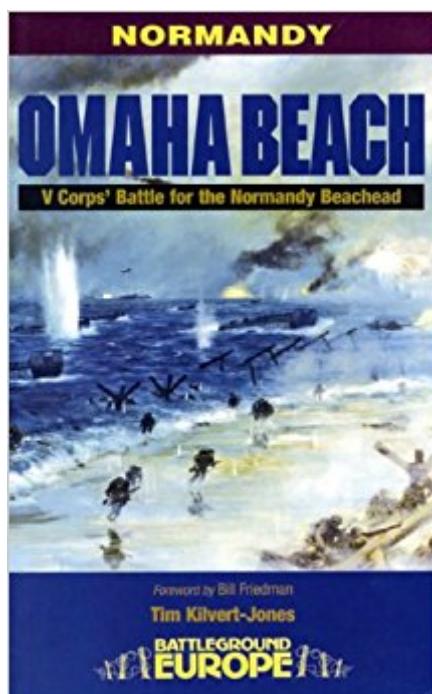


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# Omaha Beach: V Corps' Battle For The Normandy Bridgehead (Battleground Europe)



## **Synopsis**

As the left most inland flank of the D-Day landings, Sword Beach was thought most likely to receive the first German counterattacks. The British troops selected for the assault had the tasks of securing the beach and advancing on the heavily defended medieval town of Caen. The troops also were determined to link up with British paratroopers and glider units who had landed the night before on special missions and were not equipped to withstand an armored counterattack alone. Backed up by an impressive array of modified armored vehicles, the veteran 3rd Division, spearheaded by No. 4 Army Commando and 41 Royal Marine Commando, stormed ashore and secured its objectives with moderate casualties. No. 4 Commando also reached the airborne troops before they could be overwhelmed by German armor. However, the British failed to secure the key town of Caen on schedule. The action on this Normandy beach is now covered in all the detail that has become standard with the Battleground Europe series.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Very technical but great read. Better understanding and appreciation of what Americans went through and just barely making it. because of the valor and determination of those on the beach. Looking forward to reading additional Kilvert-Jones books re Normandy.

Having just returned from the Normandy beaches, I found that this book is essential for anyone who visits the battlefield, either by actually walking the ground, or even vicariously by reading in the comfort of your own home. The author, Tim Kilvert-Jones, provides concise, but essential,

background material on the strategic setting in 1944, German defensive plans and organization, Allied invasion plans, and the Allied air and naval operations that preceded the invasion. Of particular note is the key role played in Allied planning by intelligence, terrain analysis, weather, and deception operations. The core of the book is a tour of the three main sections of Omaha Beach: Pointe du Hoc and the tactical sectors of the 29th and 1st Infantry Divisions. For each area, Kilvert-Jones has selected excellent vantage points that allow one to view the terrain. The instructions for reaching each vantage point and for driving about the battlefield are clear and accurate. For each vantage point, the author provides detailed descriptions of the actions that occurred there; the narrative is exciting and fast-paced. The tour of each part of the battlefield is supported by excellent maps and photos. This book should appeal to veterans, military professionals, and anyone interested in getting a close-up view of this historically significant battleground.

I don't know what happened here, the author Tim Kilvert-Jones penned the truly excellent Sword Beach edition of the Battleground Europe series, and I bought this expecting it to be as good. Sadly I was wrong, this is frankly a very disappointing book. Firstly there are errors in the text - two photos of the German bunker at WN65 are labelled WN64, and a full page photo of troops onboard ship was taken off the other American beach Utah, and there is a modern picture of the lane leading to where the guns were inland from Pointe du Hoc - fine except it's the wrong lane. Secondly the battlefield tour unlike the highly detailed routes in other books in the series is very very basic - consisting of only 5 stands. The text fails to mention interesting places to stop and visit like the Dog White Sector and WN60 above Fox Red, and really just points out the monuments. Compared to the author's Sword beach book, this was a major let down for me. Finally, the text section of the book before the battlefield guide part, is frankly "dull as dishwater". 50 pages is devoted to the overall planning of Overlord, which I would propose is not something the average buyer of this book would be looking for, as it is covered in hundreds of general D-Day books. For the actual Omaha beach portion, it used the same old standard US National Archive photos interspersed with maybe half a dozen brief veteran's accounts collected by the author. Also the text could have done with being broken down into clearly defined chapters relating to perhaps each beach sector or exit. All in all I'll stick with the word "disappointing." I wonder if the publisher reduced the authors original manuscript to fit the format of the book?

Writing a tour guide and historical synopsis of the US landing at Omaha Beach on 6 June 1944 is a

daunting task, but one well executed by Sandhurst graduate Tim Kilvert-Jones in this Battleground Europe volume. Like other volumes in this series on the D-Day landings, Omaha Beach only focuses on the actions that occurred on and around that particular landing site. Overall, Omaha Beach is an excellent summary of the US V Corps landings on D-Day, as well as a decent tour-guide of the contemporary battlefield. Omaha Beach consists of seven chapters, beginning with a strategic overview and a full chapter on the Overlord plan relating to Omaha and Pointe du Hoc. The third chapter covers the loading and sea passage. The three main chapters cover the Ranger assault at Pointe du Hoc, the 29th Division landing and the 1st Division landing. An epilogue chapter covers events following D-Day, primarily the Allied logistical build-up on Omaha. There are also six appendices but no order of battle for either side. As usual in Battleground Europe titles, numerous excellent photographs complement the text, but the maps are not as good in this volume as in other volumes in the series. While Kilvert-Jones does utilize and synthesize information from other accounts, such as Joseph Balkoski's excellent *Beyond the Beachhead* and Robert J Kershaw's *D-Day Piercing the Atlantic Wall*, he offers value-added material in terms of his expertise as a retired regular army officer. This book is designed as a professional learning tool for young officers on a staff ride of the Normandy battlefields - a tool I wish that I had as a captain when I made such a staff ride in 1989 - and as such, it offers many useful insights for those who wish to study the art of war as related to Omaha Beach. The author effectively addresses the mission, the enemy, the troops available, the weather and the operational time line. There are two areas where the author does come up short in his military analysis, in my opinion. First, is the issue of terrain. While the author correctly identifies the draws leading off the beach as key terrain he fails to complete the equation. The fact is that both the Germans and Americans had identified the draws as key terrain and acted upon it, is one of the key reasons for the heavy casualties on Omaha. The Germans could only man the defenses on Omaha with a reinforced battalion at any one time, and they chose to concentrate their defenses on resistance nests covering each of the four draws. Only a few snipers and obstacles were left to cover the area between draws, and this area comprised dead space to the heavy weapons sited in most of the resistance nests. Thus, the main German engagement areas were in front of the draws, which is precisely where the Americans landed. The Americans headed strait for the draws because they optimistically assumed that the preliminary air and naval bombardment would smash the resistance nests and obstacles, allowing the landing troops to move rapidly off the beach through these defiles. Thanks to Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*, many Americans are now convinced that all of Omaha Beach was a slaughterhouse. Not true. As Kilvert-Jones notes, some troops landing inadvertently in the dead space between the

draws and they were able to reach the bluffs virtually unscathed. The failure of the Americans to appreciate the significance of dead space (since virtually all the German bunkers were identified before the landing) on Omaha Beach was as serious defect in terrain analysis as their failure to anticipate the defensive value of bocage. Had the US troops landed between the draws, hundreds of lives would have been saved. The second issue that Kilvert-Jones skirts around is that of senior American generalship and planning. There is no doubt that the troops in the 1st and 29th Divisions were well-served by the superior combat leadership of men like BGN Cota and COL Taylor on D-Day, but these were not the men who planned the landings on Omaha. Rather, the inferior leadership and lack of imagination of General Bradley and General Eisenhower are the issue. Whenever one studies Overlord, it is difficult not to be impressed by the incredible logistic planning that went into moving thousands of troops across the sea, as well as technical marvels like PLUTO and MULBERRY and the incredibly successful deception plan. On the strategic level, Overlord was a masterpiece. Yet at the tactical level, particularly at Omaha, Overlord seems to have been planned by men who ignored every lesson of the last thirty years. Bradley rejected British offers of armored "funnies" from the 79th Armored that were far superior at obstacle removal under fire than dismounted engineers - who suffered 41% casualties on Omaha. Nor would Bradley consider using Underwater Demolition Teams or amphibious tractors as used in Pacific invasions. Bradley never really thought about how troops could cross 300-400 meters of open sand under fire from interlocking machinegun nests - a basic lesson learned from the First World War. The fire support plan for Omaha ignored the use of smoke, which would have greatly reduced the accuracy of German fire. Although often described as an excellent tactician, Bradley clearly was not. Indeed, the divisional leaders in the 1st and 29th Divisions questioned the landing plan, but were over-ruled by Bradley who didn't want a plan complicated by gadgets or fancy tactics. Kilvert-Jones mentions the irony of Bradley considering a withdrawal as his troops were actually getting off the beach and Eisenhower was planning a mass air strike to demonstrate how out-of-touch these "leaders" were. After the battle, Eisenhower blamed the "intelligence failure" in detecting the German 352nd Division at Omaha as the primary reason for the heavy casualties. In fact, the American GIs triumphed at Omaha in spite of, not because of, their senior leadership.

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