

D-Day at Omaha Beach

Published by Decision Games 2013

Designed by John Butterfield

Review by Paul Le Long

Overview

This is a game, as the title suggests, that is focussed on the American landings on Omaha Beach on D-Day. The player controls the Americans and spends the first half of the game simply getting ashore under heavy fire from German defensive strong-points. The second half of the game, should you even make it that far, is all about pushing inland to establish a secure beachhead; all the while, the Germans are reinforcing and counter-attacking. The action is set at company level so each counter represents a company and each hex represents 275 yards across. The game takes place exclusively on 6 June 1944.

The game is diceless with plenty of friction and randomness provided by cards which determine events, German fire, beach landings, tidal drift and much else besides. The randomness is believable though and things unfold in a logical (rather than truly random or chaotic) fashion but with a degree of unpredictability that guarantees replay-ability.

Can it be played solo?

Yes, the game is designed specifically for solitaire play. Two can play co-operatively, each commanding half of the landing forces but this is not necessary. The game is designed by John Butterfield who is famous for other solitaire games like RAF and Ambush so there is plenty of solo pedigree here. The AI controlling the Germans is very effective, ingenious even, and you never know quite what you are up against.

What are the components?

See the photographs below to see what the game looks like. The map is, I think, a thing of beauty but I've heard criticisms that it is too "busy." Let's be clear, it is busy, but just like Shaker furniture there is beauty in utility and all of those little coloured dots all over the map are the basis of the combat system so when a counter enters a hex, the level of fire it faces is based on the type and colour of the dot in that hex. By the way, you never avoid being fired at, especially in the initial landing phase, you just get shot at with different levels of intensity in an unpredictable way so expect heavy casualties.

The counters: you get 352 counters, mostly representing US companies. The counters are functional, no more, and I found them very difficult to remove from the counter cards without damaging them which was a bit of a fag. You also get 55 cards that contain, as I said earlier, all sorts of information. There are several play aids and the rule book is well laid out and written/explained well. You also get a booklet all about the battle as it happened on the day which is a nice touch.

What is the level of complexity?

This is not a simple game by any means and play can take 8 hours to play (though it took me a lot longer than that but I'm always a slow-coach). The box says 3/5 for complexity which is about right. Actually, the game play is pretty simple once you get used to it. So while this is not a game for the casual gamer or your eight-year-old kid, it is a game that you can get to grips with fairly easily. But be prepared to set aside some time for it.

There are four scenarios designed to break you in gradually:

- i. Easy Fox: This is played on only half the map and covers the initial landings only (turns 1-16) so about 25% of the game. Plays in about 2 hours and the purpose is simply to teach you the rules.
- ii. The First Waves: turns 1-16 played on the whole map. This is all about getting men ashore while the Germans murder them on the beaches, and trying to break into the beach defences.
- iii. Beyond the Beach: turns 17-32: played on the whole map, taking 4-5 hours and concerned with the inland phase of the battle.
- iv. D-Day at Omaha Beach: the whole battle.

What do you spend your time doing during play?

Play is broken down into a series of phases, each governed by the draw of cards. You start by drawing a card to determine how/if landing craft get to the beach (sometimes they drift off course, get destroyed in the water and so on). This is repeated for the other half of the map so that's generally how the whole game works, you draw a card and apply results on the left half, then repeat for the right hand side. Then there is a random event and this is followed by German fire. I won't go into detail but a single card tells you which German positions fire and what gets hit. This phase takes longer in the Beyond the Beach part of the game because the Germans have a lot more varied options, but early on they are pretty much just shooting. Then you get to do US actions, which is where you decide what happens so which units move, assault and so on. Some things happen automatically, including engineers clearing obstacles and infantry running for shelter; the rest is up to you. But you have limited resources in terms of command so deployment and use of commanders is vital and takes some thinking through.

What are the tactical decisions?

These are relatively simple so what and where to attack and with what; where to position commanders (especially later in the game) and how to conquer and hold real estate. There is nothing particularly complicated here as all decisions are on the purely local, tactical level. Nevertheless, the US action phase is the most time-consuming precisely because this is where you are making all the decisions.

Points to note

There is a new game just out set in the Pacific (D-Day at Tarawa) which is a sequel so I haven't tried it, so can't comment.

Web links

I find that I learn games more easily by watching others play on YouTube so here are a few links:

-- Boardgame Geek: <http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/29603/d-day-omaha-beach>

-- Jason Young: (YouTube Channel) here you get an unboxing and 4 videos of the game being played

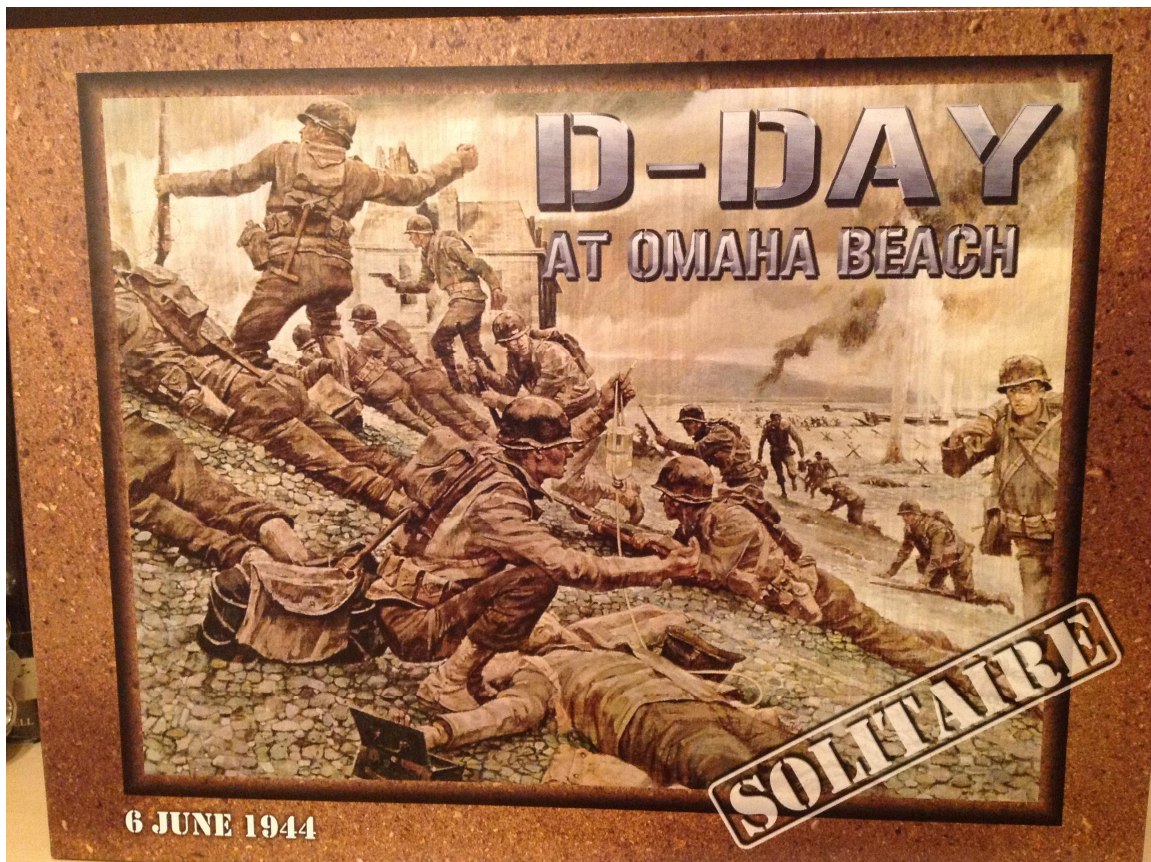
-- Single Handed Warfare: (YouTube channel) a two-part play through

-- Left Hand Reviews: (YouTube channel) a review

Final assessment

I think this is an excellent game, designed specifically for solo play, as opposed to most games which can be adapted with varying levels of difficulty. Not a casual game and one that requires a significant investment of time, energy and concentration, but one which also repays that investment. The game is challenging (you take a real pounding early on) and the AI is ingenious and makes the enemy very effective. But it feels logical and everything that happens feels appropriate. Also, your actions as a player do make a difference, you're not just pushing counters around and trusting to fate.

Very highly recommended.



D-DAY

AT OMAHA BEACH

6 JUNE 1944

"Get the hell off the beach! If you stay you are dead or about to die!"

— Col. George Taylor, US 16th Infantry

D-Day at Omaha Beach recreates America's most bloody and heroic day of World War II. In this solitaire game from the designer of the solo classics *RAF* and *Ambush*, you control the forces of the US 1st and 29th Divisions landing under fire on the Normandy shore, and struggling desperately to establish a viable beachhead. The game is also great for two players playing cooperatively, each controlling one US division.

US units include assault infantry, amphibious tanks, artillery, engineers and HQs. The game system controls the hidden German defenders in *Widerstand* and resistance points on the bluffs overlooking the beaches. US forces that manage to break through the deadly coastal defenses and reach the high ground must then contend with German mobile reinforcements in the bewildering hedgerows of Normandy's bocage. An innovative diceless combat system highlights unknown enemy deployments and the importance of utilizing the right weapons and tactics.

Event cards keep the action flowing and the rules simple, while controlling German strategy and introducing extensive historical detail. The game includes amphibious landings, German artillery and rocket barrages, US naval bombardment, tides, engineer operations, and intangibles such as US leadership under fire and the initiative of the American GIs.

Scenarios: *The First Waves* (two to three hour playtime) introduces the basics of the game in a recreation of the initial assault. *Beyond the Beach* (four to five hours) picks up on the high ground at 10:00 a.m. and adds rules for German tactics. *D-Day at Omaha Beach* (seven hours) covers the entire day, from 6:15 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Optional rules explore what-ifs, such as more pre-invasion bombardment or the arrival of German armor.

Another great solitaire game from RAF designer John Butterfield

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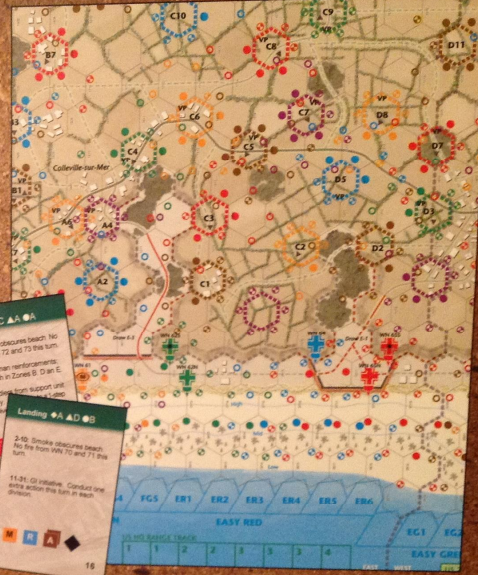
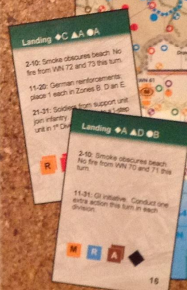
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SOLITAIRE

Game Contents:

- Rules booklet
- Player Aid cards
- 352 Die cut counters
- 1 34" x 22" Map
- 55 Event cards
- Storage bags



D-DAY	
PLAYERS	1 or 2
LEVEL	III X XXX XXX
COMPANIES	275 YARDS (250 METERS)
HEX SCALE	2-8 hrs
PLAYING TIME	2-8 hrs
COMPLEXITY	MEDIUM
SOLITAIRE	VERY HIGH









