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## Analysis of Battle for Omaha Beach

A battle that left many Allied troops dead before they could get off of their transport vessel, let alone fire a shot at the enemies soon to seal their fate, will forever lie in the minds of Americans across the Nation as one of the most memorable battles to ever gleam upon U.S. history. June 6, 1944 left a mark on the U.S. as well as a sign to the Axis forces that the Allies could hold their own in even the most gruesome conflicts. Numbers stacked in favor of Nazi troops so prominently that the idea that the Allies possibly managed to pull through could compel the most hopeful of thinkers. The weaponry that was used in such conflict and the taxing yet glorious victory the Allied forces earned on such a fateful day should provide inspiration to those who feel overwhelmed and hopeless.

When people think of World War II, their minds will venture to one of two places: Pearl Harbor or The Battle of Omaha Beach. The Battle of Omaha Beach was ferocious and, although the Allied forces pulled through, proved the ever-clear fact that no one is invincible, no matter the circumstance. Just before six in the morning, a bombardment of the Axis-controlled beachfront began. Allied infantry and armor began landing on the beach at approximately six-thirty in the morning. The forces did not simply hop off of the boat and skip up to the Germans, but faced serious obstacles all along their advancement up the beachfront. Troops immediately came under fire and the Allied forces' numbers were cut down significantly by gun emplacements lining the beach's high ground. Lieutenant, Junior Grade Coit Hendley, the commanding officer of the transport vessel USS LCI(L)-85, was quoted as saying, "The 88's began hitting the ship, they tore into the compartments and exploded on the exposed deck. Machine guns opened up. Men were hit and men were mutilated. There was no such thing as a minor wound." The emplacements lining the beach were protected by concrete bunkers and walls of sandbags lining areas of the German front. These bunkers had protected much of the Axis force from the previous bombardment and allowed the troops to stay posted patiently waiting to saw down boat after boat of Allied infantry. Sand bags protected gunnery positions along the beach from infantry fire. Another obstruction to the Allied forces' path to victory was the strategic placement by the Axis troops of barbed wire, mine-fields, wood stakes and a multitude of steel tripods. While the defenses the Germans had maintained appeared to be endless, the line at which the regiments had been stationed were actually quite thin. Just because the defensive line the Germans had created was so thin did not mean that the line was not strong. The Germans had taken advantage of their high-ground, using the limited visibility this had provided to the Allies to their great advantage. However strong these defenses were, they were very weak in one sense: the defenses were very dependent on each other. If infantry could make it to the line, the defenses would crumble and fall entirely. Another huge factor that played into the Germans' defeat at Omaha Beach was a group of reinforcements that was never sent. Had the

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reinforcements arrived at the front, the Americans most likely would never have reached past the defensive line and the Germans would have tasted victory. However, the Germans seemed to believe there was no need, that they had already defeated the Allies on Omaha Beach and that the reserves could be better put to use elsewhere. Even though the Germans had quickly discovered their mistake in the matter, they had not learned quickly enough to provide reserves before the defenses had fallen entirely and it was far too late.

A large variety of weaponry was capitalized on by each side as a means to win the battle at hand. The allies had attacked the beach days before the invasion with bombing runs and artillery strikes as to break the German foothold before putting boots on the ground. The bombers hit the beach rather hard but the bunkers that the Germans had designed for such an instance weren't to be easily destroyed by the standard shells carried by the average Allied bombing aircraft. The bombs dropped on Omaha were between one-hundred to five-hundred pounds and stood no chance at destroying the Germans' well engineered bunkers on the cliff sides. Another issue with the bombing of Omaha Beach by the Allies was the use of anti-aircraft guns. The particular anti-aircraft gun in question in the 88mm Flak gun, commonly referred to as eighty-eights. This gun was a German-engineered masterpiece of artillery. Although the gun had been designed to drop planes like flies, which it did quite often, it could also be used as an anti-tank/artillery gun, anti-infantry gun and a naval defense gun. The allies had also used ships off of the coast of Normandy to bombard Omaha beach, but the bombardments proved only slightly effective. While all the bombing and shelling that occurred that morning did impact the defenses of the Germans and tear the beach apart, the guns weren't accurate enough at long range to single out specific targets behind the German line and weren't powerful enough, much like the bombs carried by the planes of the battle, to pierce the Germans' bunkers. Also, though it seemed like a useful idea to shell the defenses and obstructions that obstructed the Allies' paths to the German lines, explosives aren't very effective on barbed wire or steel tripods. The barbed wire was not destroyed but instead was shaken a bit before resettling in the path of the Allied forces. When the allied troops began their invasion of the beach, they met a gun that would go down in history for its extraordinary ability to cut groups of soldiers down. The MG42, a light machine gun manufactured by Grossfuss Johannes AG, was a large machine gun that fired 7.92mm rounds at up to eighteen-hundred rounds a minute with an effective range of one thousand meters. These guns were fed ammo off of belts of up to two hundred and fifty rounds a piece. The gun often required two men to operate as to keep the belt from getting jammed against the gun's chamber. This gun opened on boats filled with Allied troops and cut down entire boats of infantry, each boat carrying around thirty to fifty men. The Allies also attempted to drop tanks at Omaha Beach. The boats carrying each tank came in from each end of the beach. The original plan for deployment of the armored forces on Omaha Beach was to drop the tanks a number of meters offshore and to allow the armor to make its way to the beach. However, this plan quickly seemed to fall unto the weather's mercy. The water was choppy and dangerous for tanks who would be half-submerged to travel through, especially over a distance

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of close to one-hundred meters offshore. Both sets of ships noticed the dangers of the waters at hand. One group notified the captains of the tanks to the issue and the captains heeded the warning. The captains of the ships decided on a serious sacrifice and risked their own skin to get the armor to the beach. Instead of the tanks being dropped many meters away, the ships drove right up onto the shore and the tanks stormed onto the beach. The other group of ships also notified the captains of the tanks. However, the captains of these tanks did not heed the warnings of the pilots of the ships. The tanks were dropped off at the previously designated locations and all but two were lost to the sea. The remaining two that made it to the beach rendezvoused with the first group of tanks and continued the assault. The infantry in the battle of Omaha Beach carried similar weaponry to each side, simply a different make and different country that produced each. The Germans had snipers set on the ridges with a widely known weapon, the Gewehr 98, bolt action rifles that had been equipped with scopes. Many infantry who were not planted in sniping positions also carried the Gewehr without a scope. The Allies carried a variety of rifles and sub machine guns, but none quite so popular as the M1 Garand and the M1 Thompson sub-machine gun. The M1 Garand is a semi-automatic rifle that can be loaded with clips from the top of the rifle's chamber, making reloading the weapon easy. A downfall of this was that the clips would often fly out of the gun and injure the person carrying the weapon. The M1 Thompson sub-machine gun was a rather small automatic weapon designed for closer ranged combat. The Thompson had a pistol grip that allowed for greater stability when unleashing batteries of rounds on an enemy position. Another famous weapon used by both sides, but under different names, was the flame thrower, what the Germans referred to as a "Flammenwerfer." These flamethrowers shot burning gasses up to 30 yards. These were often used as a mental weapon to intimidate enemies, but were also extremely deadly when within range. The Allies used these flamethrowers to burn out German bunkers and completely wipe out all of the forces within the oven they had now been trapped within. There was a huge fault with these weapons, however, in the matter that if a shot were to rupture the gas line, the weapon would quickly turn from a powerful ally to a great foe, lighting the user and anyone within range of the gasoline spray ablaze.

When looking at the battle for Omaha Beach, many aspects must be taken into account when summarizing the true intensity and depth of the battle. Both sides to the fight had great advantages and disadvantages to their tactics. Even with the German upper hand, the Allies managed to defeat the defenses and take Omaha Beach, a huge step in defeating the Nazi regime. Even though the Allied forces managed to pull the victory from the Germans on Omaha Beach, one cannot honestly state that either side was unskilled or were they unworthy opponents.

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