



OMAHA BEACH- NORMANDY, FRANCE HISTORIC TRAIL



FIELD GUIDE



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®
TRANSATLANTIC COUNCIL

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This Field Guide contains information on the Omaha Beach-Normandy Historical Trail designed by members of the Transatlantic Council. The guide is intended to be a starting point in your endeavor to learn about the history of the sites on the trail. Remember, this may be the only time your Scouts visit the Omaha Beach area in their life so make it a great time!

While TAC tries to update these Field Guides when possible, it may be several years before the next revision. If you have comments or suggestions, please send them to Admin@tac-bsa.org or post them on the TAC Nation Facebook Group Page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/27951084309/>.

This guide can be printed as a 5½ x 4¼ inch pamphlet or read on a tablet or smart phone.



Front Cover: Troops of the 1st Infantry Division land on Omaha Beach

Front Cover Inset: Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial



OMAHA BEACH-NORMANDY, FRANCE
HISTORIC TRAIL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GETTING PREPARED.....	4
WHAT IS THE HISTORIC TRAIL.....	5
HISTORIC TRAIL ROUTE.....	6-18
TRAIL MAP & PICTURES.....	19-25
BACKGROUND MATERIAL.....	26-28
QUICK QUIZ.....	29
B.S.A. REQUIREMENTS.....	30
NOTES.....	31



GETTING PREPARED

Just like with any hike (or any activity in Scouting), the Historic Trail program starts with **Being Prepared**.

1. Review this Field Guide in detail.
2. Check local conditions and weather.
3. Study and Practice with the map and compass.
4. Pack rain gear and other weather-appropriate gear.
5. Take plenty of water.
6. Make sure socks and hiking shoes or boots fit correctly and are broken in.
7. Pack a first aid kit, "just in case."
8. Discuss the day's activities, so there are no surprises; discuss safe hiking.
9. Ensure Two-Deep Leadership at all times.
10. Check the Quick Quiz and keep it with you on the trail.



WHAT IS THE HISTORIC TRAIL?

So – you are thinking about doing the Omaha Beach-Normandy Historic Trail. Why should you do it? There are numerous reasons one can think of in justifying doing this historic trail. Although, the most important is to honor the memory of so many great Americans and Allies who sacrificed everything to safeguard our freedom. It is because of the sacrifices that our forefathers made on these battlefields that we are a great nation today.

The Battle of Normandy or Operation OVERLORD was led and planned by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) from 6 June 1944 to 30 August 1944 under the command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

It was here that the Allies finally gained a western foothold on the European continent as they battled the Nazis. The attack was very successful, and helped turn the tide of the war. However, this success came at a high cost in allied lives. You will see this first hand at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial, where over 9300 Americans are buried.

The Omaha Beach-Normandy Historic Trail includes three required stops and eight recommended stops. The trail is located along the Normandy Coast near the town of Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer. It includes several locations of particular importance to the United States.

Along the required stops, you will walk the ground where the Rangers scaled the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc, see the beach where the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions landed on the morning of June 6, 1944, and walk with reverence around the holy ground where so many of our fellow-countrymen are buried, having died near this historic trail.



NORMANDY 1944



OMAHA BEACH-NORMANDY, FRANCE
HISTORIC TRAIL

HISTORIC TRAIL ROUTE

Hike

Where and How to Start

When one reads the word "trail" one of course thinks of hiking. The trail was originally designed to run from the American Cemetery to Pointe du Hoc. It was an excellent hike that involved walking up the bluffs overlooking the beach as well as walking on Omaha Beach or the sidewalk along the beach depending on the tide. In 2001, the bluffs were closed to walking due to a severe erosion problem.

There are three locations to visit each with a short hike to complete the Historic Trail. You can visit them in any order but we recommend you start the Normandy American Cemetery north of the town of Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer.

Distance and Time

The first hike, at the Normandy American Cemetery covers the cemetery grounds along the bluff overlooking Omaha Beach and the visitors center. It should take about an hour. The second hike on Omaha Beach is about 3 km along the beach. The final hike is around Point du Hoc and is around 1.5 km. Expect the entire trail to take most of a day including the hikes and driving between sights.

There are also eight other recommended stops in the area if you have time. They include additional invasion beaches, museums and cemeteries. You may be able to fit one or two of these into the same day as the rest of the trail or add a second day to be able to visit them all.

Bon Voyage! – Have a Good Trip!



OMAHA BEACH-NORMANDY, FRANCE
HISTORIC TRAIL

NORMANDY AMERICAN CEMETERY

Checkpoint #1 – Normandy American Cemetery

The **Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial** in France is located in Colleville-sur-Mer, on the site of the temporary American St. Laurent Cemetery, established by the U.S. First Army on June 8, 1944 as the first American cemetery on European soil in World War II. The **cemetery** site, at the north end of its half mile access road, covers 172.5 acres and contains the graves of 9,385 of our military dead, most of whom lost their lives in the D-Day landings and ensuing operations. On the Walls of the Missing, in a semicircular garden on the east side of the memorial, are inscribed 1,557 names. Rosettes mark the names of those since recovered and identified.

The **memorial** consists of a semicircular colonnade with a loggia at each end containing large maps and narratives of the military operations; at the center is the bronze statue, "Spirit of American Youth Rising from the Waves." An orientation table overlooking the beach depicts the landings in Normandy. Facing west at the memorial, one sees in the foreground the reflecting pool; beyond is the burial area with a circular chapel and, at the far end, granite statues representing the United States and France.

In 2007, the Normandy Visitors Center opened. The \$30 million visitor center was dedicated by the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) on June 6, 2007 during the commemoration of the 63rd Anniversary of D-Day. The center is sited in a wooded area of the cemetery approximately 100 meters east of the Garden of the Missing.

Dedicated: July 18, 1956

Acres: 172.5

Sets of Brothers: 41

Burials: 9,387

Latin Crosses: 9,238

Medal of Honor Recipients: 3

Missing in Action: 1,557

Stars of David: 149

49°21'25.9"N 0°51'06.0"W – Rte du Cimetiere Americain, 14710 Colleville-sur-Mer

After visiting the cemetery, your next stop Omaha Beach, where you will retrace the steps of the 1st and 29th Infantry Division as they landed on the beach. It is about a 10-minute drive.



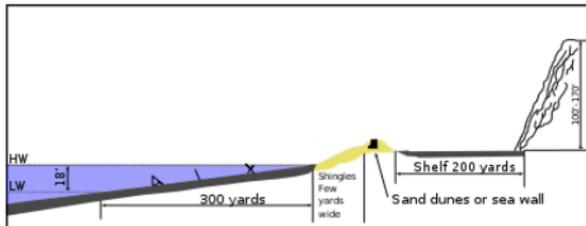
OMAHA BEACH-NORMANDY, FRANCE
HISTORIC TRAIL

OMAHA BEACH

Checkpoint #2 – Omaha Beach

Omaha, commonly known as **Omaha Beach**, was the code name for one of the five sectors of the Allied invasion of German-occupied France in the Normandy landings on June 6, 1944, during World War II. Omaha refers to a section of the coast of Normandy, France, facing the English Channel 8 kilometers long, from east of Sainte-Honorine-des-Pertes to west of Vierville-sur-Mer on the right bank of the Douve River estuary and an estimated 150-foot tall cliffs. Landings here were necessary to link the British landings to the east at Gold with the American landing to the west at Utah, thus providing a continuous lodgment on the Normandy coast of the Bay of the Seine. Taking Omaha was to be the responsibility of United States Army troops, with sea transport, mine sweeping, and a naval bombardment force provided predominantly by the United States Navy and Coast Guard, with contributions from the British, Canadian, and Free French navies.

Opposing the landings was the German 352nd Infantry Division. Of the 12,020 men of the division, 6,800 were experienced combat troops, detailed to defend a 53-kilometer front. The German strategy was based on defeating any seaborne assault at the water line, and the defenses were mainly deployed in strongpoints along the coast. The untested American 29th Infantry Division, along with nine companies of U.S. Army Rangers redirected from Pointe du Hoc, assaulted the western half of the beach. The battle-hardened 1st Infantry Division was given the eastern half. The initial assault waves, consisting of tanks, infantry, and combat engineer forces, were carefully planned to reduce the coastal defenses and allow the larger ships of the follow-up waves to land.



OMAHA BEACH

Checkpoint #2 – Omaha Beach (cont.)

Very little went as planned during the landing at **Omaha**. Difficulties in navigation caused the majority of landing craft to miss their targets throughout the day. The defenses were unexpectedly strong, and inflicted heavy casualties on landing U.S. troops. Under heavy fire, the engineers struggled to clear the beach obstacles; later landings bunched up around the few channels that were cleared. Weakened by the casualties taken just in landing, the surviving assault troops could not clear the heavily defended exits off the beach. This caused further problems and consequent delays for later landings. Small penetrations were eventually achieved by groups of survivors making improvised assaults, scaling the bluffs between the most heavily defended points. By the end of the day, two small isolated footholds had been won, which were subsequently exploited against weaker defenses further inland, thus achieving the original D-Day objectives over the following days.

After parking, head to the **Omaha Beach** Memorial and then head east along the beach for about 1.5 km to the base of the cliffs by the cemetery. There are several monuments along the route and don't forget to bring along an empty bottle to collect some sand from Omaha Beach.

49°22'12.2"N 0°52'46.8"W – 4 Rue Bernard Anquetil, 14710 Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer
The next stop is the Point du Hoc Monument where US Army Rangers scaled the cliffs. It is about 11km away and will take about 15 minutes to drive there.



29th Infantry Division



V Corps



1st Infantry Division



POINTE DU HOC

Checkpoint #3 – Pointe du Hoc

The World War II **Pointe du Hoc Ranger Monument** is located on a cliff eight miles west of Normandy American Cemetery, which overlooks Omaha Beach, France. It was erected by the French to honor elements of the American Second Ranger Battalion under the command of Lt. Col. James E. Rudder. During the American assault of Omaha and Utah beaches on June 6, 1944, these U.S. Army Rangers scaled the 100-foot cliffs and seized the German artillery pieces that could have fired on the American landing troops at Omaha and Utah beaches. At a high cost of life, they successfully defended against determined German counterattacks.

By mid-1944, German forces manned formidable defenses along the French coast. Of concern to the Allies were German 155mm artillery positions on Pointe du Hoc. They could wreak havoc on Utah and Omaha Beaches. Lt. Col. James E. Rudder, commanding the 2nd Ranger Battalion, received the mission to land at 6:30 a.m., scale the 100 foot cliffs, and disable the German positions. Lt. Col. Max F. Schneider's 5th Ranger Battalion would follow and reinforce them.

Timeline:

June 6, 5:50 a.m.: Naval bombardment of Pointe du Hoc began, including guns of the battleship USS Texas. Three companies (70 men per) of Rudder's 2nd Ranger Battalion were to land at Pointe du Hoc at 6:30 a.m., but were delayed. Per plan, Schneider's command (plus three companies of the 2nd) joined the Omaha Beach assault.

June 6, 7:10 a.m.: Two landing craft were lost, but the Rangers debarked and started up the cliffs. They pressed upward, supported by the destroyer USS Satterlee. One of the Rangers' DUKWs was disabled by enemy fire en route to Pointe du Hoc. The engine failed. Three Rangers were casualties, including one killed.

June 6, 7:40 a.m.: Most of the remaining Rangers reached the top.



POINTE DU HOC

Checkpoint #3 – Pointe du Hoc (cont.)

June 6, 9:30 a.m.: The Germans had previously moved the guns southward from their initial prepared positions. Despite fierce resistance, Rangers found and destroyed the guns pushing onward to cut the highway south of Pointe du Hoc.

June 6-8: After fighting two days, only about 90 Rangers stood when relieved by Schneider's Rangers and the 29th Division from Omaha Beach.

The monument consists of a simple granite pylon positioned atop a German concrete bunker with tablets at its base inscribed in French and English. This battle-scarred area on the left flank of Omaha Beach remains much as the Rangers left it.

49°23'34.8"N 0°59'14.3"W – Rue Talbot, 14450 Cricqueville-en-Bessin

*Congratulations, you have now completed the Omaha-Beach-Normandy Historic Trail!
If you are still looking for more sights to visit, the next few pages highlight some other sites in the area dealing with the Normandy Invasion and subsequent breakout by the Allied Forces.*



UTAH BEACH

Optional Checkpoint #4 – Utah Beach

Utah, commonly known as **Utah Beach**, was the code name for one of the five sectors of the Allied invasion of German-occupied France in the Normandy landings on June 6, 1944 (D-Day), during World War II. The westernmost of the five code-named landing beaches in Normandy, Utah is on the Cotentin Peninsula, west of the mouths of the Douve and Vire rivers. Amphibious landings at Utah were undertaken by United States Army troops, with sea transport, mine sweeping, and a naval bombardment force provided by the United States Navy and Coast Guard as well as elements from the British, Dutch and other Allied navies.

The objective at **Utah** was to secure a beachhead on the Cotentin Peninsula, the location of important port facilities at Cherbourg. The amphibious assault, primarily by the US 4th Infantry Division and 70th Tank Battalion, was supported by airborne landings of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Division. The intention was to rapidly seal off the Cotentin Peninsula, prevent the Germans from reinforcing Cherbourg, and capture the port as quickly as possible. Utah, along with Sword on the eastern flank, was added to the invasion plan in December 1943. These changes doubled the frontage of the invasion and necessitated a month-long delay so that additional landing craft and personnel could be assembled in England. Allied forces attacking Utah faced two battalions of the 919th Grenadier Regiment, part of the 709th Static Infantry Division. While improvements to fortifications had been undertaken under the leadership of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel beginning in October 1943, the troops assigned to defend the area were mostly poorly equipped non-German conscripts.

D-Day at **Utah** began at 01:30, when the first of the airborne units arrived, tasked with securing the key crossroads at Sainte-Mère-Église and controlling the causeways through the flooded farmland behind Utah so the infantry could advance inland. While some airborne objectives were quickly met, many paratroopers landed far from their drop zones and were unable to fulfill their objectives on the first day. On the beach itself, infantry and tanks landed in four waves beginning at 06:30 and quickly secured the immediate area with minimal casualties.



UTAH BEACH

Optional Checkpoint #4 – Utah Beach (cont.)

Meanwhile, engineers set to work clearing the area of obstacles and mines, and additional waves of reinforcements continued to arrive. At the close of D-Day, Allied forces had only captured about half of the planned area and contingents of German defenders remained, but the beachhead was secure.

The 4th Infantry Division landed 21,000 troops on **Utah** at the cost of only 197 casualties. Airborne troops arriving by parachute and glider numbered an additional 14,000 men, with 2,500 casualties. Around 700 men were lost in engineering units, 70th Tank Battalion, and seaborne vessels sunk by the enemy. German losses are unknown. Cherbourg was captured on June 26, but by this time the Germans had destroyed the port facilities, which were not brought back into full operation until September.

49°24'55.9"N 1°10'32.4"W – 2 Utah Beach, 50480 Sainte-Marie-du-Mont

There are numerous monuments and museums in the area that be of interest to you and your scouts.



AIRBORNE MUSEUM

Optional Checkpoint #5 – Airborne Museum

The **Airborne Museum (Musée Airborne)** is a French museum dedicated to the memory of American paratroopers of the 82nd and 101st airborne divisions who parachuted into Normandy on the night of June 5–6, 1944. The **museum** opened in 1964 with the help of donations from both residents and veterans. The **Museum** is located in Sainte-Mère-Église, in the La Manche region of Normandy, close to the beaches used for landing on D-Day. Sainte-Mère-Église became famous because of paratrooper John Steele whose parachute snagged on the belfry of the church on June 6, 1944, leaving him suspended in the air. The museum holds more than 10,000 items, including a WACO Glider and a C-47 cargo plane. The museum contains mostly American equipment, but there are some replicas of German military equipment from the period. There are at least a hundred uniformed dummies used to model uniforms and equipment of the period.

Hours:

May to August - 0900-1900

April & September - 0930-1830

October to March - 1000-1800

Closed in December and January except during Christmas Holidays.

The museum is closed in December 24th, 25th, 31st and January 1st.

Costs (as of March 2018):

Adult – 8.50€ Children (6-16) – 5€

Family (2 adult + 2 children) – Adults 8€ + Children 4€

Youth Groups – 4€ (groups of 15 or more), 1 free ticket per 10 paid tickets

Groups – 6€ per person (groups of 15 or more), 1 free ticket per 20 paid tickets

You are encouraged to visit the museum website to check on updated prices and hours before you arrive at <http://www.airborne-museum.org/en>.

49°24'31.0"N 1°18'55.1"W – 14 rue Eisenhower, 50480 Sainte-Mère-Église



OMAHA BEACH-NORMANDY, FRANCE
HISTORIC TRAIL

INVASION BEACHES

Optional Checkpoints #6, 7 & 8 – Other Invasion Beaches

In addition to Omaha and Utah Beaches, there were three other landing sights along the Normandy Coast. They were **Gold Beach**, **Juno Beach** and **Sword Beach**. Soldiers from the United Kingdom landed on **Gold** and **Sword** while Canadians landed on **Juno Beach**. While the fighting along these three beachheads were not as intense as the fighting on Omaha Beach, numerous Soldiers were wounded or killed during the invasion and subsequent fighting. At each beach are several museums and memorials. Highlights include the Landing and D-Day Museums at Gold Beach, the Croix de Lorraine and Juno Beach Center at Juno Beach and the Liberation of France Monument and Atlantic Wall Museum at Sword Beach.

Gold Beach

49°20'25.2"N 0°37'14.2"W – Place du 6 Juin 1944, 14117 Arromanches-les-Bains

Juno Beach

49°20'09.6"N 0°27'41.7"W – Voie des Français Libres, 14470 Courseulles-sur-Mer

Sword Beach

49°17'25.8"N 0°15'44.4"W – 23 Boulevard Aristide Briand, 14150 Ouistreham



PEGASUS BRIDGE

Optional Checkpoint #9 – Pegasus Bridge

On the night of 5 June 1944, a force of 181 men, led by Major John Howard, took off from RAF Tarrant Rushton in Dorset, southern England in six Horsa gliders to capture **Pegasus Bridge**, and also "Horsa Bridge", a few hundred yards to the east, over the Orne River. The force was composed of D Company, 2nd Battalion, Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry; 20 sappers of the Royal Engineers of 249 Field Company (Airborne); and men of the Glider Pilot Regiment. The object of this action was to prevent German armor from crossing the bridges and attacking the eastern flank of the landings at Sword Beach.

Five of the Ox and Bucks' gliders landed as close as 47 yards from their objectives at 16 minutes past midnight. The attackers poured out of their battered gliders, completely surprising the German defenders, and took the bridges within 10 minutes. They lost two men in the process, Lieutenant Den Brotheridge and Lance corporal Fred Greenhalgh.

Greenhalgh drowned in a nearby pond when his glider landed. Lieutenant Brotheridge was mortally wounded crossing the bridge in the first minutes of the assault and became the first member of the invading Allied armies to die as a result of enemy fire on D-Day. The Ox and Bucks were reinforced at 0300 by Lieutenant Colonel Pine-Coffin's 7th Parachute Battalion, and linked up with the beach landing forces with the arrival of Lord Lovat's Commandos.

49°14'31.0"N 0°16'21.3"W – Avenue du Major Howard, 14860 Ranville



OMAHA BEACH-NORMANDY, FRANCE
HISTORIC TRAIL

LA CAMBE GERMAN CEMETERY

Optional Checkpoint #10 – La Cambe German Cemetery

La Cambe is a military war grave cemetery, located close to Bayeux, France. Presently containing in excess of 21,000 German military personnel of World War II, it is maintained and managed by the German War Graves Commission. La Cambe was originally the site of a battlefield cemetery, established by the United States Army Graves Registration Service during the war, where American and German soldiers, sailors and airmen were buried in two adjacent fields.

Because of the pace of the war, the German war dead in Normandy were scattered over a wide area, many of them buried in isolated field graves - or small battlefield cemeteries. In the years following the war, the German War Graves Commission (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge) sought to establish six main German cemeteries in the Normandy area.

49°20'35.1"N 1°01'39.9"W – Les Noires Terres, 14230 La Cambe



BRITTANY AMERICAN CEMETERY

Optional Checkpoint #11 – Brittany American Cemetery

The **Brittany American Cemetery and Memorial** is located in Saint-James, Normandy, France, near the northeastern edge of Brittany. It contains the remains of 4,410 of World War II American soldiers, most of whom lost their lives in the Normandy and Brittany campaigns of 1944. Along the retaining wall of the memorial terrace are inscribed the names of 498 of the missing.

The **cemetery** lies among the hedgerows in rolling farm country in Normandy near the border with Brittany in France. It is one of fourteen permanent American World War II military cemetery memorials erected by the American Battle Monuments Commission on foreign soil.

The site was liberated on 2 August 1944 by the 8th Infantry Division; a temporary military cemetery was established on it three days later. After the war, when the temporary cemeteries were being disestablished by the American Graves Registration Service, the remains of American military dead whose next of kin had requested interment on foreign soil were moved from the temporary cemeteries to one of the permanent cemetery sites, usually the one closest to the temporary location.

The 4,410 American military dead buried in the **Brittany American Cemetery** lost their lives in the area of northwestern France extending from the beachhead westward to Brest and eastward to the Seine and represent 43 percent of the burials originally made in the region. They were interred there by the American Graves Registration Service in the distinctive grave patterns proposed by the cemetery's architect and approved by this Commission. Most of them died in the fighting in and around Saint-Lô.

Dedicated: July 20, 1956

Burials: 4,408

Missing in Action: 498

Acres: 28

Latin Crosses: 4,327

Stars of David: 81

Unknowns: 97

Medal of Honor Recipients: 2

48°31'11.1"N 1°18'05.2"W – Bel Orient, 50240 Montjoie-Saint-Martin



OMAHA BEACH-NORMANDY, FRANCE
HISTORIC TRAIL

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS
ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE



Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force!

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened. He will fight savagely.

But this is the year 1944! Much has happened since the Nazi triumphs of 1940-41. The United Nations have inflicted upon the Germans great defeats, in open battle, man-to-man. Our air offensive has seriously reduced their strength in the air and their capacity to wage war on the ground. Our Home Fronts have given us an overwhelming superiority in weapons and munitions of war, and placed at our disposal great reserves of trained fighting men. The tide has turned! The free men of the world are marching together to Victory!

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!

Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

LETTER FROM GENERAL EISENHOWER TO THE ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE



OMAHA BEACH-NORMANDY, FRANCE
HISTORIC TRAIL



AREA MAP

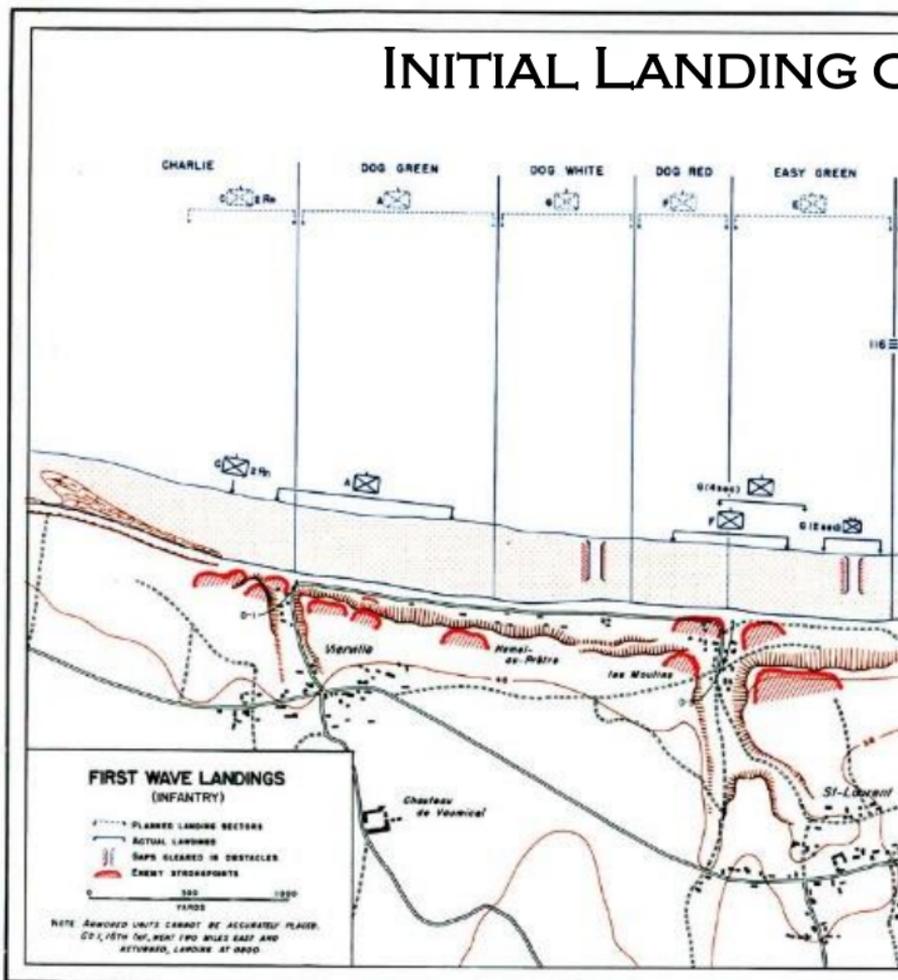


OMAHA BEACH TRAIL



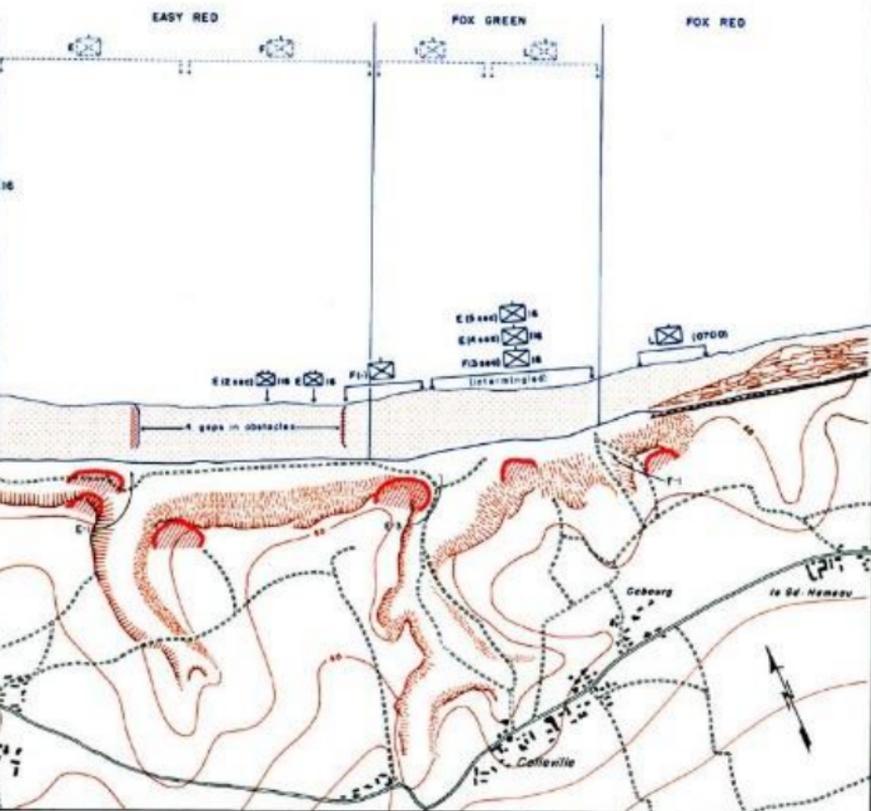
OMAHA BEACH-NORMANDY, FRANCE
HISTORIC TRAIL

INITIAL LANDING C



OMAHA BEACH-NORMANDY, FRANCE
HISTORIC TRAIL

ON OMAHA BEACH



BACKGROUND READINGS

D-Day, 6 June 1944, a date that altered the course of history, saw the largest amphibious invasion ever launched. Led by troops from the US, Great Britain and Canada, and involving Allied divisions from across the globe, the invasion of Occupied France, codenamed Operation Overlord, had been years in the planning and subject to the utmost secrecy.

Five beaches

The Americans, it was decided, would land on the two western beaches in Normandy, codenamed Utah and Omaha; while the British would attack via the middle and eastern beaches, codenamed Gold and Sword; and between these two, the Canadians would land at Juno.

At 5.50, on 6 June, the 1,738th day of the war, 138 Allied ships, positioned between three and thirteen miles out, began their tremendous bombardment of the German coastal defenses. Above them, one thousand RAF bombers attacked, followed in turn by one thousand planes of the USAAF. Between them, the aircrews flew 13,688 sorties over the course of D-Day alone.

From their ships, soldiers, weighed down with weapons and seventy pounds of equipment, scaled down scramble nets and into their flat-bottomed landing craft. It took over three hours for the vessels to traverse the eleven or so miles to the coast. The men, trembling with abject fear, shivering from the cold and suffering from severe seasickness, endured and held on as their tightly-packed vessels were buffeted by six-foot high waves and eighteen-miles per hour winds. At 6.30, the first US troops landed on Omaha and Utah beaches.



BACKGROUND READINGS

On all five landing spots, the most dangerous task fell to the men whose task it was to explode and neutralize the German mines littered across the beaches in order to clear a path for the first full wave of troops coming up directly behind them. The courage to attempt such a task is beyond imagination. The fatality rate was horrendously high, reaching 75 per cent.

Omaha Beach

The defenses around Omaha were formidable. Erwin Rommel's men had placed thousands of 'dragon's teeth' on the beach, designed to take out the base of landing craft, and topped with mines. Gun emplacements had the entire length of beach within their range. The naval bombardment and subsequent aerial bombardment although effective elsewhere had made little impact on Omaha. Ten landing craft were sunk. Men, leaping into water too deep, drowned, weighed down by their equipment.

The US soldiers, led by General Omar Bradley, facing the strongest and most experienced German troops from the 352nd Infantry Division, jumped from their landing craft into a barrage of gunfire. All but two of their specially-built swimming tanks were sunk, their crews trapped inside, depriving the advancing Americans covering fire. With Omaha beach offering little in the way of shelter or protection, casualties among the Americans were appallingly high. Many returned to the freezing waters and floated on their backs, keeping their noses above the waterline.



BACKGROUND READINGS

Among the second wave, landing an hour later, was photographer Robert Capa. Under relentless fire Capa managed to take 106 pictures. (On returning to the Life offices in London with the unprocessed films, a laboratory assistant accidentally destroyed all but eleven of Capa's photographs).

The congested beach at Omaha had become a killing field, littered with bodies, burning tanks and equipment. The noise of screams, gunfire and bombardment filled the air. Terrified men, sprinting, as best as they could across the expanse of beach, found a degree of cover at the base of the cliffs – if they managed to get that far; many did not.

Finally, at 8 a.m., as destroyers came close enough to pound and weaken the German defenses, sufficient numbers had congregated to begin the climb up the cliffs. By 11 a.m., a contingent broke out and captured the village of Vierville. Their colleagues, still pinned down on the beach and with the tide now coming in, were in danger of being pushed back to the sea. But the German soldiers, in maintaining their constant barrage, were close to exhaustion. Finally, at 2 p.m., the first beach exit was cleared. By four p.m., tanks and vehicles were able to move off the beach. By the end of the day, 34,000 troops had been landed on Omaha beach for the cost of 2,400 killed or wounded. D-Day had begun.



HISTORIC TRAIL QUIZ

1. Who commanded the Allied Expeditionary Force that oversaw the invasion of Normandy? _____
2. What was the code name of the Invasion of Normandy? _____
3. What day were the D-Day landings? _____
4. What were the 5 beaches named? _____
5. How many Medal of Honor recipients are buried at Normandy American Cemetery and name one? _____
6. How many sets of brothers are buried at Normandy? _____
7. What infantry divisions landed on Omaha Beach? _____
8. What German division defended Omaha Beach? _____
9. What are the 3 elements of the Les Braves monument on Omaha Beach? _____
10. Name 3 of the flags at the Omaha Beach Memorial? _____
11. What Ranger Battalion assaulted Pointe du Hoc? _____
12. What was the Ranger commander's name? _____
13. What time did the Rangers start climbing the cliffs? _____
14. How many Rangers were left at the end of the battle? _____
15. What languages are used on the monument at Pointe du Hoc? _____

Answers on page 31



BSA REQUIREMENTS

Completion of the Omaha Beach-Normandy Historic Trail may complete the following Requirements:

Cub Scouts:

Tiger:

My Tiger Jungle	Req 1
Tigers in the Wild	Req 1, 2, 4
Tiger Tales	Req 7

Wolf:

Paws on the Path	Req 1-5
Finding Your Way	Req 4

Bear:

Fur, Feathers, and Ferns	Req 1
Paws for Action	Req 2B

Webelos:

Webelos Walkabout	Req 1-6
-------------------	---------



Scouts BSA:

Tenderfoot:	Req 4d, 5a, 5b, 5c
Second Class:	Req 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 6c
First Class:	Req 4a, 4b



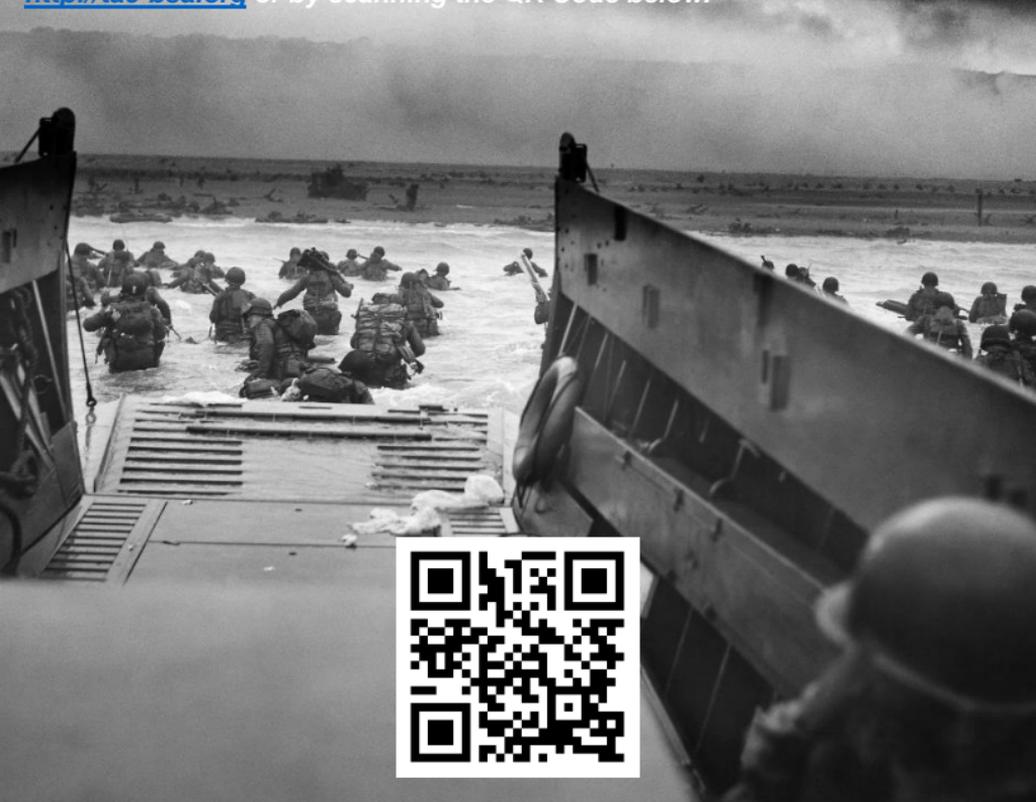
*Note: Requirements for the Citizenship in the Community, Citizenship in the Nation, Hiking, Orienteering, and American Heritage Merit Badges and the Cub Scout Outdoor Activity Award can be earned by completing this hike and learning about sites found on this hike.



OMAHA BEACH-NORMANDY, FRANCE
HISTORIC TRAIL

This Historic Trail was designed by members of the Transatlantic Council. Since the original trail guide, there have been significant changes to the trail as the area leading from the Cemetery to the beach has been closed. Despite this limitation, all the original stops are still on the trail.

Additional Historic Trails in the Transatlantic Council area can be found at <http://tac-bsa.org> or by scanning the QR Code below.



UPDATED 29 OCTOBER 2019