

## What are the values and limitations of the PC game 'Company of Heroes' to the Historian studying D-Day?



*US troops landing at Omaha*

<http://www.history.army.mil/images/Reference/normandy/pics/CG-2343.jpg>

*"This is not only the greatest combined operation of history, but in all its aspect it is the greatest united effort ever to be undertaken."*

A special correspondent of 'The Times' at an English Port, June 5 1944

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## **A. Plan of the Investigation**

This investigation focuses on the D-Day Landings and how the events surrounding Operation Overlord are depicted in the PC game 'Company of Heroes.' By evaluating the values and limitations of 'Company of Heroes,' in contrast with other sources, such as archives from 'The Times' newspaper, the Headquarters 1st Infantry Division Diary of Operations and 'The Longest Day' by Cornelius Ryan among others, I seek to analyse whether this PC game would be useful to portray D-Day to the historian studying the topic.

I have divided my analysis section into four subsections. The first focuses on the significance of the topic, then and today; the second section focuses on the development of the operation; the third section focuses on the forces present during D-Day and the fourth section focuses on the armament.

The reason why I chose this type of analysis is that my passion for history began by playing historically based games.

*(152 words)*

## B. Summary of Evidence

### Introduction

On June 6, 1944 the most important anecdote in the London 'The Times' was that the "city [of Rome was] now occupied by Allies,"<sup>1</sup> the Fifth Army, Gen. Alexander's troops and the British Eighth Army, were pushing upwards from the Mediterranean. A few columns to the right, "between 500 and 750 American heavy bombers"<sup>2</sup> had bombed the "military installations near Boulougne and Calais."<sup>3</sup> June 6 1944 is nowadays associated with the invasion of "Hitler's European fortress"<sup>4</sup> at Normandy; however the Allied Command had been very careful to keep this a secret, to avoid filtrations to the Germans, a secret that had been kept for more than 6 months and that had turned from an idea into the largest seaborne invasion of all times. "In November, 1943, Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt met together in Teheran, Iran, to discuss military strategy and post-war Europe."<sup>5</sup> Stalin had requested a Western front and promises had been made for "landing troops in Western Europe in 1942"<sup>6</sup>, and so at the turn of 1944 the Big Three agreed that a Western Front would be opened in the spring of 1944<sup>7</sup>- the code name for the invasion of northwest Europe was Operation Overlord.

### The Development of the Invasion

Operation Overlord (was "postponed...from 5th June to 6th June"<sup>8</sup> due to suboptimal meteorological conditions) consisted in the division of the Norman beaches into 5 landing zones, Utah, Omaha (US objectives), Gold, Juno and Sword (British objectives).<sup>9</sup> There were 2 phases to the invasion, firstly the airborne operations "to capture key objectives, such as bridges and roads in order to reduce the enemy's capability of a counterattack"<sup>10</sup>, taken ahead by the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions assigned to the west of Utah Beach and the British 6th Airborne Division assigned to the eastern flank of the beaches and the second phase which was the amphibious assault, it involved more than 5,000 ships. At Omaha, 25 minutes after the hour H, the "entire first wave [was] foundered,"<sup>11</sup> nevertheless the first wave managed to survive although in some companies up to "half their number were casualties"<sup>12</sup>.

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1 The Times Archives June 6, 1944 Available at: <http://www.archive.timesonline.co.uk> Retrieved on 23/09/08

2 Ibid

3 Ibid

4 BBC Broadcast of June 6 1944 Available at:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/player/nol/newsid\\_6570000/newsid\\_6572500/6572595.stm?bw=nb&mp=wm&news=1&bbews=1](http://news.bbc.co.uk/player/nol/newsid_6570000/newsid_6572500/6572595.stm?bw=nb&mp=wm&news=1&bbews=1) Retrieved on 23/09/08

5 <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWteheran.htm> Retrieved on 23/09/08

6 Ibid

7 Churchill, Winston (1948). The Second World War book 5, Closing the Ring, Chapter 16, paragraph 1

8 <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/normandy/nor-pam.htm> Retrieved on 23/09/08

9 See Appendix 1

10 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Overlord](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Overlord) Retrieved on 23/09/08

11 Headquarters 1st Infantry Division Diary of Operations Appendix 4

12 Omaha Beachhead p47. Historical Division, War Department (20 September 1945) Available at: <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/100-11/ch3.htm> Retrieved on 23/09/08

### **Forces Present**

Around “10 divisions of the USA, UK and Canada were there representing roughly 156,000 men with around 10,000 casualties on D-Day.”<sup>13</sup> The “operation... was led by General Dwight D. Eisenhower”<sup>14</sup>

On the German side, on D-Day “6 infantry divisions, representing 30,000 men, were defending the first line in Normandy with around 9,000 casualties on D-Day.”<sup>15</sup>

Rommel, “the most popular German general of the Second World War,”<sup>16</sup> led the Germans.

### **Armament**

On one hand the Allies required naval and air superiority to make sure that the Invasion was successful. “15,000 aircraft were present in this operation, 5,049 fighters, 3,467 heavy bombers, 1,645 medium and light bombers and 698 combat planes for example to through torpedoes; 2,345 transport planes and 2,591 gliders. The Allied Armada had more than 5,000 ships many of these to transport and disembark the troops but also 8 battleships, 22 cruisers, 93 destroyers, 159 minor units and 255 minesweepers.”<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, on D-Day the German Forces had “128 fighters, 190 bombers and 115 transport planes.”<sup>18</sup> Many of the air units had been “destined to the Eastern Front and the defense of the Reich as a result of the allied bombardments on Germany.”<sup>19</sup>

"The Kriegsmarine had 3 destroyers, 33 submarines and 38 minor units which did not represent a sufficient force to repel the Allied Armada.”<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless “Erwin Rommel had [prepared the beaches full of] traps which he called 'my inventions',”<sup>21</sup> as well as laying millions of mines.

(595 words)

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**13** *Casualties and Soldiers on D-Day* contrast of:

Ryan, Cornelius (2005) *The Longest Day*. RBA (ISBN-13: 978-84-473-4605-9) p.VIII-IX and Churchill's Speech on D-Day Available at: <http://www.winston-churchill-leadership.com/speech-d-day.html> and

Retrieved on 23/09/08 and

History Educational Website: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWdday.htm> Retrieved on 23/09/08 and

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normandy\\_Landings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normandy_Landings), Retrieved on 23/09/08 and

Going, Chris and Jones, Alun (2004). *D-Day: The Lost Evidence*. Crecy Publishing (ISBN: 0859790975).

**14** Going, Chris and Jones, Alun (2004). *D-Day: The Lost Evidence*. Crecy Publishing (ISBN: 0859790975).

**15** Same as footnote 13

**16** Going, Chris and Jones, Alun (2004). *D-Day: The Lost Evidence*. Crecy Publishing (ISBN: 0859790975).

**17** Ryan, Cornelius (2005) *The Longest Day*. RBA (ISBN-13: 978-84-473-4605-9) p.XI

**18** Ibid

**19** Ibid

**20** Ibid

**21** Ibid

## C. Evaluation of Sources

### Source 1- Appendix 3

The values of this source are in terms of its origins that this PC game comes from one of the best gaming companies worldwide “posted 12th consecutive year of revenue growth with record net sales of more than \$1 billion”<sup>22</sup> in 2007 allowing this company to revert its revenues on quality products and so being able to focus on minute details of realism. In terms of its purposes, this source seeks to represent the combat experience on D-Day in its purest realism in order to compete with other game producers.

This source has limitations. In terms of origins, THQ is a private company which seeks economical profits, selling more copies of the game, ie. making the game addictive and enjoyable rather than an educational organization seeking an objective image of the event. There are also limitations concerning the purposes of this source. The bias of the company is seen in the ruthlessness with which Nazi soldiers finish off the dying man dramatizing the heroism, and thus the title of the game, ‘Company of Heroes’ and concentrating on the amphibious assault on D-Day and not on the parachutes, although these units are available in future missions.

### Source 2

Source 2 is the book written by Cornelius Ryan, ‘The Longest Day.’

The strengths of this source in terms of its origins is that the author is an established military historian<sup>23</sup> and in terms of purpose, his book is in the form of a narrative novel with many facts and statistics as a result of his “ten years of painstaking research and...more than 1000 interviews before finishing The Longest Day.”<sup>24</sup>

However, the weaknesses of this source in terms of its origins, this source is based mainly on interviews which are not always fully reliable and the source is in Spanish which involves more room for error in the process of translation, for example the word ‘foundered’ was translated to the equivalent of ‘destroyed’ when talking about the first wave at Omaha, therefore the idea conveyed is completely different; and in terms of purpose, this book focuses on the facts of the operation rather than giving an analysis, as the author proclaimed, “What I write about is not war but the courage of man,”<sup>25</sup> This source is in this aspect not as useful because the game is about strategy instead of a single soldier’s story, as with other sources<sup>26</sup>.

(400 words)

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22 [http://media.corporate-ir.net/media\\_files/irol/96/96376/reports/THQ\\_07AR.pdf](http://media.corporate-ir.net/media_files/irol/96/96376/reports/THQ_07AR.pdf)

23 Other books written by Cornelius Ryan in chronological order:

- 1946. - Star-Spangled Mikado. - with Frank Kelley. - New York, New York: R.M. McBride. OCLC 1142015
- 1950. - MacArthur: Man of Action. - with Frank Kelley. - Garden City, New York: Doubleday. - OCLC: 1516843
- 1957. - One Minute to Ditch!. - New York: Ballentine Books. - OCLC 24116050
- 1959. - The Longest Day: June 6, 1944 D-Day. - Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications. ISBN 0671622285
- 1966. - The Last Battle. - New York, New York: Simon and Schuster. - ISBN 0450044335
- 1974. - A Bridge Too Far. - New York, New York: Simon and Schuster. - ISBN 0671217925
- 1979. - A Private Battle. - Posthumously with Kathryn Morgan Ryan. - New York, New York: Simon and Schuster. - ISBN 0671225944

24 <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,908994,00.html>

25 Ibid

26 Ambrose, Stephen E. (1994) D-Day June, 6 1944: The Climatic Battle for World War II. Simon & Schuster (ISBN: 0671884034) is also a book in the form of a novel on the experiences of individual men instead of the strategy. Authors seem to write more about the personal side of the conflict perhaps because it sells more copies and so sometimes we must question whether all of this is true, in the case of Ambrose, there is a great controversy on plagiarism in his books.

## D. Analysis

### **Importance of the investigation in its historical context**

The significance of D-Day at the time was the crucial turning point in the development of the war. D-Day is one of those episodes in history which provides many lessons for us now, because as a special correspondent of 'The Times' at an English Port, June 5 said, "This is not only the greatest combined operation of history, but in all its aspect it is the greatest united effort ever to be undertaken."<sup>27</sup>

However it is the way in which these lessons are transmitted to the new generations that interests this investigation, the significance today is that our technology allows us to transmit these experiences in new ways for example videogames.

### **Critical Analysis of the Evidence**

#### ***The Development of the Invasion***

In the game we are shown that the invasion was the amphibious assault on the beaches of Omaha. In some aspects this is accurate, the Able Company, the company which the game focuses on, did fight at Omaha beach.<sup>28</sup> In other aspects it is inaccurate the parachutists which were "dropped on the flanks of the beaches"<sup>29</sup> are mentioned but there is no mission in which you can experience what happened. The reason the game is inaccurate is that since Operation Overlord was such a gigantic project it would be very difficult to thoroughly deal with every aspect of the invasion.

#### ***Forces Present***

In the game we are shown the D-Day landing at Omaha through the Able Company, the first wave is almost destroyed and we have to make sure that the remnant forces and the second wave makes it. In some aspects this is accurate "Company A of the 116th was due to land at Omaha"<sup>30</sup>; however in other aspects it is inaccurate, the Able Company landed only with the first wave and although the "entire first wave [was] foundered"<sup>31</sup> it managed to survive even if, as the 'Omaha Beachhead' book "estimates of its casualties range as high as two thirds."<sup>32</sup> This source is reliable since it was written after the war by the US War Department to analyse tactics even if at times the lack of preciseness and too many 'estimates' only help to give us an overview.

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27 The Times, June 7 1944 Available at <http://archive.timesonline.co.uk> Retrieved on 23/09/08

28 Omaha Beachhead p42. Historical Division, War Department (20 September 1945) Available at <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/100-11/ch3.htm> Retrieved on 23/09/08

29 Ryan, Cornelius, The Longest Day. RBA (ISBN-13: 978-84-473-4605-9) p.IX

30 Omaha Beachhead p45. Historical Division, War Department (20 September 1945) Available at <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/100-11/ch3.htm> Retrieved on 23/09/08

31 Headquarters 1st Infantry Division Diary of Operations see Appendix 4

32 Omaha Beachhead p47. Historical Division, War Department (20 September 1945) Available at <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/100-11/ch3.htm> Retrieved on 23/09/08

## *Armament*

In the game we, the Allies, have access to infantry units, some air support, paratrooper support, commandoes, engineers, and ‘Sherman’ tanks; meanwhile the Germans have access to diverse armament such as Panzers, a special unit similar to the commandos, the normal infantry and anti-tank weapons but no air support.

In some aspects this is accurate for “the allies [in terms of the Air Force] had air superiority”<sup>33</sup>; in terms of the Army, “infantry, commandos (Rangers), engineers and tank divisions”<sup>34</sup> were in the first wave. As for the Germans, it is true that “they had no air superiority”<sup>35</sup> and this is clearly represented in the game since the Germans have no air units.

In other aspects it is inaccurate; the scale of the forces both for the Allies and the Germans is much smaller than the real forces present (“156,000”<sup>36</sup>). For the Allies, there is little air support and no naval support having in mind “the enormous superiority they [the Allies] had.”<sup>37</sup> As for the Germans, they had no units of experience because the divisions deployed in Normandy (15th and 7th) had, as shown in the appendix 2, too many “limited employment divisions”<sup>38</sup> many were old men and young children since all the more able men were at the Eastern Front. However we need to bear in mind that, although this map was done by the military to offer help to the troops landing and was not a tool of propaganda, this map was probably a conjecture when it was made since the allies could not know precisely the state of the enemy troops, therefore I believe they assumed that all the valuable men were in the Eastern Front.

The reason the game is inaccurate is firstly, in the scale of the forces, the game would require better computers so it would be less accessible implying less profits made. As for the lack of experience in the German forces, there are different levels of difficulty to choose from, therefore imposing a smaller artificial intelligence onto the German side would not have any effect when the difficulty changed.

*(718 words)*

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**33** Ryan, Cornelius, *The Longest Day*. RBA (ISBN-13: 978-84-473-4605-9) p.XI claims that there were “15,000 aircraft were present in this operation, 5,049 fighters, 3,467 heavy bombers, 1,645 medium and light bombers and 698 combat planes for example to through torpedoes; 2,345 transport planes and 2,591 gliders

**34** Omaha Beachhead p42. Historical Division, War Department (20 September 1945) Available at <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/100-11/ch3.htm> Retrieved on 23/09/08

**35** Ryan, Cornelius (2005) *The Longest Day*. RBA (ISBN-13: 978-84-473-4605-9) p.XI claims that the Germans had “128 fighters, 190 bombers and 115 transport planes.”

**36** Contrast of:

Ryan, Cornelius *The Longest Day*. RBA (ISBN-13: 978-84-473-4605-9) p.VIII-IX and Churchill's Speech on D-Day Available at: <http://www.winston-churchill-leadership.com/speech-d-day.html> Retrieved on 23/09/08 and

History Educational Website: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWdday.htm> Retrieved on 23/09/08 and

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normandy\\_Landings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normandy_Landings), Retrieved on 23/09/08 and

Going, Chris and Jones, Alun (2004). *D-Day: The Lost Evidence*. Crecy Publishing (ISBN: 0859790975).

**37** Ryan, Cornelius (2005) *The Longest Day*. RBA (ISBN-13: 978-84-473-4605-9) p.XI

**38** Appendix 2

## **E. Conclusion**

In conclusion, 'Company of Heroes fails to represent the events on D-Day; however this is rather due to the omission of the other fragments of Operation Overlord, such as the airborne landings, rather than the inaccuracy of the facts presented, since the game only focuses on the Able Company landing at Omaha. Therefore the historical events are well illustrated and the game acts as a source which gives a better spatial image to the historian studying D-Day. This analysis leads on to a major historical debate, 'Should we give up truth to attract the youth?' I would argue that the answer to this question should be a tentative "yes". In my case, the passion that I have for history began this way and although we might not get the entire picture, this gives us an incentive too read further into the subject.

*(135 words)*

## **F. List of Sources**

### **BOOKS:**

Ambrose, Stephen E. (1994) *D-Day June, 6 1944: The Climatic Battle for World War II*. Simon & Schuster (ISBN: 0671884034).

Churchill, Winston (1948). *The Second World War book 5, Closing the Ring*, Chapter 16, paragraph 1

Going, Chris and Jones, Alun (2004). *D-Day: The Lost Evidence*. Crecy Publishing (ISBN: 0859790975).

Ryan, Cornelius (2005) *The Longest Day*. RBA (ISBN-13: 978-84-473-4605-9)

### **ELECTRONIC BOOKS:**

**Omaha Beachhead Historical Division, War Department (20 September, 1945)**

Available at: <http://www.army.mil/cmh/books/wwii/100-11/ch3.htm>

**Overview of Operation Overlord**

<http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/normandy/nor-pam.htm>

### **DOCUMENTS:**

**Headquarters 1st Infantry Division Diary of Operations on June 6 1944**

### **RADIO BROADCASTS:**

**BBC Radio Broadcast on 6 June 1944**

Available at :

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/player/nol/newsid\\_6570000/newsid\\_6572500/6572595.stm?bw=nb&mp=wm&news=1&bbcws=1](http://news.bbc.co.uk/player/nol/newsid_6570000/newsid_6572500/6572595.stm?bw=nb&mp=wm&news=1&bbcws=1)

### **WEBSITES:**

**Archives from 'The Times newspaper**

6 June 1944

[www.archive.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.archive.timesonline.co.uk)

7 June 1944

[www.archive.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.archive.timesonline.co.uk)

**Detailed information on the Normandy Campaign by the US Army**

<http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/normandy/nor-pam.htm>

**Information on the Teheran Conference**

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWteheran.htm>

Sample History Internal Assessment by student at IST via [www.activehistory.co.uk](http://www.activehistory.co.uk)

**Operation Overlord**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Overlord](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Overlord)

**Normandy Landings**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normandy\\_Landings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normandy_Landings)

**D-Day Spartacus**

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWdday.htm>

**D-Day Museum FAQ**

<http://www.ddaymuseum.co.uk/faq.htm#overlord>

**Churchill's speech to the nation on 6 June 1944**

<http://www.winston-churchill-leadership.com/speech-d-day.html>

**Information on the game producers**

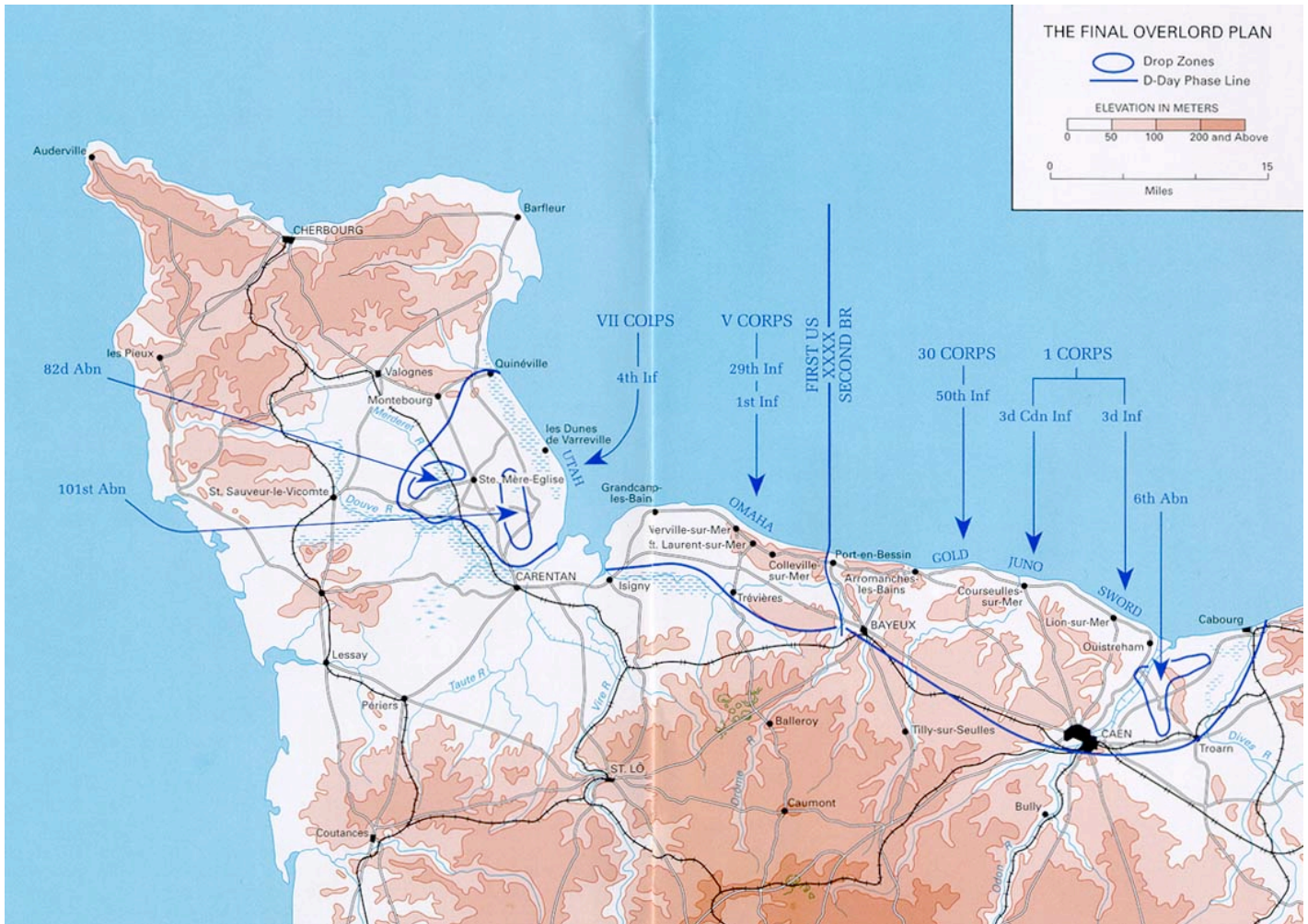
[http://media.corporate-ir.net/media\\_files/irol/96/96376/reports/THQ\\_07AR.pdf](http://media.corporate-ir.net/media_files/irol/96/96376/reports/THQ_07AR.pdf)

**Information on Cornelius Ryan**

<http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,908994,00.html>

# G. Appendices

## Appendix 1

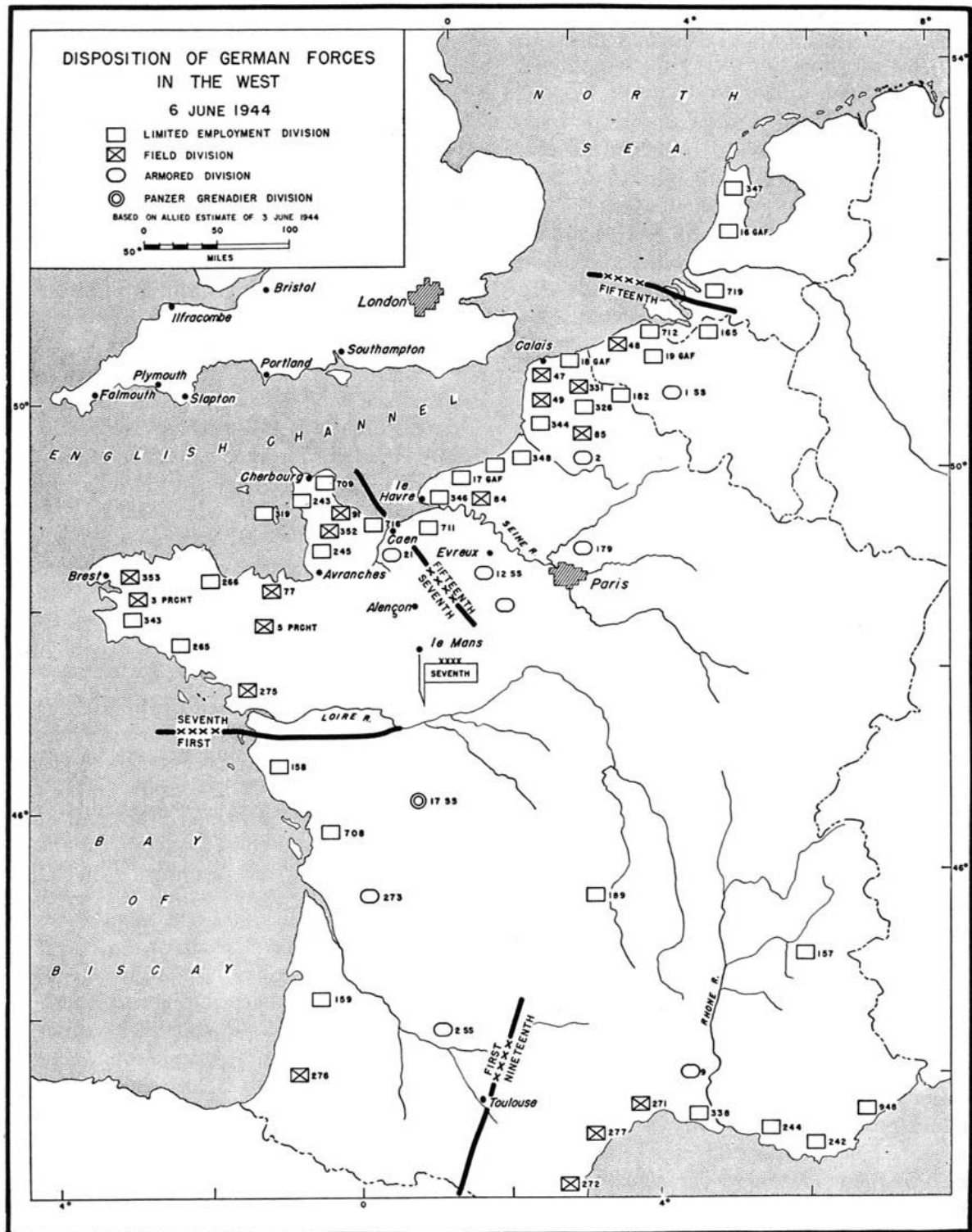


Operation Overlord

Available at: <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/normandy/p22.jpg>

Retrieved on 23/09/08

## Appendix 2



Disposition of German Forces in the West

Available at: <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/100-11/mp1.jpg>

Retrieved on 23/09/08

**Appendix 3 - Source 1**



Source 1 - A soldier at Omaha

In Source 1 we see scenes of the first wave of the men that disembarked onto the Omaha beach. This scene ends with the last man falling on his knees before his body is ripped with the bullets of an MG42 in a bunker.

Appendix 4

Headquarters 1st Infantry Division  
 APO # 1, U. S. Army  
 G-3 Journal  
 Appendix V

From 0001B

Date: 6 June 1944

Time:

To: 3400B

CP Location: USS ANCON, ENGLISH CHANNEL  
 off Coast of France

Time	No.	From	Synopsis	Via	Disposition
0230	1		Arrived in Transport Area at 0230.		
0251	2		Dropped Anchor at 0251.		
0630	3	CG	Land CT 11B at H/4 unless otherwise directed.		Coord CTF 124
0708	4		1st wave landed 0635 2d wave landed 0636	Rad	J
0830	5		16 Inf and 116 Inf touched down 0635.	Rad	J
0630	6	Talley	It 1 DUKW No one waterborne	Rad	V Corps & J
0636	7	Talley	It 3 Dog Dogs Launched new capt. LCT returning.	Rad	V Corps & J
0655	8	PC582	ME First wave foundered.	Rad	Navy & J
0702	9	Javelin	LCA unit is landing half on DUKW 2nd half on CHARLIE.	Rad	Navy & J
0700	10	Talley	Brilliant white flare seen near POINT DE HON.	Rad	V Corps & J
0641	11	PC 582	Entire first wave foundered.	Rad	CG & J
0807	17	Thomas Jefferson son	Returning boats report floating mines near beach endangering landings. Many boats have swamped because of them. Many persons in water.	Rad	CG, V Corps & J
0730	23	DC/S V Corps	LCHL 94 and 493 landed 0740. Firing heavy on beach.	Rad	V Corps & J
0838	24	Control Vessel Dog Red	The obstacles are mined. No chance of destroying mines by demolition yet.	Rad	J
0816	25	LCT 535	There are DUKWS in distress between here and the beach.	Rad	Amco & J
0710	27	CTG 124.9 (Rngr Co)	Two LCTs knocked out by enemy btry west of center of Beach Dog Green.	Rad	Amco & J
0809	28	Control Craft	All of LD Tns for Fox Green beach sank between disembarkation point and line of departure.	Rad	CG, G-3, J
0824	29	CTG 124.9	Btry at MALBY still in commission. Being kept under fire.	Rad	CG, G-3, J
0830	30	50th Div	Request progress of your btry. Progress of 50th Div going according to plan.	Rad	CG, G-3, J
0833	31	LCT 538	Failed to unload due to indirect fire of 88's. Hit. 3 Army casualties.	Rad	PC 617, G-3, J

The Diary of Operations of the Headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division on June 6, 1944.

At line 11 25 minutes after the Hour H, we can see how the boat PC 552 transmitted to the Headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division that the entire first wave had been foundered.