

D-Day: A Brief History

Since Nazi Germany forced the Allies out of France to Great Britain in the spring of 1940, plans were being made for a cross-Channel assault to retake the continent and defeat Hitler's Third Reich. By the spring of 1944 an elaborate plan—code-named Operation *Overlord*—was secretly in place to launch the attack. The Allies, led by General Dwight Eisenhower, faced an enemy determined to keep them from landing successfully anywhere along the western European coastline. To ensure against such a landing, Hitler ordered Field Marshal Rommel to complete the Atlantic Wall—a 2,400-mile fortification made up of concrete bunkers, barbed wire, tank ditches, landmines, fixed gun emplacements, and beach and underwater obstacles specially designed to rip out the bottoms of landing craft or blow them up before they reached the shore.

On the eve of June 5, 1944, 175,000 men, an armada of 5,333 ships and landing craft, 50,000 vehicles, and 11,000 planes sat in southern England, poised to attack secretly across the English Channel along a 50-mile stretch of the Normandy coast of France. This force was the largest amphibious assault in history and represented years of rigorous training, planning, and supplying. It also represented a previously unknown level of cooperation between nations—all struggling for a common goal. Because of highly intricate deception plans, Hitler and his staff believed that the Allies would be attacking at the Pas-de-Calais, the narrowest point between Great Britain and France. But the Atlantic Wall was strong at Normandy, too.

In the early morning hours of June 6, thousands of Allied paratroopers and glider troops landed silently behind enemy lines, securing key points on the flanks of the invasion area. As the dawn lit the Normandy coastline the Allies began their landings, traveling to the beaches in small landing craft lowered from the decks of larger ships waiting in the Channel. The plan called for landings at five beaches code-named *Utah*, *Omaha*, *Gold*, *Juno*, and *Sword*. By nightfall nearly all 175,000 men were ashore at a cost of 4,900 Allied casualties. Hitler's vaunted Atlantic Wall had fallen in less than one day. The beaches were secure, but it took many weeks before the Allies could fight their way out of the heavily defended Normandy countryside and almost a full year to reach and defeat Germany in the spring of 1945.

Operation *Overlord* was not just another great battle, but the true turning point of WWII in Europe. While the US and Great Britain had earlier engaged the Axis powers on the periphery of the continent (North Africa, Sicily, Italy), it was not until the invasion at Normandy that they struck the blow that would signal the beginning of the end for Hitler and his Nazis. Had the invasion failed (*Eisenhower was prepared to read a statement over the radio taking full responsibility if Allied troops been repulsed from the beaches*), Hitler would have been able to pull troops from his now-secure Western Front to strengthen his Eastern Front against the Soviet Union. A second Allied invasion into France would have taken years to plan, supply, and assemble. Meanwhile Hitler would have further strengthened his Atlantic Wall, his newly developed V-1 flying bombs would continue to rain down on England from launching pads across the Channel, and the Nazis' *Final Solution* against European Jews might well have succeeded completely.

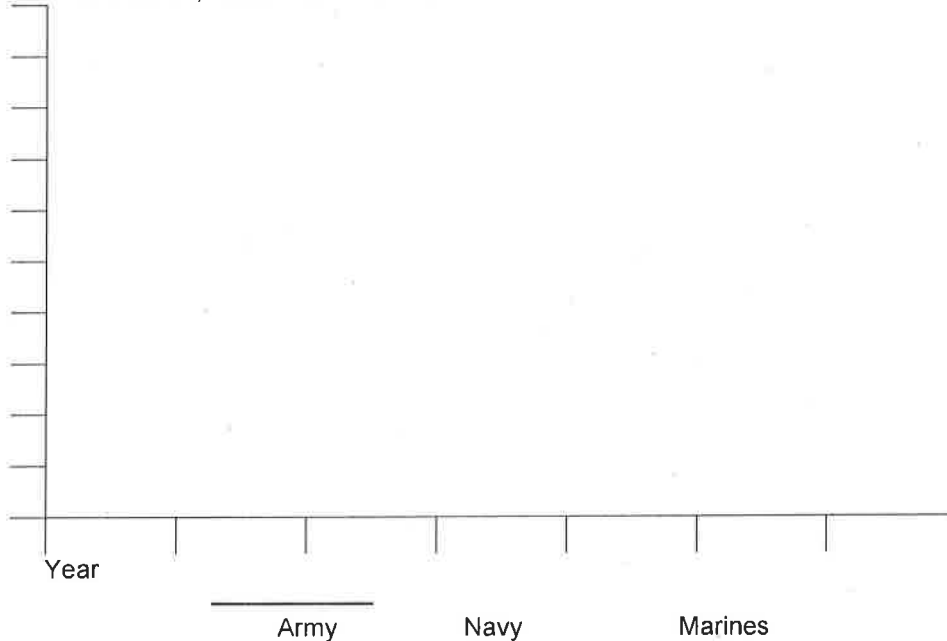
WWII by the Numbers
Charting and Graphing D-Day and WWII Data

1. On a line graph below, fill in both axes and plot and label the growth of each branch of the U.S. military during World War II. Use the type of lines shown for each branch. Then answer the questions below.

U.S. Active Military Personnel (1939-1945)

Year	Army	Navy	Marines	Total
1939	189,839	125,202	19,432	334,473
1940	269,023	160,997	28,345	458,365
1941	1,462,315	284,427	54,359	1,801,101
1942	3,075,608	640,570	142,613	3,858,791
1943	6,994,472	1,741,750	308,523	9,044,745
1944	7,994,750	2,981,365	475,604	11,451,719
1945	8,267,958	3,380,817	474,680	12,123,445

Number of Soldiers, Sailors and Marines



- A. What was the trend in the size of the U.S. military between 1939 and 1945?
- B. What year saw the largest increase of military personnel and what event(s) brought about this increase?
- C. From the data in this graph, what branch of service do you predict had the highest casualty rate during World War II?

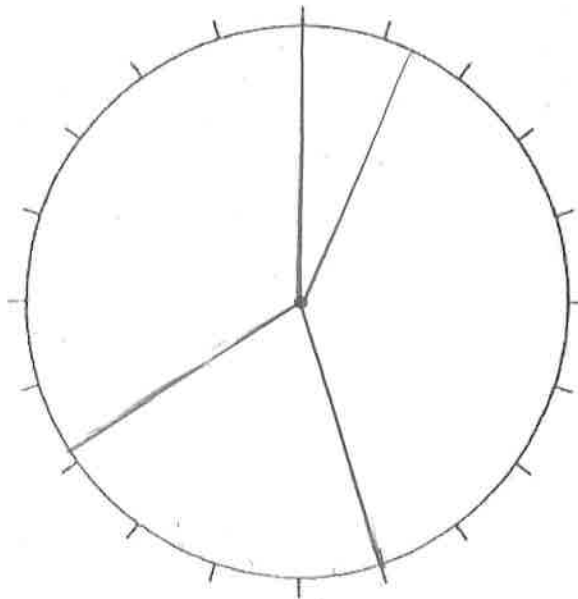
2. Use these statistics from June 6, 1944—D-Day—to fill in and label the percentages of each country's military force in Normandy on the pie chart. Then answer the questions below.

D-Day Combatants

Country	Number of Soldiers on D-Day	Percentage
*United States	95,000	34%
*Great Britain	60,000	21%
*Canada	20,000	7%
Germany	105,000	38%

*Allies

5%



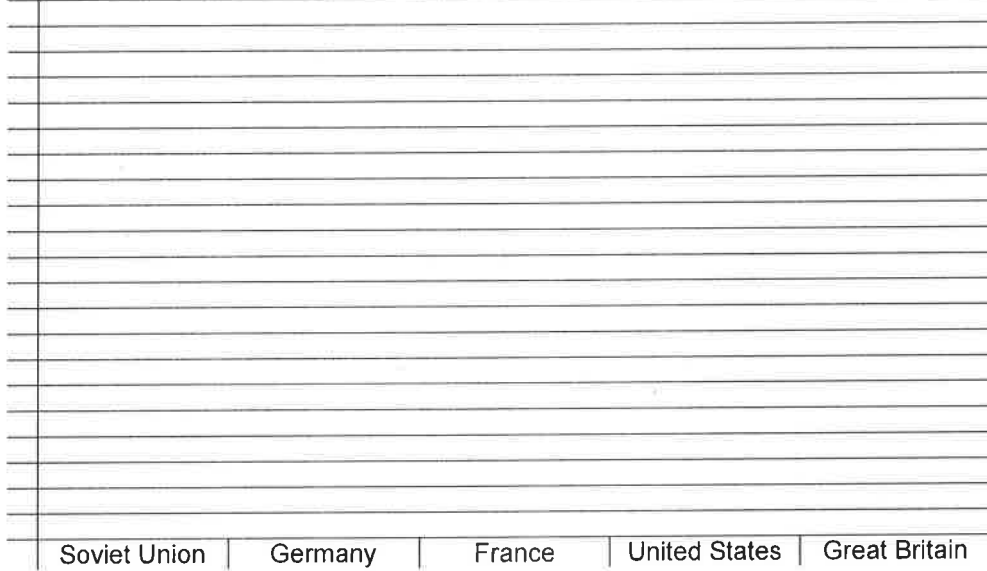
- What country had the most troops in Normandy on D-Day?
- What percentage of the troops at D-Day were Allied troops?
- Why did the Allied commanders think it was necessary to attack with such a large number of soldiers?

3. Use the following statistics of WWII deaths to complete a bar graph. Label both axes. Use one bar per country and be sure to separate the number of military and civilian deaths for each country, as shown below. Answer the questions that follow.

Casualties of World War II

Country	Total Deaths	% of Pre-war Population	Military Deaths	Civilian Deaths
USSR	24,000,000	13.88%	8,800,000-10,700,000	13,300,000-15,200,000
Germany	6,600,000 - 8,800,000	8-10.5%	5,533,000	1,067,000-3,267,000
France	567,600	1.35%	217,600	350,000
United States	418,500	0.32%	416,800	1,700
Great Britain	450,700	0.94%	383,600	67,100

Number of Casualties



- A. Which countries had more civilian deaths than military deaths?
- B. What does this chart tell you about the consequences of war and the decisions by leaders to go to war?