft, but the initial assault waves of the Winnipeg Rifles had to fight their own way ashore dealing with the pillboxes as best they could. Casualties amongst the exposed infantry were significant. The LCTs carrying AVREs were up to 30 minutes late in arriving.

B Company of the Winnipeg Rifles landed on the right on Mike Green and moved along the beach to deal with the group of concrete casemates forming a strongpoint whose fire enfiladed the landings. On this sector of the beach there was no sign of supporting armour, so the infantry stalked the concrete pillboxes on foot. Enemy small arms fire was concentrated and accurate and the Canadians suffered as a consequence. The other assault company, D Company, landed on the left and immediately started trying to fight its way off the beach inland, through a



**A genuine veteran of D-Day that had spent over 30 years buried beneath Exit 2 from Mike Beach on Juno. This AVRE Churchill tank from 26th Squadron, Royal Engineers, slipped into a crater and was used as a foundation to support a bridge across the obstruction. In 1973 Royal Engineers retrieved the tank and restored it to its 1944 condition. It now rests just yards away from its original tomb. (Ken Ford)**

maze of concealed machine gun posts and Tobruk emplacements. The two great concrete emplacements that dominated the entrance to the harbour were taken amid tough, prolonged fighting, most of which was at close quarters. Only seven of the DD tanks from A Squadron, 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars), had got ashore and many of them were later swamped by the incoming tide as they stopped in the surf firing at the pillboxes.

Once the emplacements on the beach had been captured, the two companies topped the sand dunes and moved inland. Immediately behind Mike Red Beach, the course of the River Seulles curved round in a great semicircle, forming a three-sided 'island'. B Company crossed a small bridge, got onto the 'island' and began clearing it of the enemy. This area was in fact the western part of Courseulles and was covered with oyster beds and harbour installations. D Company also moved away from the beaches crossing the minefield in front of La Vallette and advancing towards the village of Graye sur Mer beyond it.

On the extreme right of Mike Green Beach, C Company of the Canadian Scottish Rifles, which was attached to the Winnipeg's, landed against lighter opposition. Its main objective on the beach was a concrete casemate housing a 75mm gun. When the infantry closed on the position they found it had been already knocked out by naval gunfire. Within a short time the company was off the beach and moving inland, dealing with the wire and minefields in front of Vaux and advancing across open land towards St Croix sur Mer. Twenty minutes after the assault waves, the reserve companies landed. The beaches were still under heavy mortar and machine gun fire, but the immediate vicinity was clear of the enemy. A Company pushed straight over the dunes and also made for St Croix sur Mer, whilst C Company advanced on Banville.

On the beaches, the late arrival of the specialised armour and the rapidly incoming tide, blown on by a stiff breeze, had caused chaos all along the water's edge, for neither of the two exits planned for Mike Beach were open. When the flails and AVREs of B Squadron, 22nd Dragoons, and 26th Assault Squadron, Royal Engineers, landed

**Crowded scene on Juno Beach as Canadian reinforcements come ashore. Naval beach parties wearing steel helmets with a white band try to bring some order out of the chaos. The tide is now high and only a narrow strip of beach is available on which to manoeuvre men, tanks and vehicles. (Imperial War Museum, MH3097)**



late at 0830hrs, the beach was less than 100 yards wide. The LCTs carrying the tanks had drifted to the east and all the specialised armour was landed close to the No 2 gap that the division hoped to make. The teams from 79th Armoured Division were hoping to clear two exits from the beach, the first, No 1 gap, on the extreme right of the beach, led on to a lane that went inland towards Vaux, whilst No 2 gap on the left joined with the lane leading back to La Valette.

No 2 gap was seen as the priority and was tackled first. Two Crabs flailed a lane up to and over the dunes, but both were disabled when they struck mines just as they were turning. A third Crab continued and cleared a single track along the lane to a point 150 yards inland. There it was halted by a crater, 60ft wide and 12ft deep, left by a demolished culvert. The broken drain had flooded the area and the Crab became bogged down. An AVRE Churchill came forward with a fascine and dropped the great wooden roll into the water-filled crater but then itself slipped into the hole. Now a sitting duck to enemy gunners, the crew baled out. In making their escape, three of the tankers were killed by enemy fire and the other three were wounded. A second AVRE came forward with a fascine and pushed it into the crater. Then a SGB bridge was brought up to cover the gap. The bridge was placed across the top of the stranded AVRE and the abandoned tank was used as a support. A Crab now came forward and continued to flail the lane up to the lateral road, thus opening an exit from the beach. The time was 0915hrs.

This unusual and unorthodox bridge remained in use for the next three hours, as traffic and tanks streamed off Mike Beach. Just after midday, when all enemy resistance had been cleared, the crater was filled in with rubble and a permanent crossing established over the culvert. The AVRE tank remained entombed under the road for the next 32 years until a party of Royal Engineers dug it out in 1973 and restored it. Gap No 1 proved to be a less complicated affair, with the major obstacles to its completion coming from enemy fire. Mines proved to be the only field defences and the lane was opened for traffic at 0930hrs.

Canadian 7th Brigade's other assault battalion, the Regina Rifle Regiment, landed its troops on Nan Green on the other side of the

**Aerial view of Nan White Beach at Bernières. The tide is in so the picture was probably taken in the late morning. The exit across the bridge span over the sea wall is open and vehicles are moving inland. Strongpoint WN28 is located in the left bottom of the picture where the sea wall curves downwards. (National Archives, Washington)**



mouth of the River Seulles straight onto the town beach at Courseulles. In front of them, and very much alive, was the German strongpoint WN 29, comprising two H612 casemates armed with 75mm guns and an H677 containing an 88mm gun. These were supported by the small arms and mortar fire from six concrete machine gun posts and four Tobruk emplacements. Bombing and naval bombardment seemed to have done little to silence the enemy and the landing craft were shelled all the way to the shoreline. As on Mike Beach, the supporting armour from British 79th Armoured Division was late arriving, but B Squadron of Canadian 6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars) landed just before the first waves of infantry. Nineteen DD tanks had been launched about 2,000 yards from shore and swam in. Fourteen of them reached the beach and were wading through the surf blasting the enemy defences as the assault landing craft bringing the Regina Rifles weaved their way amongst them.

The advance wave of infantry, A and B Companies, arrived at around 0810hrs. A Company landed immediately in front of the German strongpoint and met heavy resistance, B Company landed further to the east. Ahead of them was 200 yards of exposed beach, swept by German fire. Each man leaving the craft had to wade through tumbling surf and then make a mad dash for cover at the top of the sandy shoreline. But the only cover to be had on that exposed sea front was under the guns of the strongpoint. For the infantry on the beach it was like running into the mouth of a dragon. Help was on hand from the supporting armour and one by one, the DD tanks closed on the concrete emplacements and machine gun nests, sweeping the area with their own machine guns and firing armour-piercing rounds at close range.

Whilst all of these enemy positions had received numerous direct hits on their concrete sides from naval gunfire, none ceased firing for more

than a brief period. One of the 75mm guns had over 200 empty shell cases around it when finally captured, evidence of its effectiveness even after the bombardment. It was finally knocked out by a direct hit from a tank shell, which pierced its gun shield killing all of the crew. All of the guns in the strongpoint were eliminated by direct fire from tanks at short range and for a while the beach quietened down, save for the fire from snipers and isolated machine guns. But this respite did not last, for once the immediate German resistance was subdued, other weapons opened up from further inland, showering the beach with artillery and mortar fire. This continued throughout the morning until each German battery was identified and eliminated by naval guns or artillery fire from those guns still in landing craft offshore. Several positions were overrun by advancing Canadian troops.

By the time the specialised armour arrived on Nan Green Beach, 40 minutes behind schedule, the local German opposition had been subdued and the exit teams immediately began opening up lanes off the beach. Crabs flailed lanes over the dunes and up to the antitank ditch behind the strongpoint. Fascines were then brought up and the ditch was crossed with few problems. An armoured bulldozer carved out two lanes and around 0900hrs two exits were open for business. Tanks moved inland through the streets of Courseulles helping the Regina Rifles to clear the town.

Landing 15 minutes after the assault wave, the two follow-up companies of the Regina Rifles came ashore. C Company quickly moved off the beach and began clearing its assigned area of the town. Courseulles itself had been divided into 12 numbered blocks, with each company designated to clear certain squares. Prior to the invasion, the battalion had spent several months perfecting its street fighting techniques. Unique amongst all the assaulting infantry who landed on D-Day, the Regina Rifles faced the formidable task of making an assault landing and then clearing the streets of an enemy-held town.

The landing craft bringing D Company in had the misfortune of running into a number of obstacles close to shore. Many of the light vessels hit mines or struck underwater obstructions. Explosions blew some craft out of the water and others were ripped apart by steel 'hedgehogs'. By the time the company was ashore and at its rendezvous point, only 49 men of the unit were available to execute its mission.


The capture of Courseulles involved a bitter and prolonged struggle. Each house had to be individually assaulted and cleared of the enemy. Snipers were everywhere, slowing the Canadian advance and picking off the unwary. At the top of the town, just behind the chateau was German strongpoint WN 30, which looked down on the streets and houses of Courseulles. The position contained machine guns and mortars and guarded the route inland along the road towards Reviers. By mid-morning many tanks were in the streets helping the infantry break up and crush enemy resistance. The entire battalion was now involved in the street fighting and the sheer numbers and weight of firepower grinding inexorably through the town began to tell. By midday Mike and Nan Beaches had linked up and formed a continuous front along the northern part of the town, all the houses were eventually cleared and strongpoint WN30 was outflanked and taken. By the early afternoon, troops and tanks were clear of the built-up area and were pushing south towards Reviers.





#### ALLIED FLEET


##### Destroyers

- 1 HMS *Bleasdale*
- 2 HMS *Glaisdale*
- 3 HMS *Sioux*
- 4 HMS *Algonquin*
- 5 HMS *Vigilant*
- 6 HMS *Kempfenfelt*


 LCS(M) Landing Craft Support (Medium) providing close support with machine guns and smoke. These craft also contain Forward Observation Officers to check the fall of shot of supporting guns and rockets and radio back adjustments to the fire plan.


 LCT(3) Landing Craft Tank (Mk. III) of 11th LCT Flotilla. These craft carry the DD tanks of 'B' and 'C' Sqns., Canadian 10th Armoured Support Regiment.


 LCG(L) Landing Craft Gun (Large) of 331st Flotilla providing artillery support against identified targets with their two 4.7in. guns.


 LCT(HE) Landing Craft Tank (High Explosive) of 590th Assault Flotilla. Each carries one Sherman and two Centaur tanks from 2nd Royal Marine Armoured Support Regiment.

 LCT(4) Landing Craft Tank (Mk. IV) from 22nd and 30th LCT Flotillas carrying the AVRE tanks from 79th Armoured Division.


 LCT(CB) Landing Craft tank (Concrete Buster) from 106th LCT Flotilla, each carrying two 17-pdr tanks able to provide high-velocity fire against concrete emplacements.


 LCA(HR) Landing Craft Assault (Hedgerow) from 590th Assault Flotilla armed with spigot mortars capable of firing 24 x 60lb bombs to blast lanes through wire and mines.

 LCA Landing Craft Assault from various Landing Ships Infantry carrying the assault companies of the Canadian North Shore Regiment and the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada.


 LCF Landing Craft Flak from 331st Assault flotilla providing anti-aircraft and close-support fire from their eight 2-pdr and four Oerlikon guns.

 LCT(R) Landing Craft Tank (Rocket) from 320th LCT(R) Flotilla, each armed with 1,000 5in. rockets.

 LCT(4) Landing Craft Tank (Mk. IV) from 22nd and 30th LCT Flotillas carrying the self-propelled artillery of Canadian 3rd Division.

 LCA Landing Craft Assault from various Landing Ships Infantry carrying the reserve companies of the Canadian North Shore Regiment and the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada.

 LCI(S) Landing Craft Infantry (Small) of 202nd LCI(S) Flotilla carrying 48 RM Commando.

 LCH 167 Landing Craft Headquarters 167, the HQ ship of the assault area's senior officer.

#### GERMAN STRONGPOINTS

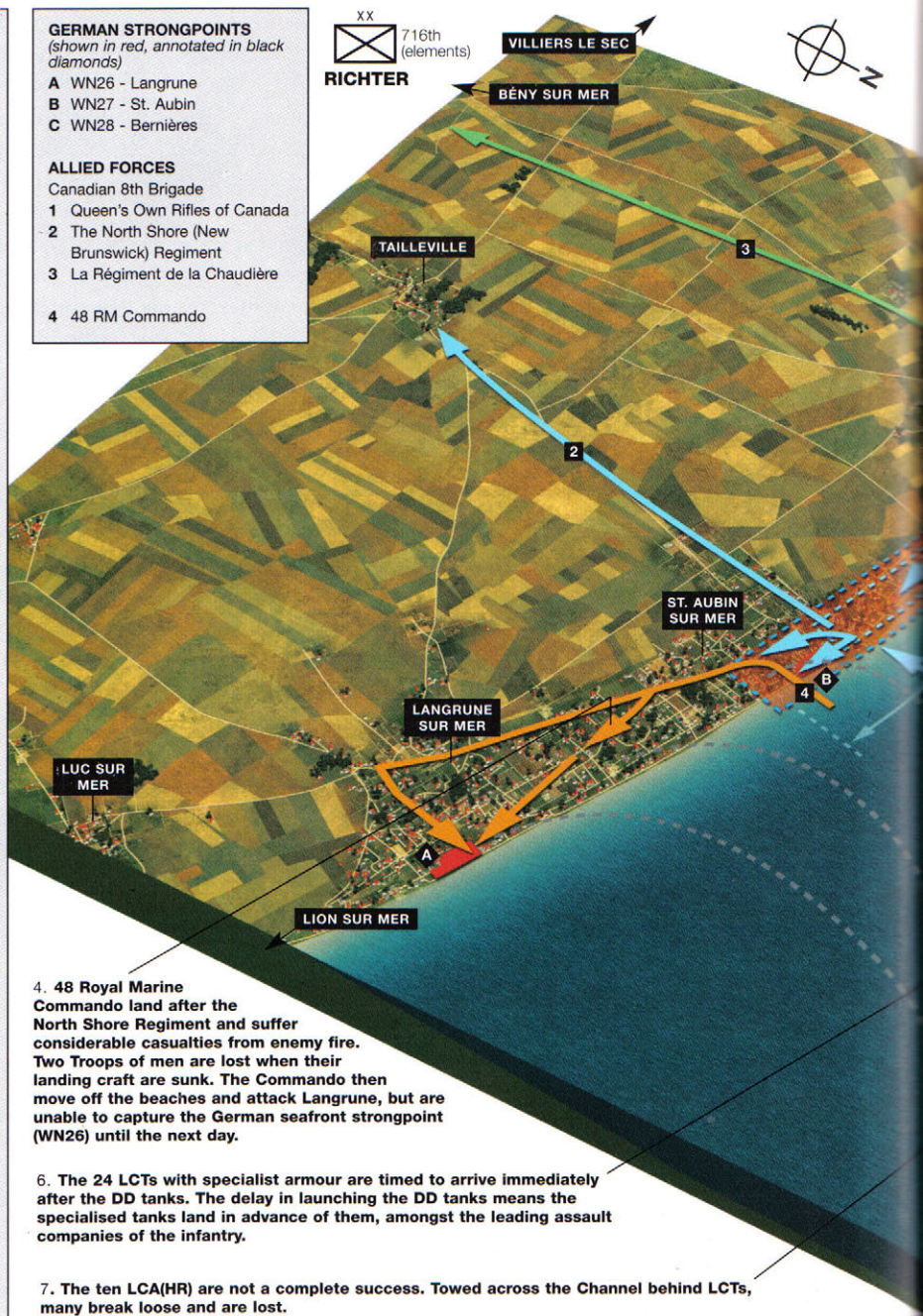
(shown in red, annotated in black diamonds)

- A WN26 - Langrune
- B WN27 - St. Aubin
- C WN28 - Bernières

#### ALLIED FORCES

Canadian 8th Brigade

- 1 Queen's Own Rifles of Canada
- 2 The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment
- 3 La Régiment de la Chaudière
- 4 48 RM Commando



4. 48 Royal Marine Commando land after the North Shore Regiment and suffer considerable casualties from enemy fire. Two Troops of men are lost when their landing craft are sunk. The Commando then move off the beaches and attack Langrune, but are unable to capture the German seafront strongpoint (WN26) until the next day.

6. The 24 LCTs with specialist armour are timed to arrive immediately after the DD tanks. The delay in launching the DD tanks means the specialised tanks land in advance of them, amongst the leading assault companies of the infantry.

7. The ten LCA(HR) are not a complete success. Towed across the Channel behind LCTs, many break loose and are lost.

12. Follow-up companies of the two assaulting battalions set to land 20 minutes after the assault waves.

## CANADIAN 3RD BRIGADE ON NAN WHITE AND RED BEACHES

6 June 1944, 0755hrs to mid-afternoon, viewed from the northeast showing the assault on St. Aubin and Bernières by the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada and the Canadian North Shore Regiment respectively. 48 Royal Marine Commando land on Nan Red and move to attack the strongpoint in Langrune. With the coastal defences subdued the drive inland towards Tailleville and Bény sur Mer begins.

1. 0755hrs, assault companies of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada land on Nan White and capture Bernières sur Mer, eliminating the German strongpoint along the sea front after much fierce fighting.

3. 0830hrs, Canadian 8th Brigade's follow up battalion, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, land after the assault waves and move inland towards Bény sur Mer.

2. 0800hrs, Canadian North Shore Regiment arrive on Nan Red in the face of devastating German small arms fire. The assault companies are pinned down on the beaches. Fighting moves inland after more support arrives and the battalion eventually secures the whole of St. Aubin, then press inland to capture Tailleville later that morning.

5. The DD amphibious tanks are supposed to be launched 5,000 yards out, but with strong winds and rough seas it is decided to launch closer to the beaches. They disembark about 500 yards out and wade ashore. This delay allows the line of LCTs and the LCAs coming up behind to overtake them and arrive well before the DDs reach the beach.

8. 24 LCAs carry the assault companies of the two attacking battalions. The infantry were transported across the Channel in various Landing Ship Infantry (LSI) and disembarked into the assault landing craft some six miles off shore. The run in to the beaches was very rough and virtually every man on board was seasick.

10. Four LCT(R) bombard the beach area.

9. Two Landing Craft Flak (LCF) switch from anti-aircraft cover to close-support as the assault troops touch down.

11. The Canadian 3rd Division's self propelled guns are positioned to fire over the bows of the craft during the run in to shore. They remain offshore for the next hour providing observed fire as directed by the infantry.

13. Landing behind the follow up companies is 48 Royal Marine Commando. The heavy crossing in light wooden landing craft causes widespread seasickness.

14. On either side of the assault flotillas Royal Navy Fleet and Hunt Class destroyers, protect the flanks and fire on known German strongpoints ashore.



**BLACKADER**

#### BOMBARDMENT TARGETS

[light blue] Bombardment area for rocket-firing LCT(R)s.

[blue] Artillery fire from self-propelled guns on board LCTs as they run into shore.

Canadian troops move inland past a battery of 5.5in. medium guns firing in support of the advance. (Imperial War Museum, MH3093)



Canadian 7th Brigade's follow-up battalion was the Canadian Scottish Regiment and it landed over Mike Beach at around 0830hrs. Some resistance was encountered during the run in and the leading troops suffered mortar fire on the beach. The brigade was delayed while an exit was cleared through a minefield, but by 0930hrs the Canadian Scottish was moving out across open fields. C Company had already landed with the Winnipegs in the assault wave and was by then on its way towards St Croix sur Mer. The rest of the battalion now moved up behind its advance company and closed on the village, picking up C Company on the way. German machine guns in field emplacements caused casualties throughout the march. St Croix was reached and cleared of isolated snipers and then the advance continued. A short distance further on, the battalion passed through the Winnipeg Rifles in Colombiers and reached Pierrepont late in the afternoon. The battalion could have pressed on, but were ordered simply to hold in place, pushing ahead with nothing larger than patrols.

## **CANADIAN 8TH BRIGADE'S LANDINGS**

8th Brigade carried out the left-hand landings of Canadian 3rd Division, assaulting on a two-battalion front between Bernières and St Aubin. The DD tanks of the Canadian 10th Armoured Regiment (Fort Garry Horse) together with A Squadron, Westminster Dragoons, and 80th Assault Squadron, Royal Engineers, from British 79th Armoured Division, provided armoured support.

The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada landed on Nan White Beach at 0755hrs. Once again, as on Mike Red and Nan Green, the DD tanks were late arriving. They were launched much closer to shore than elsewhere and more or less waded to the beach, arriving just after the leading waves of infantry had disembarked from their landing craft. Two companies of the Queen's Own led the assault. Both had a difficult time during the first 15 minutes ashore. B Company suffered on the beach from the attentions of the enemy strongpoint in front of Bernières. A

**By the late afternoon Courseulles was finally cleared of the enemy and Canadian armour began moving inland to support the drive on Caen. (Imperial War Museum)**



Company succeeded in crossing the beach only to encounter difficulties crossing the open fields behind.

B Company landed 200 yards to the east of their planned position, directly in front of WN28. As the troops left their landing craft, they faced 200 yards of open beach, their route inland blocked by a high sea wall and a cluster of concrete pillboxes staring down at them. As the troops began to scatter and make for the shelter of the sea wall, the enemy's machine guns and mortars opened fire in earnest. Within the first few minutes the company had taken 65 casualties. Their best hope was to cover the loose sandy ground as quickly as possible and get to grips with the enemy. Those who stumbled, fell or hesitated were lost, for the German defenders swept the beach with fire and homed in on any static target. Once under cover of the wall, the Canadians could close on the pillboxes, keeping low to avoid the mutually supporting fire from the other enemy emplacements. The concrete structures were attacked with grenades and Sten guns. With the first pillbox overcome the men of the Queen's Own moved on to silence the other emplacements in the strongpoint one by one from close range. Behind them the beach was littered with the bodies of those who did not make it.

On the right A Company stormed ashore and its men made the same mad dash across the beach to the cover of the sea wall. The same machine gun and mortar fire picked many of them off as they ran, but the intensity of it was much less as the enemy in the strongpoint concentrated most of their fire on the troops of B Company who were rushing straight at them. Most of A Company got off the beach over the sea wall and into the fields behind. It had been a hard race as each man sought his own route to safety, but there was little security to be found on the open ground behind the beach. It was there that their worst troubles began; the area was covered in mines and being sprayed with

Canadian troops coming ashore from Landing Craft Infantry (Large) - LCI(L). It is now high tide and the beach has virtually disappeared, with the water now lapping against the collapsed sea wall. (Imperial War Museum, B5261)



machine gun fire. Mortars had the eastern approach to Bernières covered and each time the troops attempted to regroup or push forward, they were forced to ground by concentrated fire or suffered casualties from the mines. Units became disorganised and individuals found it difficult to link up with their sections. This first 15 minutes of action had cost A Company 50 per cent casualties.

Things improved a little when the tanks came ashore, for they quickly helped B Company mop up the strongpoint and allowed the infantry to push into Bernières. This in turn eased the pressure on A Company and its men gradually worked across the open ground and entered the western part of the village. Then the follow-up companies landed. D Company lost a few of their landing craft to mines during the run in, but had an easier time getting off the beach. C Company came ashore to sporadic small arms fire and made swift progress into Bernières. As more and more Canadians pushed into the village the pressure on the German defenders increased allowing the Allied troops to press ahead and clear the southern edge of the village.

By the time the specialised armour of 79th Division arrived, the beaches were clear of all but long-range enemy fire. The first Crab ashore flailed a path up to the sea wall and an AVRE following behind quickly laid a bridge across it. Another AVRE started to cross but promptly hit a mine and blocked the exit. An armoured bulldozer was called forward to push the broken tank aside. A few moments later the bulldozer hit a mine and its driver was killed. Another exit was made over a damaged part of the sea wall and flail tanks created a lane linking the two exits. The Crabs then cleared the fields behind the beach of mines allowing troops and vehicles to move off the shoreline and inland. Two more exits were created later to the east of Bernières.



Le Régiment de la Chaudière, the brigade's reserve battalion, began to land at around 0830hrs. It came ashore directly in front of Bernières and was pinned down by the sea wall for some time while the assault companies cleared the strongpoint. About two hours later it was in its assembly area to the south of the village waiting for orders to advance. In fact it waited there until after midday before it started to attack towards Bény sur Mer, supported by the tanks of the Fort Garry Horse and it was not until mid-afternoon that this, the first of 8th Brigade's inland objectives, was taken.

Next ashore were the self-propelled field guns of the division. 14th and 19th Field Regiments, Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA), arrived between 0910 and 0930hrs and were ready and in action on the outskirts of Bernières at 1030hrs. By this time the incoming tide was eating up the available beach and access to the exits was limited. Incoming landing craft brought their loads into a crowded and chaotic mêlée of troops, tanks and vehicles. Every tank, jeep, carrier and gun had to use the bridges over the sea wall and their passage past these obstacles was very slow and ponderous. Once off the beach they entered the narrow streets of Bernières and jammed the place solid. Movement inland was delayed. Matters were made even worse a little later at 1050hrs when Nan White Beach was also made available to the reserve brigade. Canadian 9th Brigade now joined in the crush and virtually choked the area with traffic for several hours. Just when speed and movement were most vital to seize the division's D-Day objectives, the spearhead earmarked for the great advance was trying to extricate itself from an immense traffic jam along the seafont.

Canadian 8th Brigade's other assault battalion landed on Nan Red at 0800hrs. The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment attacked with A Company on the right and B Company on the left, just to the west of St Aubin. German strongpoint WN27 in the seaside village swept the beach with fire from a casemated 50mm gun mounted on the top of the sea wall and from machine guns and mortars in positions along the edge of the beach. Several seaside villas had been fortified and turned into strongpoints. As in Bernières, the beach was lined with a high sea wall, with few natural breaks. This formed the first barrier to the troops as they stormed ashore.



**This was the sector of Nan Red Beach where the commandos of 48 Royal Marine Commando landed. It was under concentrated machine gun, mortar and sniper fire when they came ashore and they suffered considerable casualties, but they took their greatest losses just offshore when two of their LCI(S)s hit obstacles and sank. Many of the fully laden commandos were swept away and drowned in the offshore currents. By the time the Commando had reached its first objective at Langrune, it could only muster 50 per cent of its original strength. (Imperial War Museum, B5225)**

A Company made its landing against relatively light opposition. The troops dashed through small arms fire to the sea wall and dispersed inland to clear the way to the lateral road running east-west behind the beach. B Company's first task was to deal with WN27. Its landing craft beached as planned and then the infantry swung eastwards to attack the strongpoint. The naval bombardment failed to silence the fortified position and its guns did great damage on the beach. The first two DD tanks to land were immediately knocked out, followed by two AVREs when they came ashore. It took almost the whole of the morning for B Company to silence the post. It was later helped in its task by the guns of two DD tanks and an AVRE. The Royal Engineers AVRE used its Petard to hurl great explosive charges at the strongpoint and blasted the infantry inside. At 1115hrs, strongpoint WN27 was finally silenced.

When C and D Companies came ashore they had a reasonably clear run. D Company cleared the southern part of St Aubin, whilst C Company set out for the village of Tailleville, two miles away. Its advance was relatively free of enemy opposition until it neared the village. Here enemy troops were well dug in and they fought with the tenacity of seasoned campaigners. Even when C Company was later joined by other infantry, Tailleville remained an awkward proposition and it was not until late afternoon that it was finally cleared with the help of tanks.

Behind the North Shore Regiment, landing over Nan Red from the six Landing Craft Infantry (Small) in which they had crossed the Channel from the Hamble River in England, were the commandos of 48 Royal Marine Commando. The commandos suffered badly during the landing; two of the craft struck mines and were destroyed. Loss of life was considerable. Things got even worse when they discovered the Canadians had not subdued their section of Nan Red. Snipers and small arms fire picked off the marines as they tried to get inland and they were pinned behind the shelter of the sea wall whilst the situation stabilised.

Eventually the commandos extricated themselves from the débâcle on the beach and set off to the east on their twin missions. Lieutenant-Colonel Moulton's marines were first to capture strongpoint WN26 at Langrune and then make contact with 41 RM Commando coming from Sword Beach to link the two landings made by British I Corps. They achieved neither that day. Langrune proved to be a very difficult proposition for the lightly armed marines. It consisted of a street of fortified houses along the sea front, all connected by internal passageways and by an external trench system. The two side roads at either end were blocked by 6ft-high, solid concrete walls. On the seaward side, jutting out from the promenade were two concrete emplacements housing a 75mm gun and a 50mm antitank gun. Machine guns covered every approach and a minefield protected the inland flank; WN26 was a veritable fortress. Despite their best efforts Col Moulton's men were unable to get to grips with the strongpoint. Tanks proved to be of little help, for the first of the two Royal Marine Centaurs that came to their assistance was knocked out by mines and the second could make little impact on the solid concrete barriers with its gun. Warships out at sea had also done little damage to the position during their prolonged bombardment. The Germans in WN26 were content to sit tight and let the shells bounce off their impregnable shelters. By the end of the day 48 Royal Marine Commando had suffered over 50 per cent casualties and had achieved very little. It also failed to achieve its other objective, as









**FRITZ WITT AND KURT 'PANZER' MEYER LEAVING ARDENNE ABBEY, 8 JUNE 1944** (pages 74–75)

Gruppenführer Fritz Witt (1), commander of the 12th SS-Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend* leaves the northern entrance of the headquarters of 25th SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment in a motorcycle combination driven by the regimental commander Kurt Meyer (2). Both of these men were highly decorated veterans of many campaigns. They were young unconventional officers who liked to keep in close contact with their troops in the line. In this scene Meyer is personally taking his divisional commander forward to consult with his battalion commanders prior to launching his attack against the Canadians at Bretteville l'Orgeilleuse. Witt had joined the SS in 1931, choosing a career aligned to the ruling Nazi Party. In 1933 he was among the first 120 men who volunteered to join the elite *Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (LSSAH)* bodyguard formation. Witt commanded a company during the Polish campaign and later fought in France and Holland. In 1941 he campaigned in Yugoslavia, Greece and Russia with the *LSSAH* Division, rising to command its 1st SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment in 1942. In early 1943, Witt was given the honour of raising the 12th SS-Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend*. At the age of just 35 years he became the second youngest divisional commander in the German armed forces. Witt was killed by Allied naval shellfire at his headquarters at Venoux on 14 June 1944. Kurt 'Panzer' Meyer was also a veteran of the *LSSAH* Division and like Witt had been awarded both classes of the Iron Cross and the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves. In 1943

he was transferred from *LSSAH* Division to lead the 25th SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment in Witt's division. On Witt's death Meyer took command of the *Hitlerjugend* Division and fought with it until he was captured during the collapse of the German Seventh Army in August 1944. He was then the youngest divisional commander in the German Army. Meyer's headquarters were located in Ardenne Abbey (3), a large walled enclosure housing a medieval church and a range of domestic buildings. The site covered several acres and provided cover for hundreds of troops with their vehicles. Advance elements of Meyer's regiment had arrived at the Abbey late on 6 June and were ready to attack the Canadians the next day. Meyer was confident that he could throw the 'little fish' back into the sea, but his first contact with the Allies on 7 June, just a few hundred yards from the Abbey grounds, resulted in a very sharp repulse. The counter-attack made by Meyer's 25th SS-Panzergrenadier Regiment met Canadian 3rd Division's advance head-on and Meyer watched the encounter from the tower of the abbey church. In the stiff fighting that followed neither side was able to seize the initiative. During June, while his regiment was based in Ardenne Abbey, Meyer tacitly allowed his men to execute a total of 27 Canadian prisoners of war in cold blood in the small garden behind the courtyard. After the war he was prosecuted for this crime and sentenced to death. This was commuted to life imprisonment on appeal. He was released in September 1954 and died in 1961 at the age of 51. (Kevin Lyles)



By the time these commandos from the HQ of 4th Special Service Brigade arrived, the worst of the enemy fire that had been raking the beach had subsided. They landed on Nan Red Beach behind 48 Royal Marine Commando, but suffered few casualties. (Imperial War Museum, B5218)

when its advance guard reached its rendezvous with 41 RM Commando, there was no one to be seen. 41 Commando had suffered heavily since landing on Sword Beach and could not advance to close the gap.

## **GERMAN REACTION TO THE LANDINGS ON JUNO BEACH**

The arrival of the Canadians on Juno Beach added to the worries plaguing the commander of German 716th Division, GenLt Richter. Since the early hours his men had been forced to contend with the parachute landings made by British 6th Airborne Division east of the River Orne. Then, at 0730hrs, British 3rd Division had landed on Sword Beach near Ouistreham. At 0745 British 50th Division arrived on Gold Beach and now, at 0800hrs the Canadians had come ashore on Juno. The realisation that four Allied divisions had descended on his sector made Richter's position seem hopeless. And it was, for there were no immediate reserves to hand to bolster his unit or plug any breaks in the line. Once the division's outer defensive crust had been penetrated along the coastline, there was little strength in depth with which to avert a complete rout.

Panzergrenadier units of GenMaj Feuchtinger's 21st Panzer Division had been in action against the paratroopers since before daylight. The airborne landings had descended on top of them and they had no choice but to fight. Later in the morning permission was given for the division to attack the seaborne landings. The delay was caused by indecision at Army level whether or not the landings were indeed the invasion proper or just some feint to draw troops away from more landings elsewhere. It was not until mid-afternoon that a sufficiently clear picture of Allied intentions was formed. General Marcks, commander LXXXIV Corps, realised that the gap between the British landings near Ouistreham (Sword Beach) and the Canadians at Courseulles (Juno Beach) offered



**ABOVE German prisoners taken by 48 Commando in Langrune are lined up against a wall ready to be escorted down to the beach. They will be returned to England as prisoners of war. (Imperial War Museum, B5143)**

the best prospects for a successful counter-attack. If Feuchtinger could get his tanks down to the sea between Lion and Luc sur Mer he would split the landings and could then roll up the invasion beaches on either side.

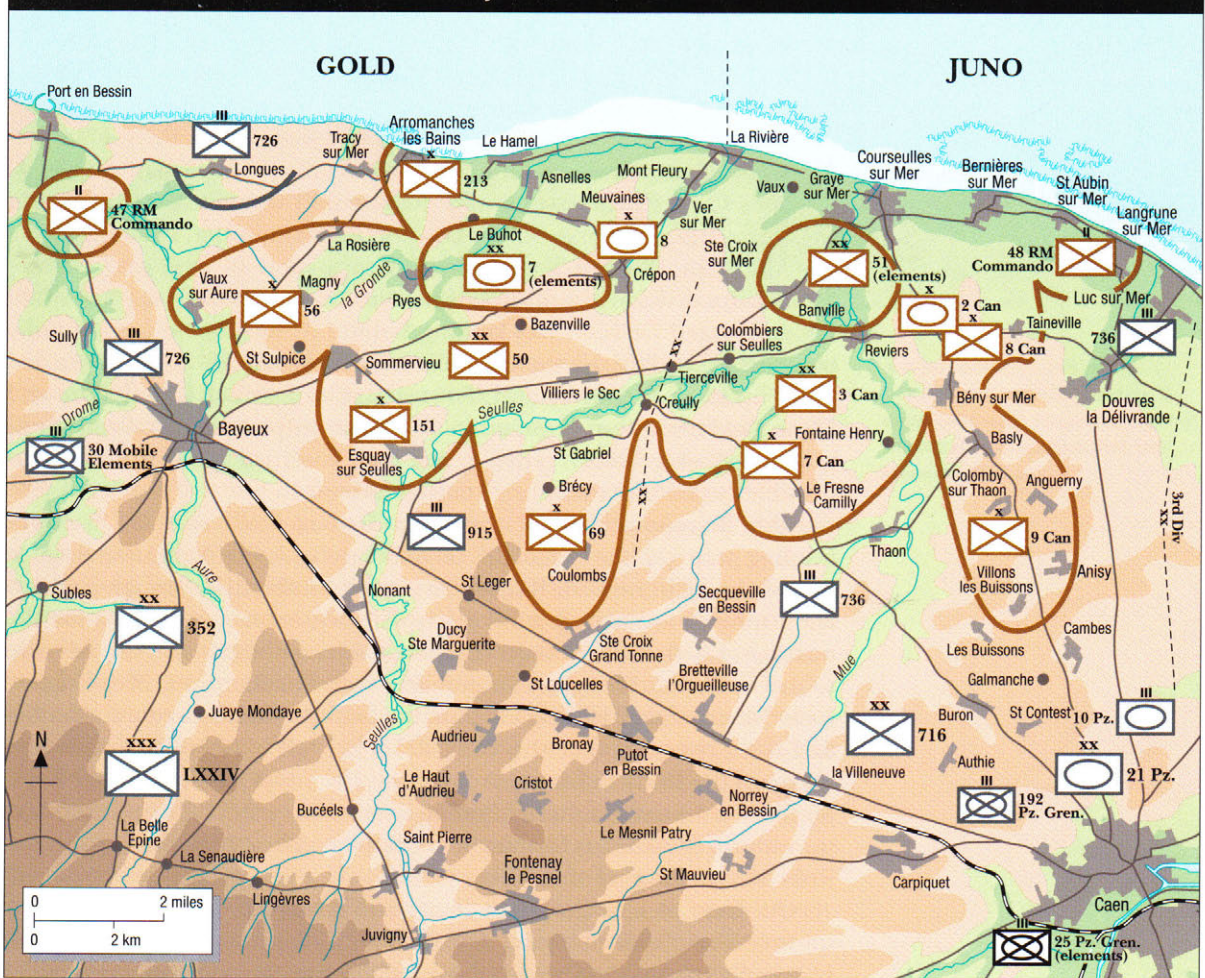
At around 1600hrs the 21st Panzer Division attacked. It was only able to launch its thrust to the sea with part of its strength for some of its units were still involved countering the paratroopers and could not be disengaged. The strike force consisted of the two tank battalions of 100th Panzer Regiment and I Battalion of the 192nd Panzergrenadier Regiment. No sooner had the Panzers begun their advance than they ran into trouble. The advance units of British 3rd Division met them head on and did great damage with their antitank guns and 17-pdr Sherman Fireflies. Feuchtinger's tanks and personnel carriers were battered all the way down the Periers Ridge to the sea. Some isolated parties of Panzergrenadiers actually made it to the coast, but were soon recalled to help deal with the arrival of a new wave of gliderborne Allied infantry. Some were unable to get back to their lines and diverted to the fortified radar station at Douvres in front of the Canadians and bolstered the garrison there for the night. In fact on 7 June the Canadians surrounded the radar station and the Panzergrenadiers remained there until the strongpoint was taken several days later.

By the evening of D-Day German reaction to the landings had been minimal. The attack by 21st Panzer Division had come to nothing, immediate reserves to counter-attack the beachhead were almost non-existent and German High Command had released the Panzer forces far too late for them to be effective. Rommel knew that the great opportunity to crush the Allied landings on the beaches had been lost.

# THE FIRST SEVEN DAYS

By the end of 6 June, the Allied Supreme Commander, Gen Eisenhower, and the Commander 21st Army Group, Gen Montgomery, could feel very satisfied with the results of the first day of the invasion. Although none of the major inland objectives had been taken – Caen and Bayeux remained in enemy hands – and all forces were still short of their proposed phase lines, the beachhead was in place, there had not been the bloodbath that had been predicted in some quarters and men and materiel were pouring across the beaches in ever increasing quantities. The landings were by no means secure, but

## SITUATION AT MIDNIGHT, 6 JUNE



**Canadian infantry of 8th Brigade working their way forward in St Aubin. The troops are approaching the sea front to the south of strongpoint WN27. The piles of logs and steel girders in the road are part of the road block protecting the approaches to the strongpoint. Bombing and shellfire has created a complete tangle of rubble and debris through which the Canadians must attack. (Imperial War Museum, B5228)**



what the day before had seemed a great gamble, now looked achievable. Everything would now depend on the battle of the build-up. Eisenhower would have to assemble his forces at a faster rate than the enemy could bring his forward and Montgomery would have to steel his commanders to be ready for the German armoured counter-attack when it came.

On Gold Beach, British 50th Division had stopped for the night short of its objectives. The encounter with Battlegroup Meyer had caused its brigades some consternation and the decision was taken to dig in and gather strength. German 352nd Division had committed its only reserve and the 50th Division had taken this as a show of strength. On the 7 June, the division continued its advance, comforted by the news that 7th Armoured Division was landing behind it. Resistance was sporadic but dogged. What the enemy 352nd Division lacked in numbers was made up for in determination. The remnants of 441st East Battalion and 726th Regiment were grouped in defensive outposts and resisted for as long as possible before retiring, but their interpretation of 'as long as possible' was often a very brief period indeed.

69th Brigade advanced across the Bayeux–Caen road at St Leger keeping pace with the Canadians on their left flank. 8th Armoured Brigade moved through the 69th Brigade to exploit southwards through Audrieu and captured the high ground above Tilly ten miles south of Bayeux the next day. Enemy Panzer units countered this movement and the advance to the south was brought to a dramatic halt. On the right, 56th Brigade took Bayeux and 151st Brigade took the high ground between the Seullès and Aure rivers. Nearer the coast 231st Brigade pushed westwards and captured the German battery at Longues. Two miles further west, 47 Royal Marine Commando captured Port en Bessin after a stiff fight and then met up with the Americans forming a continuous Allied beachhead from the River Vire to the east of the River Orne.

On Juno Beach the Canadians had advanced just over half way towards their objectives on D-Day. The Canadian 3rd Division had planned to get to the Caen–Bayeux railway line and capture the airfield



at Carpiquet, but had only reached the line Creully–Villons les Buissons by nightfall and had dug in. Not surprisingly, the attack by 21st Panzer Division which swept down its left flank during the evening had caused some alarm, but by then the movement inland was becoming over-stretched because of the late start by Canadian 9th Brigade.

On 7 June the advance continued and almost immediately ran into trouble. 9th Brigade, led by Canadian 27th Armoured Regiment and the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, moved southwards down the road from Villons les Buissons to Authie, on its way to Carpiquet. At Authie it came under prolonged and accurate artillery fire and halted only to be immediately met by even fiercer resistance when it was attacked by the 12th SS Panzer Division *Hitlerjugend*. The division had finally been released by German High Command and sent forward against the invasion. Progress from its holding area around Evreux had been slow and only its 25th SS Panzergrenadier Regiment had arrived near Caen in time to launch the counter-attack alongside 21st Panzer Division. But the advance by Canadian 3rd Division and the British 3rd Division caught these Panzer units off balance as they prepared to launch their own counter-attack. A very stiff battle ensued which resulted in stalemate. The Allies were stopped dead unable to close on Caen and

**A 6-pdr antitank gun of the 7th Green Howards guarding a small lane near Lingevres during the move inland. (Imperial War Museum, B5642)**





the Panzer force's attack was blunted and the last chance of actually pushing the Allies back into the sea was lost.

Over the next few days both sides clashed all along the front, each hoping to hold the other while they gathered sufficient strength to give them a decisive advantage. Each day, and more especially each night, over roads swept by Allied fighter bombers, the Germans brought new units forward in a vain attempt to concentrate for their big push. And each day these new units were thrown into the line to help plug some gap that the Allies had opened up. For Montgomery the goal of seizing Caen dominated his thinking. The capture of the town, with its network of roads, was a prerequisite to launching his main drive to the south. Rommel realised this and concentrated the bulk of his armour in defence of the town.

British XXX Corps gradually built up strength and pushed forward south of Bayeux. British 50th Division, together with British 7th Armoured Division, advanced towards Tilly. Here they met Panzer Lehr Division and the move southwards stopped. The close Normandy countryside, the *bocage*, turned the Allied advance into a nightmare. The small fields, high hedges and sunken lanes that criss-crossed the area were ideal for waging a defensive war. It was an infantryman's battle. Tanks were of limited use in the close terrain and horribly vulnerable to German antitank guns or tank-hunting teams with Panzerfaust anti-tank weapons. It took just a few well-sited antitank guns to hold up an entire armoured battalion. It is thus hardly surprising that the advance through the bocage slowed almost to a standstill and casualties began to mount alarmingly.

Behind the advancing troops, the priority at Gold and Juno Beaches became the landing of stores, reinforcements and supplies of every description. The Royal Navy had secured the seaways and great convoys of ships arrived unmolested to discharge prodigious amounts of materiel over the open beaches. New roads were built, fuel dumps established and assembly areas carved out. Then came the air forces. Airfields were bulldozed through open fields and steel matting laid for runways. With

**Floating roadway leading from the Mulberry Harbour to Arromanches. Two of these artificial harbours were built and both were hit by a great storm, which began on 19 June and blew for three days. The American Mulberry off Omaha was completely destroyed and abandoned, but this one at Arromanches, although badly damaged, was repaired and continued in service for ten months. (Imperial War Museum, A24360)**



little more than a tent from which to control operations and a petrol truck, these airfields were operational within days of the landings. The RAF no longer had to make a cross-Channel flight to reach the battlefield and could now have rocket-firing Typhoons and Spitfires patrolling the air above Normandy throughout the hours of daylight.

Cherbourg and Le Havre were the great ports of Normandy and the German High Command knew that the Allies would soon need a large harbour through which to land their supplies. They therefore fought tenaciously to prevent any advance towards these towns. The Allies had realised this well before the invasion and had decided that they would bring their own ports over to Normandy with them. Two artificial harbours, one off Omaha Beach and one centred on the town of Arromanches, were transported piecemeal over the Channel and then erected *in situ*. These British-designed and built harbours, codenamed Mulberry, were each intended to have a capacity of over 7,000 tons of stores a day. Each harbour enclosed an area of two square miles. Outer floating breakwaters sheltered an inner fixed breakwater made of huge concrete caissons five storeys high and of 6,000 tons displacement. These were towed into position and then sunk into place. The whole harbour was a prodigious feat of engineering. It had four miles of piers, six miles of floating roadways and 15 pier heads linked to the shore. The first components of the Mulberries were taken across to Normandy on 7 June and by 18 June both artificial ports were in use. The American port off Omaha was destroyed in a gale between 19 and 21 June, but the British Mulberry at Arromanches, although damaged in the same gale, remained in use for the next ten months, by which time it had landed 2,500,000 men, 500,000 vehicles and 4,000,000 tons of supplies.

**The landing beach on Gold is now given over to the arrival of stores and reinforcements. It came as some surprise to the naval planners how easy it was to beach fairly large ships for unloading on the sandy sea bed and then refloat them without damage on the next high tide. Millions of tons of supplies were landed in this way over the following months. (Imperial War Museum, A24012)**

# AFTERMATH



**ABOVE Wounded Panzergrenadier from 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend resting outside the northern entrance to Ardenne Abbey. The attacks against the Allied landings were the division's first taste of battle. Raised in 1943 the division was a mixture of seasoned veterans from other SS armoured divisions and members of the Hitler Youth. The average age of its troops was just 18 years. (Bundesarchiv, 146/84/11/15a)**

**W**hilst the Canadians concentrated on defending their line against enemy Panzer forces, a few miles behind them one German garrison still stubbornly held out in the face of hopeless odds. The fortress of steel, concrete and wire which made up the defences of the Douvres Radar Station contained a motley collection of troops from the Luftwaffe, 716th Division and the 192nd Panzergrenadiers and they were determined not to surrender. When the Canadians came ashore over Juno Beach on D-Day, the radar station was too strongly defended to be taken by the assault troops available. With the urgent need to capture Caen uppermost in their thoughts, the Canadians by-passed the strongpoint and left it for the follow-up troops to deal with. Its garrison was contained by aggressive patrols and was watched by the tanks of 80th Assault Squadron from 79th Armoured Division, while a plan was formulated for its capture. Several units kept watch on the site over the next week: the Canadians on D-Day, 48 Royal Marine Commando afterwards, 5th Black Watch from 51st Highland Division when they came ashore and then, finally, 41 RM Commando.

On 17 June the radar station was attacked. The plan was for several feints to be made towards the strongpoint from the south and west by 77th Assault Squadron, Royal Engineers, while four assault teams, each comprising two Crabs and one troop of AVREs from 22nd Dragoons and 26th Assault Regiment, Royal Engineers, attacked from the north.

**RIGHT Flying control at an RAF airstrip in Normandy. Work building these landing grounds began immediately after the initial assaults. Within days of the landings, RAF servicing commandos and engineers moved onto a suitable site, bulldozed a primitive landing strip, laid down a steel mesh covering for a runway and opened for business. Amenities were sparse: tented accommodation for the aircrews, road tankers as bunkering facilities and packing cases for a control tower. (Imperial War Museum, CL162)**





Other Crabs would give covering fire from the nearby woods. Once the Allied troops broke into the strongpoint 41 Royal Marine Commando would mop up the various emplacements.

After an initial bombardment by heavy artillery the tanks rumbled forwards in the late afternoon. The Crabs flailed paths through the minefields, the AVRE crews shelled shelters and concrete emplacements and 70lb 'Beehive' charges were placed against underground entrances. Several tanks were lost to mines and some to antitank guns, but the determined crews in the others pressed on amongst the bunkers silencing each of them in turn. The explosions inside the concrete tombs were colossal and the noise reverberated around the underground passageways striking fear into the defenders. When the commandos entered the underground corridors and began spraying Bren gun fire along the walls, the garrison knew that the end had come. Two hundred defenders surrendered and marched out into captivity.

By the middle of June the lodgement was secure in every way. Enemy attacks could be broken up with the aid of naval gunfire as the front line was still within ten miles of the beaches. Overhead the Allied air forces dominated the sky and pounced on any German troop concentrations. But on the ground things were moving much slower than was desirable. Caen was still untaken and constituted a large thorn in the side of the 21st Army Group's commander.

Unable to make a direct thrust through to Caen with I Corps, Montgomery tried to outflank the city by sweeping around from the Gold Beach sector with XXX Corps. The plan was to advance through Villers Bocage to attack Caen from the south-west. This gamble failed when an armoured column from 7th Armoured Division was destroyed

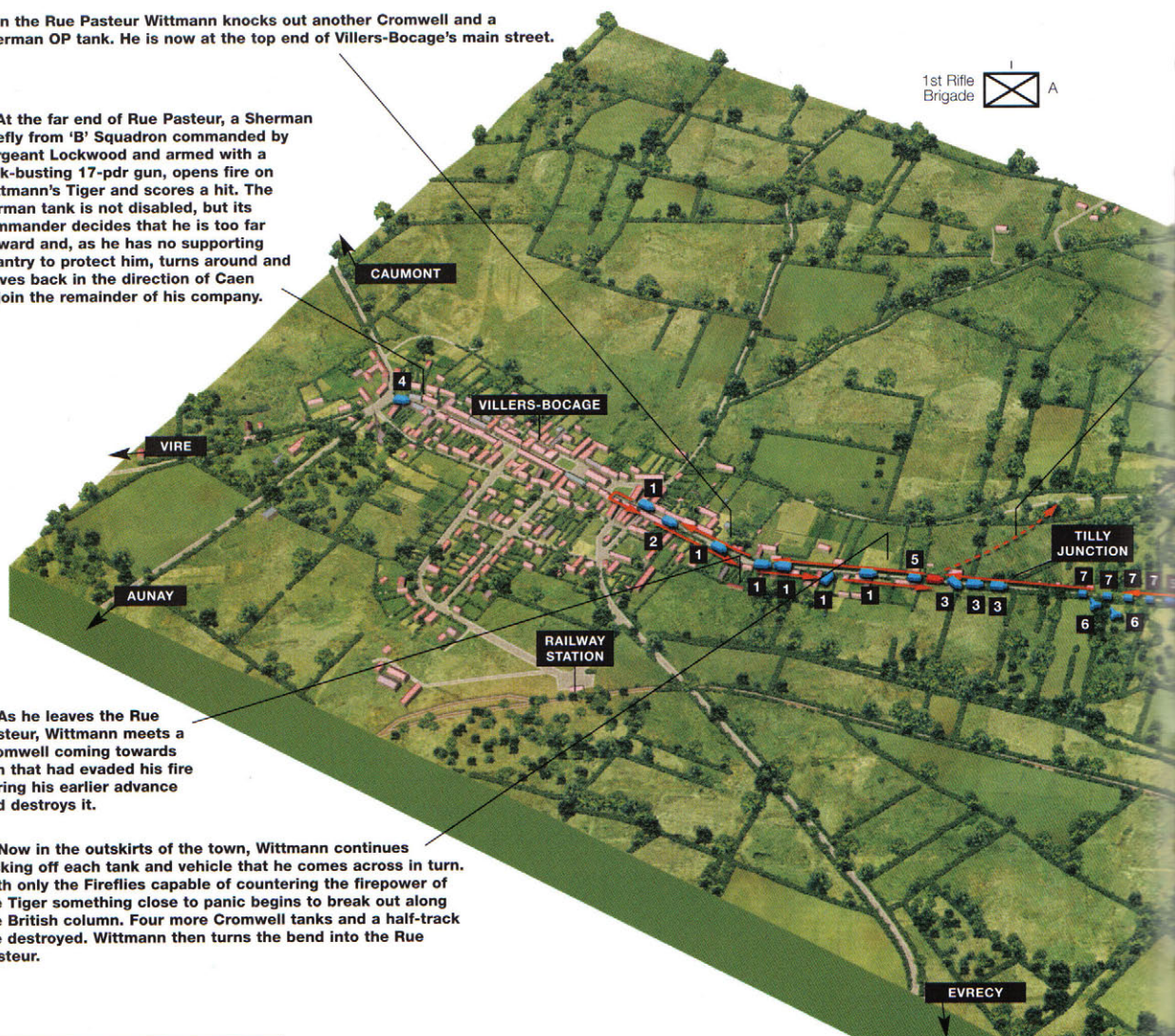
**A knocked-out Tiger tank from Hauptsturmführer Möbius's 1. Kompanie, schwere SS-Panzer Abteilung 101 in Villers Bocage. After Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittmann's 2. Kompanie had destroyed the armoured column, Möbius attacked the town with four of his Tigers and some PzKpfw IVs from Panzer Lehr Division. This attack was blunted by the antitank guns of British 22nd Armoured Brigade and many of the German tanks were knocked out. After this short battle the British withdrew from Villers Bocage and then subjected the town to intense bombing. (Bundesarchiv, 1011/494/3376/12)**

7. In the Rue Pasteur Wittmann knocks out another Cromwell and a Sherman OP tank. He is now at the top end of Villers-Bocage's main street.

8. At the far end of Rue Pasteur, a Sherman Firefly from 'B' Squadron commanded by Sergeant Lockwood and armed with a tank-busting 17-pdr gun, opens fire on Wittmann's Tiger and scores a hit. The German tank is not disabled, but its commander decides that he is too far forward and, as he has no supporting infantry to protect him, turns around and moves back in the direction of Caen to join the remainder of his company.

9. As he leaves the Rue Pasteur, Wittmann meets a Cromwell coming towards him that had evaded his fire during his earlier advance and destroys it.

6. Now in the outskirts of the town, Wittmann continues picking off each tank and vehicle that he comes across in turn. With only the Fireflies capable of countering the firepower of the Tiger something close to panic begins to break out along the British column. Four more Cromwell tanks and a half-track are destroyed. Wittmann then turns the bend into the Rue Pasteur.



- GERMAN FORCES**  
 2. Kompanie, sSS-PzAbt.101  
 A PzKpfw VI Tiger I  
 B Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittman's Tiger I
- ALLIED FORCES**  
 Elements of 22nd Armoured Brigade,  
 7th Armoured Division  
 1 Cromwell IV tank  
 2 M4 Sherman tank  
 3 Stuart light tank  
 4 Sherman Firefly (17-pdr)  
 5 Half-track  
 6 6-pdr anti-tank gun  
 7 Lloyd carrier

## VILLERS-BOCAGE

12 June 1944, 0855hrs-0910, viewed from the southeast showing 2. Kompanie, schwere SS-Panzer Abteilung 101's devastating attack on the leading elements of 22nd Armoured Brigade, around the small market town of Villers-Bocage.

10. Near the junction with the road to Tilly, men of the 1st Rifle Brigade have got one of their 6-pdr anti-tank guns working and fire a shot at Wittmann's Panzer. The shell hits the Tiger's running gear and immobilises it, forcing Wittmann and his crew to abandon the tank. They make off to the north towards the Panzer Lehr Division's positions near Orbois.

5. Wittmann's Tiger reaches the junction with the road to Tilly after devastating the line of transport vehicles backed up along the highway. His tank's high explosive shells have smashed through eight half-tracks, four personnel carriers and two 6-pdr anti-tank guns. Near the junction he goes on to attack and destroy three Stuart light tanks.

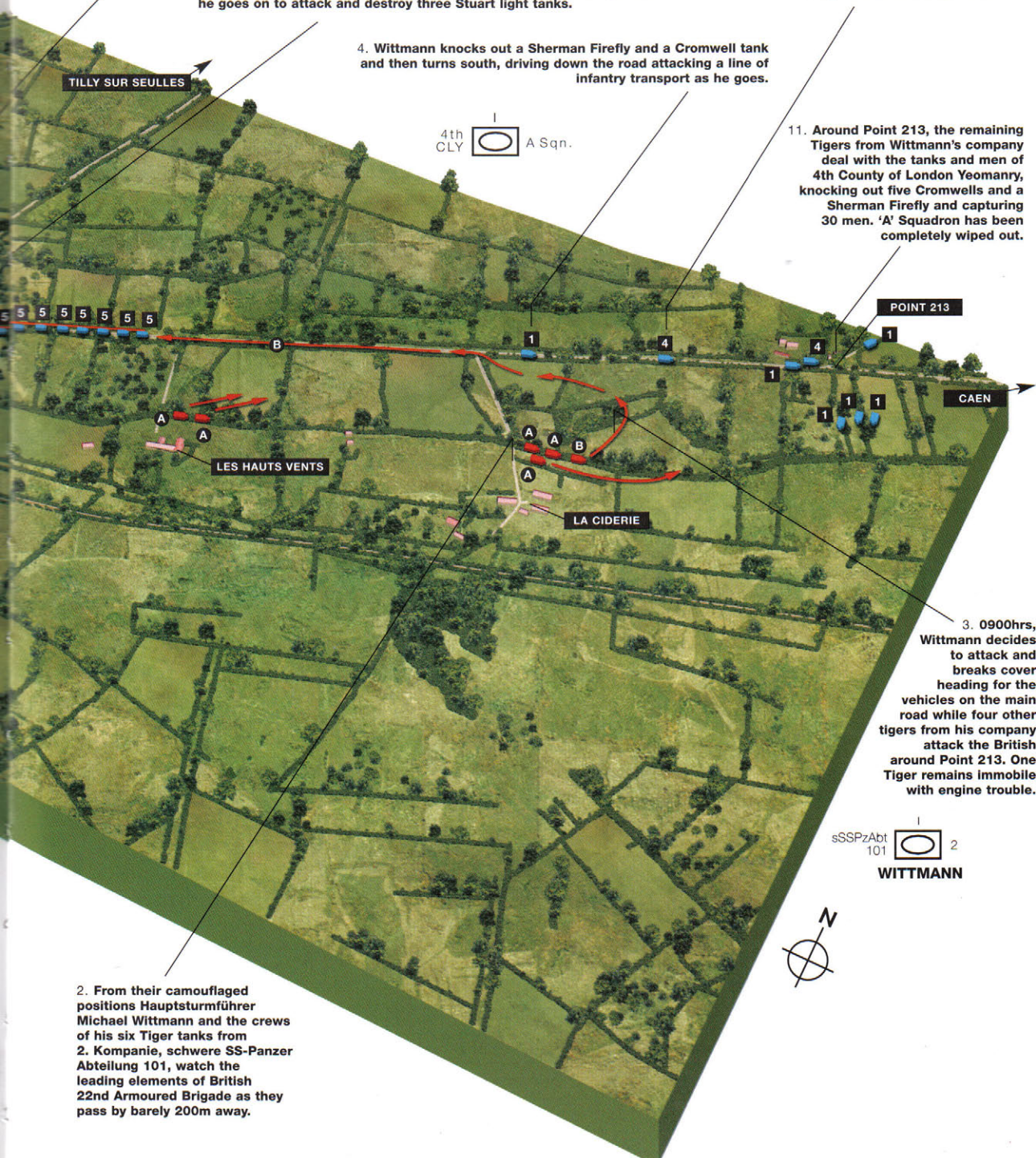
4. Wittmann knocks out a Sherman Firefly and a Cromwell tank and then turns south, driving down the road attacking a line of infantry transport as he goes.

1. Tanks from 'A' Squadron, 4th County of London Yeomanry, and mobile infantry from 'A' Company, 1st Rifle Brigade, advance towards Point 213 along the Villers-Bocage-Caen road.

11. Around Point 213, the remaining Tigers from Wittmann's company deal with the tanks and men of 4th County of London Yeomanry, knocking out five Cromwells and a Sherman Firefly and capturing 30 men. 'A' Squadron has been completely wiped out.

3. 0900hrs, Wittmann decides to attack and breaks cover heading for the vehicles on the main road while four other tigers from his company attack the British around Point 213. One Tiger remains immobile with engine trouble.

2. From their camouflaged positions Hauptsturmführer Michael Wittmann and the crews of his six Tiger tanks from 2. Kompanie, schwere SS-Panzer Abteilung 101, watch the leading elements of British 22nd Armoured Brigade as they pass by barely 200m away.



4th CLY  
A Sqn.

sSSPzAbt 101  
WITTMANN



**Cromwell tank of A Squadron, 4th County of London Yeomanry, knocked out during the battle of Villers Bocage, when an entire column from British 7th Armoured Division was destroyed by Obersturmführer Michael Wittman's six PzKpfw VI Tigers. (Bundesarchiv 1011/738/269/7)**

by a handful of PzKpfw VI Tiger tanks commanded by the Panzer ace Michael Wittmann as it emerged from the town of Villers Bocage. Over the next few weeks Montgomery tried with ever larger set-piece attacks to take Caen the hard way. Operation Epsom tried to put troops across the River Orne and to threaten the city from the south-west, but failed after small gains had been made at great cost. The Canadians then tried charging down the road from the north in the immediate aftermath of a massive carpet-bombing raid by RAF heavy bombers in Operation Charnwood. This offensive was only partly successful with the Canadians breaking into the northern part of the city. Monty had another go at the end of July with a massive armoured thrust out of the airborne bridgehead and onto the Falaise Plain in Operation Goodwood, but the drive came to a shuddering halt to the south-east of Caen, stopped by the German guns on the Bourguébus Ridge. By then the city was one huge pile of rubble and charred ruins, eventually taken by the Canadians at the climax of the operation. It was a hollow victory, for although Caen was taken, the roads to the south were still blocked by massed German armour.

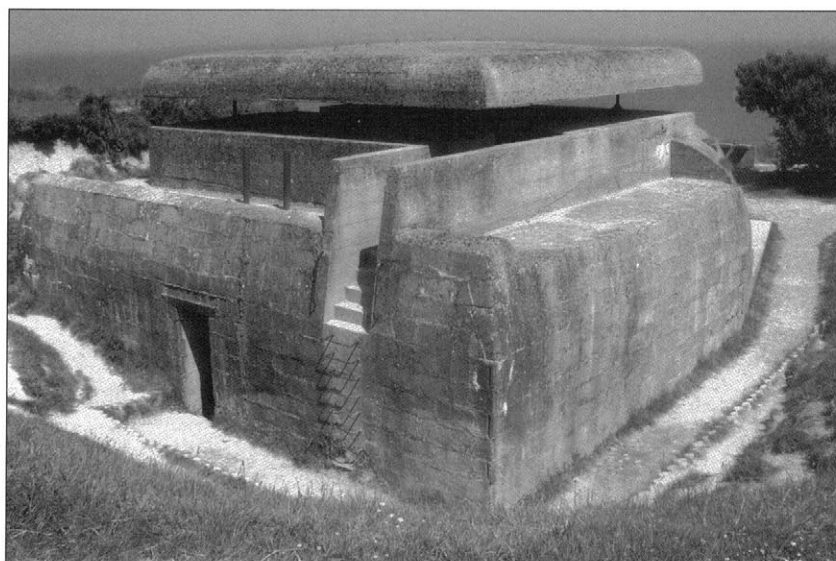
It took several more battles and the American breakout in Operation Cobra (see Campaign Series No. 88) before the British and Canadians moved beyond the confines of the Normandy bocage. At the end of August a wide encircling movement by American mobile forces combined with a British, Canadian and Polish drive towards Falaise to trap German Seventh Army and annihilate it. Those German forces that escaped the collapse rapidly retreated to the Seine and beyond, the Allied Armies snapping at their heels. The German rout did not stop until they reached the German border in late September.

# THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

**T**he towns and beaches that assaulting Allied troops knew as Gold and Juno in June 1944 are now holiday resorts and pleasure beaches. The coastline that was rocked by bomb and blasted by shell is now enjoyed by a growing number of people who want nothing more than to enjoy the delights of being by the seaside. The Normandy coast welcomes tourists just as it did before the war. The spacious seafront villas that once lined the shore have now been joined by new developments and burgeoning housing estates. But long stretches of coastline remain virtually untouched, practically identical to how they were in the tumultuous days of 1944.

Most of Gold Beach is unchanged, and it is possible to walk along the beach from Le Hamel to La Rivière and see only a handful of modern additions. Behind the beach the old road, which followed the shoreline, is now abandoned and modern traffic now passes by a few hundred yards inland. Between the beach and the new road the ground is unencumbered by modern development; low, marshy and unvisited, a haven for local wildlife. Rising gently behind it is the Meuvaines Ridge from the top of which the machine guns of 726th Regiment poured down such a weight of fire on 50th Division. At the western end of La Rivière is the great H677 casemate of WN33, which housed the 88mm gun that destroyed the tanks supporting the 5th East Yorks. It is now used as a store for the local sailing club. A few hundred yards to the west is the road leading up from the beach along which 6th Green Howards advanced; follow it for about a half of a mile and it will lead you past

**The control bunker for the German guns at Longues. It was built on the edge of the cliffs with a clear view out to sea. The two-storey bunker served as the battery command post. On the upper level was the observation deck. On the lower floor was the map room, officers' room and the range-finder room with its observation slit looking out to sea through a radius of 220°. (Ken Ford)**





German war cemetery at La Cambes, one of three German cemeteries in Normandy. Over 20,000 German soldiers are buried here, killed in the fighting between D-Day and the breakout. (Ken Ford)



'Lavatory Pan Villa' to the long abandoned casemates of the Mont Fleury battery.

At Le Hamel at the other end of Gold Beach stands the gun emplacement that wrought such havoc with the Hampshires. Nearby in the car park and built into the sea wall are Tobruk emplacements which contained the machine guns of WN37 that swept the beach with such deadly fire. To the west, on top of the hill overlooking Arromanches is the site of the radar station, now a visitor's centre with a 360° cinema showing films relating to the history of the area. There is a good view to be had from the hill of the remains of the Mulberry Harbour, many pieces of which remain in place defying the sea's efforts to obliterate them. In Arromanches itself is one of the better D-Day museums, with an emphasis on the construction and use of the artificial harbour.

Continue westwards and make a point of visiting the Longues battery, without doubt the most significant and best-preserved of all of the sites along this coast. It still has its powerful weapons *in situ* in their casemates; the guns that fired defiantly on the invasion fleet and took so long to be silenced. On the top of the cliffs nearby is the observation and ranging bunker and contained within the perimeter of the battery is a visitor's centre. Further west still is the tiny harbour at Port en Bessin, captured on D-Day + 1 by 47 RM Commando. Just inland from the port near Escures, close by Point 72 where 47 RM Commando holed up for the night on D-Day, is an unusual private museum devoted to the wrecks that have been salvaged from the sea along the D-Day coast. This has a fascinating display of original hardware together with poignant relics from the tanks and ships that were sunk during the invasion.

Juno Beach is more developed than Gold but still retains much of its D-Day past. Courseulles is a popular destination for the sun lovers who now crowd the town beach where the Regina Rifles came ashore. The strongpoint on the beach has gone and the whole of the seafront has been redeveloped. At the mouth of the harbour are two originals from D-Day: a DD tank from Canadian 6th Armoured Regiment salvaged from the sea bed and now restored to its 1944 condition and a restored German 50mm antitank gun with its battered shield showing its invasion battle scars. To the west, on the other side of the harbour entrance, several casemates are still visible, now sinking slowly in the shifting sands. Along the first exit from the beach made by the specialised armour of 79th Armoured Division, stands one of its Churchill AVREs. This is a genuine veteran of the landings, which had been buried in the crater into which it had fallen and spent the next 30 years helping to support the roadway that led inland from the beach.

At Bernières, the strongpoint on Nan White that was built into the sea wall opposite where the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada landed, retains its concrete casemate and Tobruk emplacements. Along the road eastwards can be seen remnants of WN 27 including its original 50mm gun in a casemate at St Aubin. Inland from Juno is the site of the radar station at Douvres. It has a visitor's centre (visitors should check opening times) and numerous casemates and shelters remain visible giving some indication of the great strength of this underground fortress that held out against superior forces for so long. A German Würzburg radar antenna now stands on one of the original concrete bases, not a veteran of the war, but one brought from the Observatoire de Paris to form part of the radar museum.

Closer to Caen, just past the tiny village of Authie where Canadian 3rd Division met the 12th SS *Hitlerjugend* Panzer Division head on, is the medieval Ardenne Abbey. On the night of D-Day the regimental headquarters of Standartenführer Kurt Meyer's 25th SS Panzergrenadier Regiment was located here. Its domestic range is now a private dwelling closed to the public, clustered around a courtyard close by the abbey church. The buildings are surrounded by a high, stone wall and the site remains as it was in 1944. Through an archway in the corner of the courtyard a gate leads to a small garden. In that Garden is a memorial to the 27 Canadian soldiers who were murdered there in cold blood by the 12th SS Panzer Division. It serves as a poignant reminder of the barbarity of the regime that so many Allied soldiers fought and sacrificed to overthrow.

# ORDER OF BATTLE

## **BRITISH FORCES DURING THE ASSAULT PHASE OF THE INVASION, 6 JUNE 1944**

Allied Supreme Commander – Gen Dwight D. Eisenhower  
British 21st Army Group – Gen Sir Bernard Montgomery  
British Second Army – LtGen Sir Miles Dempsey

### **British I Corps – LtGen John Crocker**

#### **Canadian 3rd Infantry Division – MajGen R.F.L. Keller**

*7th Infantry Brigade – Brig H.W. Foster*

The Royal Winnipeg Rifles

The Regina Rifles Regiment

The Canadian Scottish Regiment

*8th Infantry Brigade – Brig K.G. Blackader*

The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada

Le Régiment de la Chaudière

The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment

*9th Infantry Brigade – Brig D.G. Cunningham*

The Highland Light Infantry of Canada

The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders

The North Nova Scotia Highlanders

#### *Artillery*

12th, 13th, 14th and 19th Field Regiments, Royal Canadian Artillery

3rd Antitank Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery

4th Light Antiaircraft Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery

#### *Support*

17th Duke of York's Reconnaissance Regiment

The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (Machine Gun Battalion)

*2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade – Brig Wyman*

6th Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars)

10th Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse)

27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment)

*British 5th Assault Regiment, Royal Engineers (from 79th Armoured Division)*

26th Assault Squadron, Royal Engineers

77th Assault Squadron, Royal Engineers

79th Assault Squadron, Royal Engineers

80th Assault Squadron, Royal Engineers

B Squadron, 22nd Dragoons

A Squadron, Westminster Dragoons

### **British XXX Corps – LtGen Gerard Bucknall**

#### **British 50th Infantry Division – MajGen D.A.H. Graham**

*56th Infantry Brigade – Brig E.C. Pepper*

2nd South Wales Borderers

2nd Gloucestershires

2nd Essex

*69th Infantry Brigade – Brig F.Y.C. Knox*

5th East Yorkshires

6th Green Howards

7th Green Howards

*151st Infantry Brigade – Brig R.H. Senior*

6th Durham Light Infantry

7th Durham Light Infantry

9th Durham Light Infantry

*231st Infantry Brigade – Brig Sir A.B.G. Stanier*

2nd Devonshires

1st Hampshires

1st Dorsets

#### *Artillery*

74th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

86th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

90th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

124th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

147th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

102nd Antitank Regiment, Royal Artillery

25th Light Antiaircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery

#### *Support*

61st Reconnaissance Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps

2nd Cheshire Regiment (Machine Gun Battalion)

*8th Armoured Brigade – Brig Anstey*

4th/7th Dragoon Guards

24th Lancers

The Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry

12th Kings Royal Rifle Corps

*British 6th Assault Regiment, Royal Engineers (from 79th Armoured Division)*

81st Assault Squadron, Royal Engineers

82nd Assault Squadron, Royal Engineers

B Squadron, Westminster Dragoons

C Squadron, Westminster Dragoons

## **GERMAN FORCES GOLD AND JUNO BEACHES AREA, JUNE 1944**

German Supreme Commander – Adolf Hitler  
German Commander in Chief (West) – GFM Gerd von Rundstedt

German Army Group B – GFM Erwin Rommel  
German Seventh Army – GenObst Friedrich Dollmann

### **German LXXXIV Corps – Gen der Artillerie Erich Marcks German 716th Infantry Division – GenLt Wilhelm Richter**

*726th Infantry Regiment – Obst Korfes* (Attached to 352nd Division on D-Day)

I Battalion, 726th Infantry Regiment  
II Battalion, 726th Infantry Regiment  
III Battalion, 726th Infantry Regiment  
441st East Battalion

*736th Infantry Regiment – Obst Krug*

I Battalion, 736th Infantry Regiment  
II Battalion, 736th Infantry Regiment  
II Battalion, 736th Infantry Regiment  
642nd East Battalion

*1716th Artillery Regiment*

I/1716 Artillery Battalion  
II/1716 Artillery Battalion

716th Reconnaissance Company

716th Engineer Battalion

### **German 352nd Infantry Division – GenMaj Dietrich Kraiss**

*914th Grenadier Regiment – Obstlt Heyna*

I Battalion, 914th Grenadier Regiment  
II Battalion, 914th Grenadier Regiment

*915th Grenadier Regiment – Obstlt Meyer*

I Battalion, 915th Grenadier Regiment  
II Battalion, 915th Grenadier Regiment

*916th Grenadier Regiment – Obst Goth*

I Battalion, 916th Grenadier Regiment  
II Battalion, 916th Grenadier Regiment

352nd Division Fusilier Battalion

*352nd Artillery Regiment – Obstlt Ocker*

I Battalion, 352nd Artillery Regiment  
II Battalion, 352nd Artillery Regiment

352nd Antitank Battalion

352nd Engineering Battalion

352nd Field Replacement Battalion

### **German 21st Panzer Division – GenMaj Edgar Feuchtinger**

*100th Panzer Regiment – Obst von Oppeln-Bronikowski*  
(later designated 22nd Panzer Regiment)

I Battalion, 100th Panzer Regiment  
II Battalion, 100th Panzer Regiment

*125th Panzergrenadier Regiment*

I Battalion, 125th Panzergrenadier Regiment  
II Battalion, 125th Panzergrenadier Regiment

*192nd Panzergrenadier Regiment – Obst Rauch*

I Battalion, 192nd Panzergrenadier Regiment  
II Battalion, 192nd Panzergrenadier Regiment

200th Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion

200th Sturmgeschütz Battalion

200th Panzerjäger Battalion

*155th Panzer Artillery Regiment*

I Battalion, 155th Panzer Artillery Regiment  
II Battalion, 155th Panzer Artillery Regiment  
III Battalion, 155th Panzer Artillery Regiment

305th Army Flak Battalion

220th Panzer Pioneer Battalion

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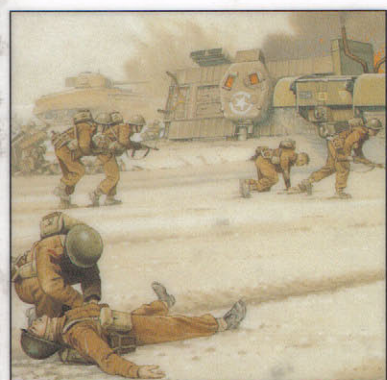
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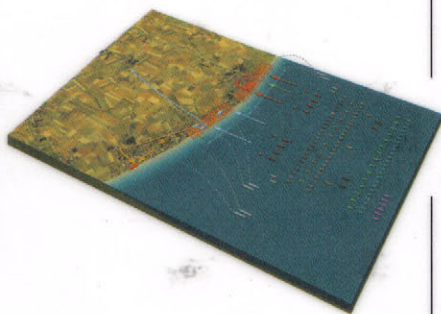
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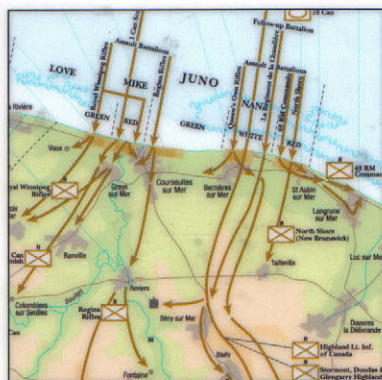
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## D-Day 1944 (4)

### Gold & Juno Beaches

Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Normandy, was the greatest sea-borne military operation in history. At the heart of the invasion and key to its success were the landings of British 50th Division on Gold Beach and Canadian 3rd Division on Juno Beach. Not only did they provide the vital link between the landings of British 3rd Division on Sword Beach and the Americans to the west on Omaha, they would be crucial to the securing of the beachhead and the drive inland to Bayeux and Caen. Ken Ford details the assault that began the liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe.