Historical Background
World War II was a pivotal event of the 20th century and a defining moment for America and the world. It shifted the borders of the globe. It forever changed those who lived through it, and shaped generations to come. It has been called "the last great war."

D-Day, June 6, 1944, opened the long-awaited Second Front in the war, an issue that ignited controversy and mistrust between Roosevelt and Churchill on one side and Stalin on the other.
The Germans knew the Allies planned to invade, but they did not know exactly where or when. To prepare for the invasion, Hitler ordered the building of the Atlantic Wall that consisted of mines, barbed wire, and other obstacles placed on the beaches with concrete positions overlooking the landing areas. Also, the Germans laid mines on the beaches.

D-Day was the largest amphibious assault in history. The first forces of about 23,000 men arrived in Normandy at 6:30AM. Over 175,000 troops landed along the 60-mile coastline of Normandy on D-Day. Within a month, one million soldiers had arrived in France ready to drive out the Germans.
A large American force landed at Omaha Beach on D-Day where they encountered an elite German infantry division. Many American soldiers drowned in deep water before their vessels were close enough to the beach.

Approximately 2,500 soldiers were killed on D-Day; 2,400 of these died at Omaha beach.

Saving Private Ryan takes place during and immediately after the June 1944 “D-Day” invasion of Normandy (France), codenamed Operation Overlord.
The film's story is that Private Ryan, a paratrooper, is behind German lines when it is discovered that all three of his brothers have been killed: one while fighting in Italy, one while fighting in the Pacific, and the third during the D-Day invasion. In order to prevent Ryan's mother from having all four of her sons killed in the war, the army orders Private Ryan, the last of the Ryan boys, to be removed from combat.

The military rule about sole surviving sons being allowed out of combat is true. It was enacted after the five Sullivan brothers were killed in 1942 when the U.S.S. Juneau was sunk in the Pacific. The rule of the surviving son is common to many armies, the American, the Canadian, the British and the Israeli.
The story of Saving Private Ryan is based on the real-life events of the Niland brothers. Sergeant Frederick "Fritz" Niland was a member of the 101st Airborne's 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, and was one of those that made the drop into Normandy on June 6, 1944. Niland's three brothers served in other units. Edward had been reported missing over Burma in the Pacific Theater and Robert and Preston were killed on D-Day.

Unlike the fictional Ryan, however, there was no need to send out a rescue mission to find Sergeant Niland. When Father Francis L. Sampson, chaplain of the 501st, learned that two of Niland's brothers were dead and a third was presumed dead, he began the paperwork necessary to send Niland home. Once the paperwork cleared Niland returned to the States, where he served in New York as an MP for the rest of the war.

MAIN CHARACTERS
Captain Miller  
(TOM HANKS)

On D-Day, June 6, 1944, Miller led Company C of the 2nd Ranger Battalion onto Omaha Beach. Miller's men suffered high casualties during the attack. On June 9th, Miller picked out a squad of men to complete a special mission to retrieve Private James Ryan, whose three brothers had been recently killed in combat.

Sergeant Horvath  
(TOM SIZEMORE)

Given the nickname “Sarge” by the squad, Technical Sergeant Horvath was a tough, experienced soldier who had served previously alongside Captain Miller in North Africa and Italy. Miller relied heavily on Horvath to help lead the company.
Private Reiben
(EDWARD BURNS)

Reiben was hand-picked by Captain Miller for the mission to retrieve Private Ryan. This 24 yr-old smart New Yorker was the first member of the squad to question the logic of their orders, and the most vocal in expressing his displeasure at the risky mission.

Private Caparzo
(VIN DIESEL)

22 yr-old tough Chicago Italian with a gentle side.
Corporal Edward Wade  
(GIOVANNI RIBISI)

Twenty-eight-year-old, from California: the unit’s sensitive and dedicated medic. He takes great risks in order to save wounded soldiers, often with little success.

Private Daniel Jackson  
(BARRY PEPPER)

The unit’s 23 yr-old, deeply religious, Tennessee sharpshooter. His shooting skills turn out to be invaluable to the unit.
Private Stanley Mellish
(ADAM GOLDBERG)

21 yr-old Private Mellish was a Jewish soldier nicknamed "fish." Handed a Hitler Youth knife by Caparzo shortly after making their way off of the beach, Mellish joked that it was now a Shabbat challah cutter, a Jewish bread knife.

Corporal Upham
(JEREMY DAVIES)

Twenty-four-year-old map-maker and translator who joins Miller’s group when their interpreter is killed. More accustomed to office work than to fighting, he initially asks Miller if he may take his typewriter with him, since he is writing a book based on his war experiences.
Private James Francis Ryan
(MATT DAMON)

The youngest of four brothers, brought up on a farm in Iowa. A simple soldier but with solid values of comradeship. He becomes a symbol for Miller and his men: if he goes home the whole group can go home.

THE MOVIE STARTS NOW…