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# *Backgrounder*

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## **D-Day**

By the spring of 1944, Germany had occupied much of Western Europe for almost four years. With the German and the Soviet Union forces locked in bloody combat on the Eastern Front, the Allies sought to relieve some of the pressure on the Soviets by opening another front in Western Europe and beginning their push to liberate the continent from Nazi rule.

Following the failed Dieppe Raid in August 1942, the Allies took the time to carefully plan a massive assault on occupied France. Normandy, a region in the northern part of the country, was chosen as the landing point. In the lead up to D-Day, the Allies leaked false information to German intelligence, leading the enemy to expect the impending assault would come in the Calais region of France.

The Allies also created new amphibious tanks, portable docking facilities and other technological developments such as pipelines designed to carry fuel from England to Normandy under the sea to ensure their forces could land successfully and be properly supplied as they pushed inland.

Initially June 5, 1944, was chosen as D-Day, but poor weather forced the Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, to push the operation to the next day. Prior to dawn on June 6, 1944, Allied paratroopers kicked off the assault by jumping into France to disrupt German communications and capture key positions to limit the arrival of enemy reinforcements on the Normandy coast.

The Allied D-Day fleet was composed of roughly 7,000 vessels of all types, with combat vessels shelling German positions. Nearly 4,000 Allied bombers and some 3,700 fighter / fighter bombers swept enemy warplanes from the skies over Normandy and attacked beach defences and inland targets.

By the end of D-Day, Canadian troops had secured Juno Beach, while American forces had also established themselves at Omaha Beach and Utah Beach. British forces also successfully came ashore, with help from French forces, at Gold Beach and Sword Beach.