

## D-Day



For most of World War II, the German Army controlled the European Continent. Throughout 1942 and 1943, the Allies had been trying to gain a foothold on the continent from the Mediterranean Sea, which British prime minister Winston Churchill called "the soft underbelly of Europe." Although their efforts had met with some success, Allied commanders needed to gain a stronger base in Europe and to relieve France, which had been occupied by the Germans since 1940. At the Tehran Conference in 1943, Churchill, U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Soviet premier Joseph Stalin agreed that a massive transchannel Allied invasion would be planned for the French coastline the following spring. U.S. general Dwight D. Eisenhower was named supreme commander of the invasion.

Eisenhower immediately began planning Operation Overlord, as the invasion was named, to catch the German forces in France by surprise. He decided that Normandy, which was far from France's main ports and out of line with the fastest route from England to France, would be ideal in terms of an ambush. Because German forces outnumbered the troops Eisenhower could send to France five to one, surprise was essential to the invasion's success.

In addition to location, a decoy strategy was also crucial to deceiving German reconnaissance. In order to trick German intelligence into thinking that Allied forces were gathering for an invasion at Pas-de-Calais, Eisenhower organized a massive feigned operation. Using sophisticated techniques and equipment borrowed from Hollywood and British film studios, Eisenhower staged Operation Fortitude. The deception, under the "command" of U.S. general George S. Patton, was extremely successful; believing that the Allied forces were preparing to attack Pas-de-Calais, Gen. Erwin Rommel, commander of German forces in France, retained nine of his 11 divisions in that region, instead of moving them to Normandy.

After one postponement caused by a dangerous gale, Operation Overlord commenced on June 6, 1944, a date known thereafter as D-Day. More than 150,000 Allied soldiers stormed the beaches of Normandy in an early phase of the largest amphibious military operation in history. Although the Allied troops suffered heavy losses, including a casualty rate of 90% in several companies attacking Omaha Beach, they broke through German defenses after heavy fighting. Relentless air cover and consistent tank and infantry reinforcements throughout the afternoon disabled a significant portion of the German coastal defense. At the day's end, Roosevelt led a prayer for the D-Day troops that was broadcast across the United States.

The fighting continued throughout June, and a stalemate ensued. By late June, more than 1 million Allied troops had invaded Normandy, and Eisenhower began the second phase of Operation Overlord: to move his army toward Germany.

Operation Overlord was a crucial turning point in the European theater during World War II. Not only did it establish an Allied foothold in France, but psychologically, it gave the Allies the upper hand that they would wield for the remainder of the conflict. After establishing a foothold at Normandy, the Allies liberated France and marched into Paris on August 29, 1944. Following that momentous event, the Allied forces began in earnest the campaign to recapture Europe, which culminated in the Germans' unconditional surrender almost a year later, on May 8, 1945.

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### References:

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