
The Round Tablette

Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)

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Welcome to the first 2014-2015 meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table. Tonight's speaker is John Nelson Rickard, author of the newly released *Advance and Destroy*. He is joined by combat veterans to discuss the British and Canadian landings at Normandy.

Americans tend to think of D-Day, June 6, 1944 in terms of Omaha Beach and *Saving Private Ryan*, but the Normandy landings (OPERATION NEPTUNE) were an Allied affair. The British, Canadians, and a host of other countries were present and bled and died. Americans landed on only two of the five beaches on that foggy June morning; the two most western beaches, code-named Omaha and Utah. The British, Canadians and the other Allies were divided among the three other beaches: Sword (the eastern-most), Juno, and Gold (the western one closest the Americans).

As the planning staff began assembling, British commandos and Canadian infantry launched a trial run invasion at Dieppe (OPERATION JUBILEE) on 19 August 1942 to learn about amphibious landings. Expecting 1,500 German troops, they encountered over 5,000 and were soundly defeated and the survivors taken prisoner. The “lesson” of Dieppe was that seizure of a port on invasion day was unfeasible, and that beach assaults would be the basis of the great invasion of France. The amphibious landings over the next two years in the European theater (OPERATION TORCH and OPERATION HUSKY) and in the Pacific theater provided some experiential basis for Normandy (although the European theater planners discounted the experiences in the Pacific, ignoring most of those lessons).

The three British and Canadian beaches were grouped together as the British 2nd Army, commanded by British Lt. General Miles Dempsey. His objective was to take the French city of Caen. Because it was the main transportation hub for Normandy, Caen was a choke-point blocking Allied movement into the

interior and German movement of reinforcements to the beaches.

The overall Naval Task Forces commander was British Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay. US Admiral Alan G. Kirk commanded the western (American beaches) task force, and British Admiral Sir Philip Vian command the eastern British-Canadian task force. The navies protected the landing zones and provided naval gun fire support to the landed troops. The only notable German naval activity during the invasion occurred when three German “E” boats emerged from the Allied smoke screen, fired a salvo of torpedoes that sank the Norwegian destroyer *Svenner*, then left unscathed.

Sword Beach, the smallest, eastern-most beach, stretched five miles from Lion-sur-Mer on the west to Ouistreham, at the mouth of the Orne River, and was only 9 miles to Caen. The initial landings went smoothly with low casualties (compared to Omaha Beach), but as the British forces advanced inland, the need to clear the German mine fields on the beach congested movement. Fortunately, 21 of 25 DD tanks (Duplex Drive “Donald Duck” Tanks) made it ashore and were able to provide cover for the infantry against the heavily defended areas behind the beachhead. Sword saw the only significant German counterattack on 6 June, around 4:00 PM, when the 21st Panzer Division pushed all the way from near Caen to the beach between Lion-Sur-Mer and Luc-sur-Mer. By the end of day, the German 716th Infantry Division was almost entirely destroyed, many of the Germans fighting to the death.

Juno Beach was a Canadian show, specifically the 3rd Infantry Division. For many of the soldiers, the memory of the disaster at Dieppe was fresh and built apprehension. Juno Beach stretched for approximately six miles on either side of the river Seulles and the small fishing port of Courseulles-sur-Mer. Their objectives were to hook up with the British forces to take Caen and to secure the Carpiquet airfield. Juno Beach had natural off shore reefs and the landings were pushed back for high tide to clear these barriers, but the German obstacles and mines slowed the Canadian advance, and thirty percent of the landing craft were destroyed or damaged. Because of

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congestion on the beach and tough house to house fighting in Courseulles-sur-Mer, the Canadians were only got within sight of the Carpiquet airfield by D-Day nightfall.

Gold Beach, five miles wide at the center of the Normandy landings, included the coastal towns of La Rivière and La Hamel, and, on the western end of the beach, the small port of Arromanches. The British objective here was to cut the Caen-Bayeux Highway, link up with the Americans at Omaha Beach to the west at Port-en-Bessin, and link up to the east with the Canadians. By the end of June 6th the British 50th Infantry Division had hooked up with the Canadians six miles inland but not with the Americans from Omaha Beach. The No.47 (Royal Marines) Commandos took the small town of Port-en-Bessin the next day.

The initial assaults on the three beaches went well. The Canadians and the British on Gold linked up and moved inland, but were unable to seize the Caen-Bayeux Highway and the Carpiquet airfield. The biggest failure of D-Day was the failure to take Caen as scheduled. That night, The 12th Panzer SS Division (*Hitler Jugend*) moved into place. It took the British-Canadian forces a month to take the city. Official British histories attribute this failure to unexpectedly high tides, congestion on shore, the strength of German opposition, and a lack of urgency.

Over the next month, the American troops moved west toward St. Lô and Cherbourg, while the British and Canadians moved southeast toward Caen. The Germans Atlantic Wall had been breached.

Further Readings:

Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire* (Univ. of Toronto: 2104).
 Carlos D'Estes, *Decision at Normandy: The Real Story of Montgomery and the Allied Campaign* (London: Penguin Books, 2004).
 Ken Ford, *Sword Beach: Battle Zone Normandy* (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishers, 2004).
 Ted Barris, *Juno: Canadians at D-Day: June 6, 1944* (Markham, ON: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2004).
 David Bercuson, *Maple Leaf against the Axis* (Red Deer, ON: Red Deer Press, 2004).
 Lance Goddard, *D-Day: Juno Beach: Canada's 24 Hours of Destiny* (Toronto: Dundun Press, 2004).
 Joseph & David Rogers, *D-Day Beach Force: The Men Who Turned Chaos Into Order* (Gloucestershire, UK: The History Press, 2012).

Announcements:

Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - Sept. 16, 2014 – *Atlanta Campaign* - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
 St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - Sept. 29, 2014 – Antietam - 715-386-1268 – rossandhaines@comcast.net
 Rochester WWII History Round Table –507-280-9970; www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org

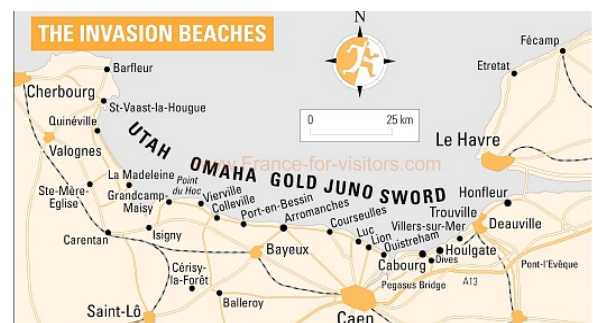
See our programs on YouTube at <http://youtube.com/ww2hrt>

Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
 Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717
 CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafmn.org 651-455-6942
 Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523
 Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org
 Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.
 World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>

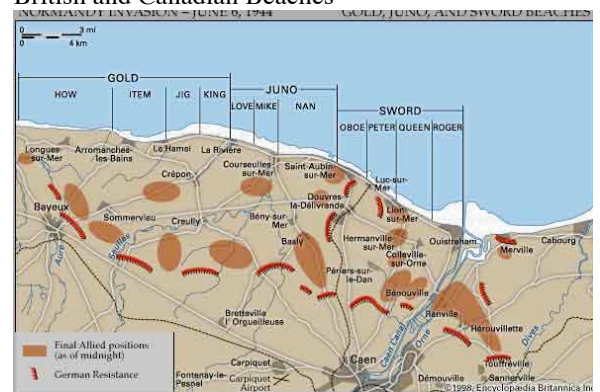
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Round Table Schedule 2014 - 2015

- 11 Sept. British-Canadian Beaches at D-Day
- 2 Oct. Glider Operations (note day change)
- 23 Oct. Thai-Burma Death Railroad
- 13 Nov. Deutsch Lecture: The OSS
- 11 Dec. Christmas at Bastogne
- 8 Jan. Myth of the German Offensive
- 12 Feb. Italian Struggle
- 12 Mar. Logistics of War
- 26 Mar. Return to the Philippines
- 9 Apr. Air War in the Mediterranean
- 14 May Retrospective: Goals of WW2 Leaders



British and Canadian Beaches



Areas of German Resistance, Allied positions at 2400 on 6 June 1944



Canadian Troops Landing on D-Day