



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

(Second World War - D-Day - Omaha Beach) OMAHA BEACH-EAST (Colleville-sur-Mer) [with:] OMAHA BEACH-WEST (Vierville-sur-Mer)

Stock#: 65730mb
Map Maker: Commander Task Force 122
Date: 1944 April 21
Place: n.p.
Color: Color
Condition: VG
Size:



Price: SOLD

Description:

A rare pair of planning maps depicting the Normandy coast at Colleville-sur-Mer and Vierville-sur-Mer, better known today simply as Omaha Beach. Issued less than a month before D-Day and bearing the ultra-secret "BIGOT" classification.

"But nothing was more secret—or more vital to Operation Neptune—than the mosaic of Allied intelligence reports that cartographers and artists transformed into the multihued and multilayered BIGOT maps." (Thomas B. Allen, "Untold Stories of D-Day," National Geographic Magazine, June 2002, vol. 201, no. 6, p. 15)

Of the five D-Day landing beaches, that of the American 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions at Omaha was by far the most harrowing. The beach was defended by the German 352nd Infantry Division—rather than a single regiment, as anticipated by Allied planners—which was well emplaced on high bluffs, with wide-open fields of fire overlooking the landing zone. Further complicating matters, many landing craft ran aground on sandbars, forcing infantrymen to wade through water up to their necks while heavily loaded and under fire; and most of the specialized amphibious tanks sent to support them were swamped before making it to land. As a result the Americans were pinned to the beach for hours and suffered hugely, with casualty estimates ranging as high as 5000. Nevertheless, by mid-morning they had breached the German defenses on the bluffs and begun moving inland.

The maps

Offered here are a pair of maps—in essence, one continuous map on two sheets—used by the American military to plan the Omaha Beach landings. Placed side by side, they offer a detailed picture of the

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Normandy coast between Colleville-sur-Mer and Vierville-sur-Mer. The base map is a familiar topographical map, with roads and built-up areas in black, green indicating different types of vegetation; and brown indicating elevations and topographical features, including the steep bluffs overlooking the beach. A variety of dashed lines in the water indicate depths at low (brown) and high (blue) tides. Below each map is a profile view of the coastline to facilitate navigation by the landing craft, with the practical note "Building landmarks, especially near the beach, may be destroyed before any craft land. Terrain features, therefore, are much more reliable for visual navigation."

Below the title of each map a laconic note reads, "Map from GSGS 4490, sheets 79 & 80 and air photo examination." This only hints at the complex, multi-layered information-gathering effort that yielded the BIGOT maps: Starting with existing base maps and hydrographic data, largely supplied by the British Hydrographic Office, military cartographers and artists added data from aerial reconnaissance surveys by Allied warplanes, including extraordinarily dangerous low-level overflights. To these were added information from a host of other sources, including reconnaissance of the beaches by commandos ("frogmen") and reports from French Resistance fighters.

The maps were issued in a variety of formats and frequently revised as new information became available. As evidenced by the signs of binding at the top of each sheet, this pair was originally issued in the *Neptune Monograph*, the definitive briefing book issued to senior American officers in preparation for the D-Day landings.

The BIGOT classification

Both maps are prominently stamped in green, "TOP SECRET - BIGOT UNTIL DEPARTURE FOR COMBAT OPERATIONS—THEN THIS SHEET BECOMES RESTRICTED." Introduced during the Second World War, BIGOT was the highest-level military security classification, above Top Secret. Some sources suggest that it was an acronym for "British Invasion of German Occupied Territory;" others, that it was a "backronym" for "To Gib," the code stamped on the papers of officers headed to Gibraltar in advance of the 1942 North Africa invasion.

Whatever the origins of the term, extraordinary efforts were made to protect BIGOT-level material. When for example a practice landing ("Operation Tiger") on the Devon coast was ambushed by U-Boats, Eisenhower himself ordered the recovery of the bodies of the ten known victims with BIGOT clearance. This was necessary to prove that they had not been captured alive, as their capture would have compromised the invasion plans and necessitated its cancellation.

In all, a rare and richly-informative artifact from one of the most significant, dramatic and terrifying



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events in American military history.

Rarity and references

Not in OCLC. A similar pair sold at Goldberg Auctions (sale 101, lot 142) for \$13,800 in 2017.

Offered in partnership with Boston Rare Maps.

Detailed Condition: