

World War II: The Atlantic War, 1941–1945

When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, the German Army used a revolutionary new tactic called *blitzkrieg* (lightning war). Rather than move overland on foot, German troops used motor vehicles and tanks to advance deep into enemy territory before the defenses could react. Germany overran western Poland by the end of the month. In mid-September, under terms of a nonaggression pact secretly negotiated with Hitler, the Soviet leader Stalin invaded and captured eastern Poland.

For the next six months the war entered a quiet phase, during which Germany massed troops and equipment along the Maginot Line, a massive system of fortifications along the border between France and Germany. Then in April 1940 Hitler invaded Denmark and Norway. In May German troops maneuvered around the Maginot Line and rapidly advanced across Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. All three of these countries were soon overcome.

British troops that had been sent into France to counter the initial German buildup now hastily retreated to the coastal city of Dunkirk on the English Channel. There, in an amazing operation over a nine-day period from late May into early June, nearly 340,000 English soldiers were successfully evacuated across the channel to England by a 900-vessel fleet of mainly civilian tugboats, yachts, and other small craft—all this in spite of continual air attacks by the German Luftwaffe (air force).

In June 1940 German troops entered Paris and France surrendered. An armistice between the two was concluded a week later. A new French government called the Vichy government was set up by Marshal Philippe Pétain. By terms of the armistice agreement, the Vichy government was given nominal sovereignty over the southeastern two-fifths of France not yet occupied by German military forces, and it controlled most of the surviving French military forces. Never recognized by the Allies, Vichy was in fact under German control throughout its existence, and it eventually collapsed with the defeat of Germany in 1945. Meanwhile, in London General Charles de Gaulle organized a resistance movement

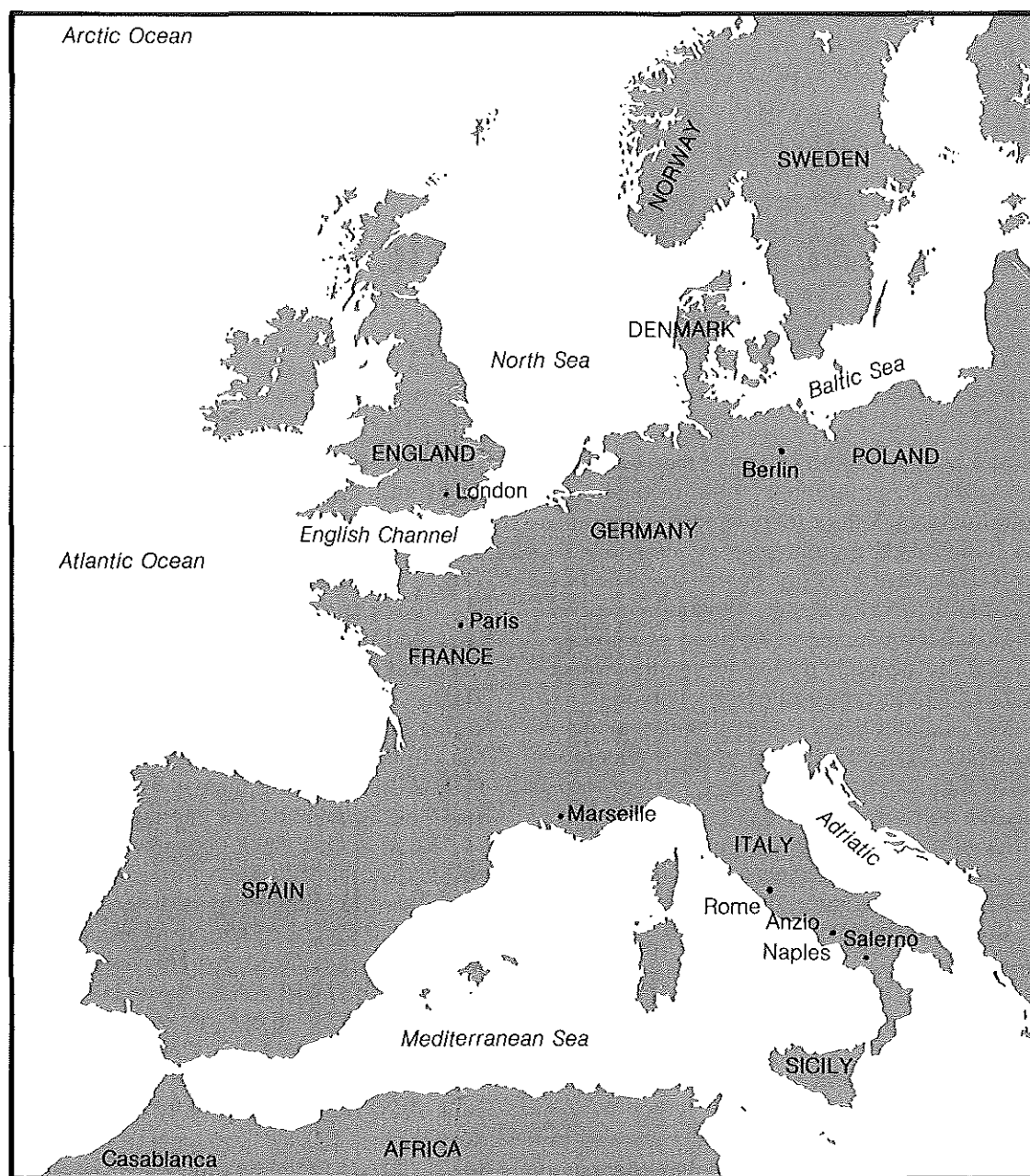
called the Free French. They rejected the Vichy government and did what they could to support the Allies throughout the war. They eventually formed the nucleus of the Fourth Republican government headed by de Gaulle after the war.

In just three months Hitler had conquered most of western Europe, and German troops were massing along the coast opposite Britain, just 20 miles away across the English Channel. The threat of invasion was imminent. But Hitler first wanted to destroy the English will to resist. To accomplish this, over the next year he used the Luftwaffe to launch against Britain the greatest air assault the world had ever known.

In what has since become known as the Battle of Britain, as many as 1,000 sorties a day were carried out by Luftwaffe bombers against targets throughout all of England at first, then later concentrated against London. To counter them, Royal Air Force pilots flying the famous Spitfire fighters often flew six and seven missions a day, inflicting heavy losses on the attackers. Inspired by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the British people never lost their will to resist, despite massive losses. By June 1941, when Hitler finally ended the bombing campaign, over 150,000 Londoners had been killed or injured. "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few," said Churchill in praise of the courageous performance of the RAF.

In late 1940 Hitler sent General Erwin Rommel and his Afrika Korps into North Africa, where they had much early success in driving back the British and advancing into Egypt. For a year and a half after that, the North African campaign was a back-and-forth affair that depended on which side was being better resupplied at the moment.

In early 1941 both British and American intelligence began picking up information that Hitler was about to invade the Soviet Union, in spite of the nonaggression pact the Soviets and Germans had signed. Both governments informed the Soviets, but they chose to disregard the warnings. Then in June Hitler launched a major in-



The European theater, World War II.

vasion of the Soviet Union, forcing it to join forces with the Allies. Over the next four years fighting along the eastern front in the Soviet Union would be some of the bloodiest the world had ever known. Altogether there would be over 25 million Soviet casualties and 5 million German casualties.

Despite these events taking place in Europe, the majority of Americans wanted no part in the European conflict. President Franklin Roosevelt, however, reelected for a third term in 1940, felt differently. As mentioned in the last chapter, he took many measures to prepare America

for war and to gear up American military industrial production to wartime levels.

The Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 stunned the American people and galvanized them into action. America was now ready to go to war. Three days after the Japanese attack, Germany and Italy joined Japan in declaring war on the United States. The second of two world wars had come to America.

A reorganization of Navy commands followed the Pearl Harbor attack and declarations of war. Admiral Ernest J. King became commander in chief of the U.S.



Admiral Ernest King, chief of naval operations during much of World War II, played a major part in formulating the strategy that led to victory in the Atlantic and the Pacific wars. His leadership was summarized in his statement, "I can forgive anything except for three things which I will not tolerate—stupidity, laziness, and carelessness."

fleet. He would also become the chief of naval operations in March 1942. It was under his guidance that the United States would contribute to the defeat of Germany in the Atlantic and achieve victory over Japan in the Pacific.

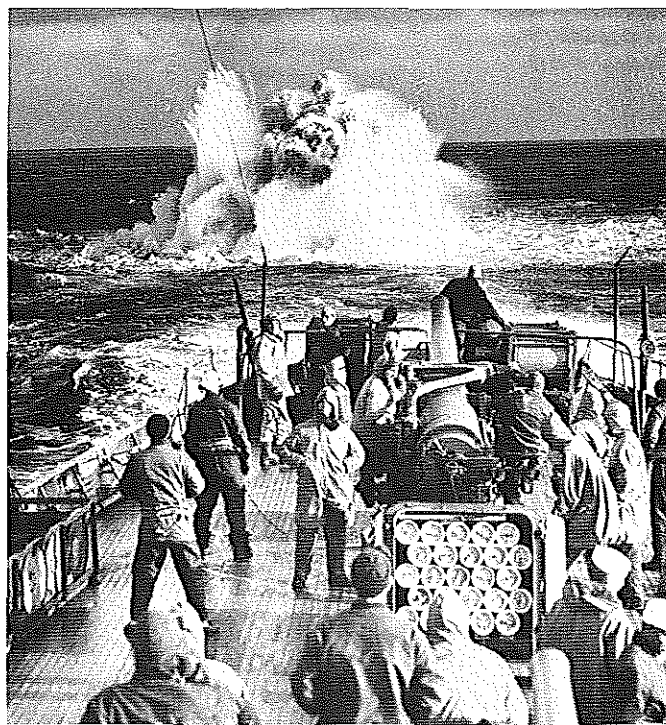
THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

When World War II broke out in September 1939, the German admiral in charge of U-boat operations, Admiral Karl Dönitz, tried to put as many submarines at sea as possible to disrupt the flow of food and war materials to Britain. At first he was hampered in his efforts by the small number of German U-boats (only fifty-six when war started) and by the distances they had to proceed in order to get to the western Atlantic sea-lanes from their bases in Germany. Once Norway and France had been conquered, however, the situation changed. While secondary bases of operation were established in Norway, Dönitz personally supervised the construction of fortified submarine bases along the French Atlantic coast at Brest, Lorient, St. Nazaire, La Pallice, and Bordeaux. Submarines operating out of these bases could cut their transit time to the hunting grounds in the western Atlantic in half. Moreover, German submarine production was continually increasing. By July 1940 there were many more U-boats on station in the Atlantic at any given time than in the opening months of the war.

Because of a limited number of available escorts, and lack of any effective convoy operations, Allied losses to the U-boats began to mount rapidly. Admiral Dönitz often used wolf-pack tactics, with as many as twenty or thirty U-boats coordinating their attacks. Often the targeted merchantmen were silhouetted by bright lights ashore all along the U.S. Atlantic seaboard. By fall of 1940, German U-boats were sinking about 300,000 tons of Allied shipping per month. German successes were making such a dent into oil supplies that fuel rationing had to be imposed in the northeastern United States.

A particularly difficult phase of the North Atlantic sea war involved the Allied convoys to the Russian port of Murmansk on the Barents Sea. During the German offensives into the Soviet Union in 1942 and 1943, Allied assistance to Soviet forces was slowed to a trickle. Sometimes less than 40 percent of a given convoy made it to Murmansk, but the perseverance of the Allied merchantmen and Allied escort ships finally broke Germany's efforts to destroy the convoys. Some historians believe that the supplies received through Murmansk were a decisive factor in preventing Russian surrender to the Germans during the war.

President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill realized that little could be done against the Germans in Europe until the submarine menace had been brought under control in the Atlantic. Every effort was made to defeat the U-boats. By early 1941 enough escort vessels

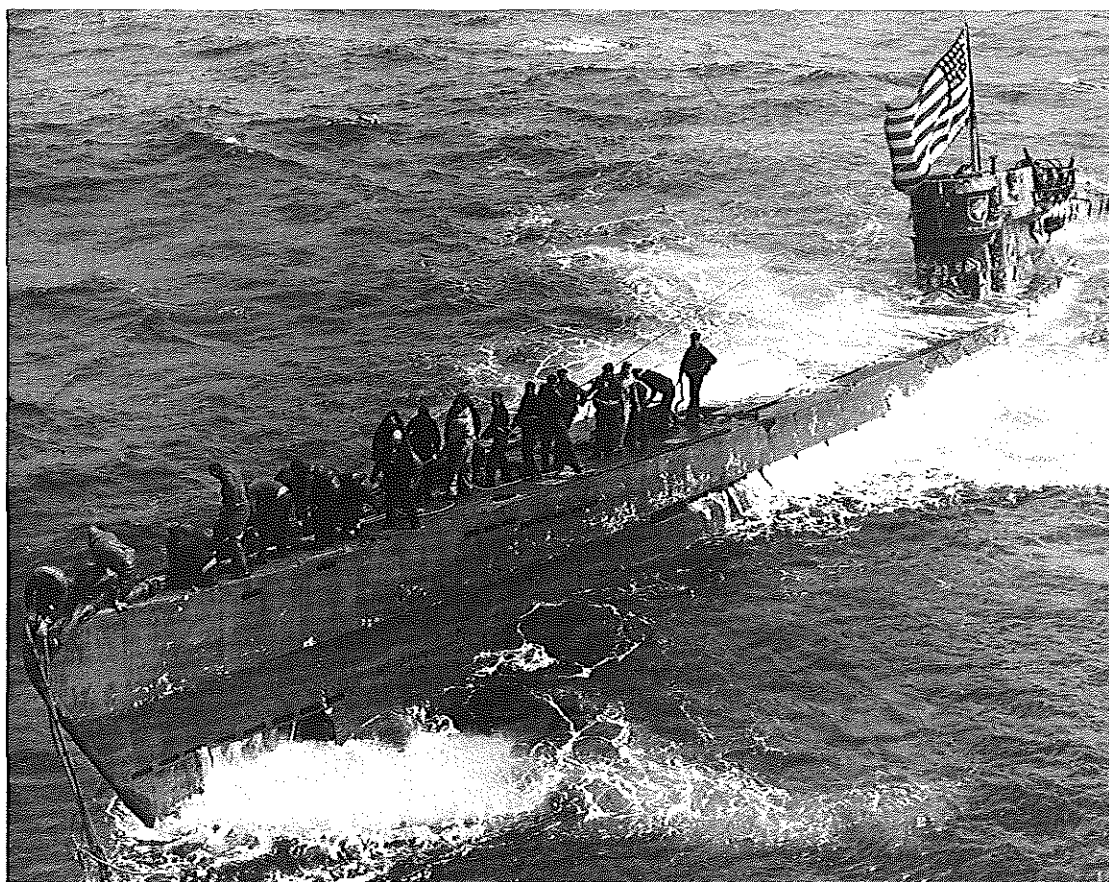


A depth-charge attack on a German submarine in the North Atlantic.

had been built so that most merchant vessels could be convoyed at least part of the way on each side of the Atlantic. In addition, an improved radar was developed that allowed convoy escort ships to detect and track surfaced U-boats. By May 1941 the German Kriegsmarine's code had been broken by British code breakers, allowing the British to decipher Dönitz's instructions to his wolf packs at sea and steer convoys away from them. Increasingly effective coastal air patrols inhibited U-boat operations off the U.S. Atlantic seaboard by late 1941 and in the Gulf of Mexico and off South America by 1942. British patrols flying out of Iceland did the same for the western approaches to Britain. Eventually all these efforts began to pay dividends. In 1940 twenty-six Allied vessels were sunk for every U-boat lost. By 1942 that ratio had been cut to thirteen to one. This was still serious, because by then the Germans were producing about twenty new U-boats per month, but the tide was turning. By 1943, with the addition of the escort carrier and hunter-killer groups, and sufficient numbers of escorts to accompany convoys all the way across the Atlantic, the rate of exchange had fallen to just two vessels lost for every U-boat sunk.

Thereafter, continued improvements in radio-direction-finding techniques and hunter-killer operations kept the U-boats pretty much under control and out of the Atlantic sea-lanes until the war's end in 1945. After the liberation of France in 1944, most U-boats operated from bases in Norway. Toward the end of the war, U-boats fitted with breathing tubes called snorkels (which permitted them to operate diesel engines while submerged) attempted a last blitz against Allied shipping in British waters. Some even patrolled once again in U.S. waters, but these efforts came too late to affect the outcome of the war.

Notable among U.S. antisubmarine group exploits was an incident involving the submarine *U-505* in June 1944. She had been tracked from the time she left her base in Brest until she headed home northward from a cruise in the south Atlantic. With this information Captain Dan Gallery and his group led by the escort carrier *Guadalcanal* intercepted *U-505* and blasted her to the surface with depth charges and hedgehogs. The defeated crew set demolition charges and abandoned ship, but before the U-boat could sink, a specially trained American salvage party boarded it. They disconnected the demoli-



A boarding party from the USS *Guadalcanal*, under the command of Captain Dan Gallery, captures the German submarine *U-505* in a hunter-killer operation on 4 June 1944. This was the first boarding and capture by U.S. naval forces since 1815.

tion charges, closed the sea valves, and captured the U-boat and her entire crew. They then pumped out the waterlogged boat and towed her to Bermuda. After the war the *U-505* was restored, and has since been on display at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, Illinois.

In all, the Allies lost 2,775 merchant ships, amounting to 23 million tons during the Battle of the Atlantic. Of this, 14.5 million tons were sunk by German U-boats. The Germans entered 1,175 U-boats into the war, of which they lost 781. They used the capital ships they had at the beginning of the war and those completed during it as independent surface raiders. Though they scored some notable successes, most of these were eventually hunted down by the Allies and sunk or blockaded in port.

THE WAR IN EUROPE AND AFRICA

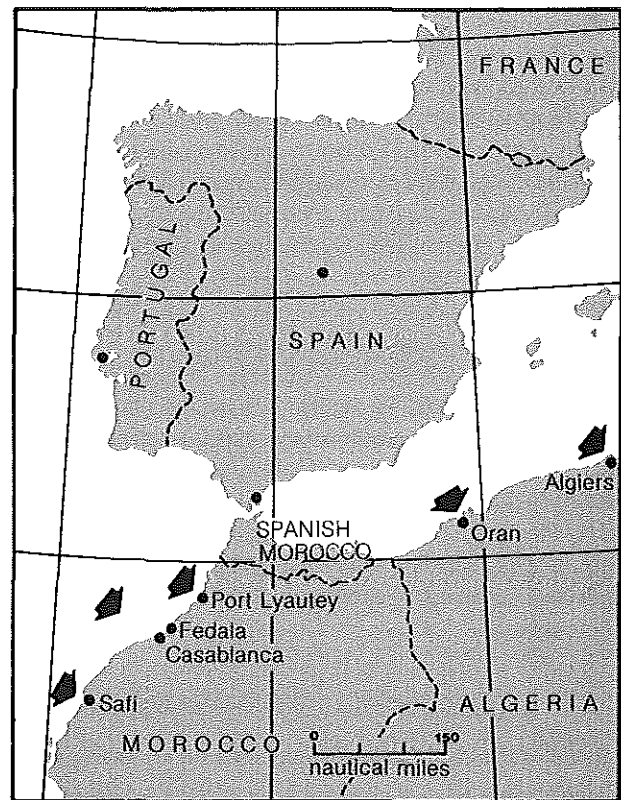
In the spring of 1942 the German armies were consolidating their positions in France and North Africa. Nowhere were things going well for the Allies. American military leaders and Stalin in the Soviet Union wanted to bring the war directly to Hitler with an invasion in Europe. But cooler British heads prevailed, convincing President Roosevelt that the Allies were not ready for such a major undertaking in the face of Hitler's superior forces.

Still, the Allies had to do something in order to recover the initiative. Winston Churchill proposed an invasion of French North Africa in order to take the pressure off British forces in Egypt. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the "Desert Fox" commanding the elite German Afrika Korps, was heading toward Suez, the loss of which would be extremely serious for the Allies. Churchill believed an Allied invasion would also have the secondary benefit of drawing German forces away from the beaches of Europe to Africa. Once there, they could not be easily returned to the continent because of increasing Allied control of the Mediterranean Sea area.

Operation Torch was planned for 8 November 1942. This became the first Allied offensive operation against the Axis in the European-North African theater. American amphibious forces making up the Western Naval Task Force were to come from East Coast ports and converge on French Morocco. They were to land on three beaches near the primary objective, the port of Casablanca.

Combined British and American forces making up the Central Naval Task Force would invade Oran, in Algeria. A third combined contingent, called the Eastern Naval Task Force, would seize Algiers. Lieutenant General Dwight Eisenhower was the supreme commander, and Admiral Kent Hewitt, USN, was the Amphibious Task Force commander.

The big question mark of Operation Torch concerned the Vichy French forces in the area. Would they resist the landings? The invasion thus became a political problem



Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa by the Allies. Arrows show the landing sites. American forces landed at the three beachheads in Morocco while combined British and U.S. forces landed at the two Algerian cities.

as well as a military one. If the French decided to offer serious resistance, they might well be able to hold off the Allies until German reinforcements arrived. This could doom the invasion and set up a major disaster for the Allies in North Africa.

As it turned out, the French Navy and some shore batteries put up a spirited defense at Casablanca, but this was quickly eliminated by U.S. Navy gunfire. Little resistance was met in either Oran or Algiers. The French quickly surrendered and joined forces with de Gaulle's Free French (in accordance with secret orders from Marshal Pétain, the French leader in Vichy). In response, Hitler's armies immediately occupied the previously unoccupied parts of France.

Operation Torch, though anything but smooth, was completely successful in meeting all of its objectives. It showed, however, that the Allies were by no means ready to invade Hitler's Europe. Much more training, larger forces, and better equipment would be necessary.

The North African operations set up one of the first major defeats for the Axis. Shortly before the Allied landings in Morocco and Algeria, British field marshal Bernard Montgomery's Eighth Army routed the Afrika Korps at El Alamein, thus removing the threat to Suez.

The Allies then squeezed the Germans and Italians between them into Tunisia. In May the fighting in North Africa ended with the defeat and capture of the entire Afrika Korps, about 275,000 troops, and all of their remaining equipment. (Rommel escaped to Germany in the closing days of the campaign.) As an indirect result of the Allied victory in Africa, most of the main units of the Vichy French naval fleet were subsequently scuttled at Toulon.

ON THE EASTERN FRONT

In the winter of 1942–43 the Soviets had surrounded and defeated an entire German army at Stalingrad, an industrial city on the Volga River. They took 330,000 prisoners in one of history's most savage battles. The Battle of Stalingrad turned the tide on the eastern front. The Soviet advance, begun in February 1943, did not stop until the Red Army entered the German capital of Berlin two years later.

CASABLANCA CONFERENCE

In January 1943 President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill met in the famous Casablanca Conference. They decided that before any major offensives were to succeed elsewhere, antisubmarine warfare in the Atlantic had to be given top priority. This was when merchant shipping losses along the U.S. East Coast were at their peak. Second, the Allied leaders agreed that the next offensive operation against the Axis would be an invasion of Sicily in July. The Mediterranean sea-lanes were now reasonably secure, except from land-based air attack. Finally, the leaders announced that the Allies would demand nothing short of the unconditional surrender of Germany, Italy, and Japan.

OPERATION HUSKY: INVASION OF SICILY

With the success of North Africa still fresh in the minds of all, Allied forces under the command of General Eisenhower prepared for a massive invasion of Sicily, code named Operation Husky. This was to be the first major attempt to take the home territory of an Axis nation. On 9 July 1943 the invasion took place on beaches on the southern side of the island. Admiral Hewitt again commanded the American amphibious forces, while Field Marshal Montgomery commanded the British Eighth Army. Over 580 ships landed and supported some 470,000 Allied troops on the island.

A force of newly developed amphibious ships and assault craft—LSTs, DUKWs, LCIs, LCTs, and LCVPs—took part. Axis tanks leading strong armored counterattacks were driven off the field by effective naval gunfire, thus allowing the Americans and British to advance.

Soon the 350,000 troops of Italian general Alfredo Guzzoni were in full retreat, chased by General George Patton's tanks and Montgomery's forces. Patton proved to be a masterful field commander, rapidly moving his armor to best advantage and chasing the retreating Axis armies toward Messina and an evacuation of the island. Only about one-third of the Axis armies escaped to Italy with their equipment.

By 17 August Sicily was under Allied control. Allied forces had sustained some heavy casualties at the hands of the German Luftwaffe, but the new amphibious ships, detailed training, planning, and rehearsals paid off handsomely.

The Sicilian campaign was a major triumph for the Allies, for it largely eliminated Italy from the war. King Victor Emmanuel II deposed Mussolini and put him into "protective custody." Marshal Pietro Badoglio, the new head of government, said publicly that he would continue the war against the Allies, but in private he began negotiations that would lead to surrender. In the meantime, Eisenhower's staff began immediate planning for the invasion of Italy itself.

OPERATION AVALANCHE: INVASION OF ITALY

On the eve of 8 September, just before the invasion of Italy at Salerno, the Italian government announced an armistice. Much of the Italian fleet steamed out of the northern ports of Genoa and La Spezia to surrender at Malta.

But the Allies still had to contend with the Germans. Montgomery's army had crossed the Strait of Messina to the mainland on 3 September without much opposition. The Germans, however, had sensed a landing planned for Salerno and had mined and fortified the beaches accordingly. When the landings, designated Operation Avalanche, occurred on 9 September, the amphibious forces of Admiral Hewitt and General Mark Clark met fierce German resistance.

German forces had the beaches zeroed in, and motorized vehicles and tanks were positioned overlooking the landing sites. The Luftwaffe was standing by to turn the beaches into an inferno. In spite of these defenses, a precarious beachhead was secured, but with heavy losses. The beachhead was repeatedly saved by naval gunfire support. Noting the reliance of Allied forces on the supporting warships, the Nazis hurled the bulk of their air power at these ships. The Germans introduced radio-controlled glide bombs, which caused severe damage to a number of British and American cruisers. Three destroyers were sunk, and many ships were damaged.

But the beachhead held. German tactical errors in the field halted their counterattacks in mid-September. A strategic error by Field Marshal Rommel withheld German reinforcements from the north—when they could

probably have made the difference. On 16 September Montgomery's Eighth Army joined forces with Clark's Fifth Army, and the Germans withdrew to a new defense line north of Naples. That great port city was occupied by the Fifth Army on 1 October. The port was a shambles, and the harbor was cluttered with sunken, booby-trapped ships scuttled by the Germans. Clearance of the harbor was assigned to the Seabees, who managed to do it, despite incredible obstacles, within four months. Meanwhile, the Allies began their buildup for further movement northward.

ANZIO

The Germans had consolidated their forces at the Gustav Line, about halfway between Naples and Rome. To bypass these defenses, the Allies planned an "end run"—an amphibious assault on Anzio Beach, some 37 miles south of Rome. The planning was complicated by the fact that many of the Allied forces in the Mediterranean theater were being transferred to England in preparation for the great invasion of France across the English Channel.

Nevertheless, the landing was made on 22 January 1944 with only two reinforced divisions. The initial landing met with little resistance, but the Germans quickly moved in to stop any forward movement by the relatively small Allied invasion force. Allied reinforcements poured into the small area, but the Germans kept reinforcing their surrounding forces at a similar rate, building up powerful artillery defenses that continuously

pounded the enclosed Allies. A major seaborne supply route was established between Anzio and Naples over the next several months. As forces on both sides grew, Allied casualties rose to 59,000 men. One-third were lost from disease, exhaustion, and stress caused by severe battle fatigue and continuous rains.

The Allied force eventually grew to 90,200 Americans and 35,500 British, packed into a small beachhead. They were surrounded by 135,000 Germans who had placed their artillery so it could reach any part of the invasion site. It wasn't until the rains ceased in May that the Allies finally broke the German hold on Monte Cassino, the key fortress on the Gustav Line, and surged northward. The Germans broke off all contact at Anzio when this happened, and the victorious Allies swept unopposed into Rome on 4 June.

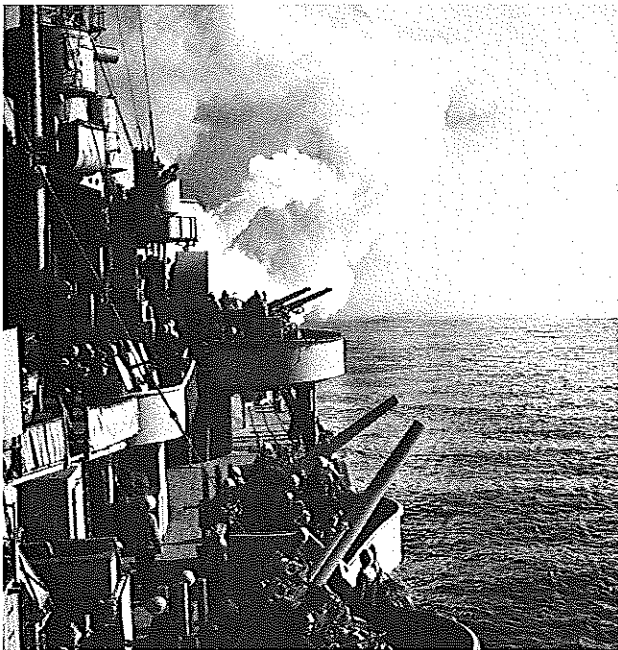
Two days later the focus of attention in Europe became coastal France, where the great cross-Channel operation against Hitler's *Festung Europa* (Fortress Europe) began. The rest of the Italian campaign received little public attention. Nevertheless, the fighting went on, as the Germans slowly but steadily retreated northward.

OPERATION OVERLORD: INVASION OF NORMANDY

Hitler had calculated that the Allies would be invading his *Festung Europa* no later than the spring of 1944. He ordered the commander on the western front, Field Marshal Karl von Rundstedt, and his deputy, Field Marshal Rommel, to build a great "Atlantic Wall" of concrete fortifications to keep the Allies out. Von Rundstedt felt that static defenses were useless against naval gunfire, so he organized highly mobile inland divisions, which could rush to any spot where an invasion occurred.

Rommel, on the other hand, felt that Allied air power would prevent the mobile divisions from getting to the seacoast. So he concentrated his efforts on beach defenses, counting heavily on mines. He also had concluded that the Allies probably would invade at the Normandy beaches, rather than at Calais, the English Channel's narrowest point. He was right. The Allies had begun to prepare for a major amphibious invasion of the Normandy coast, about 170 miles southwest of Calais, under the code name Operation Overlord.

In the early spring Eisenhower began a strategic air attack against Germany designed to eliminate aircraft factories and ruin the Luftwaffe. By April the raids had decimated the German air force to the point where the Allies could count on a thirty-to-one superiority over the Normandy beaches. Next, the Allied air forces struck at the railroad marshaling yards, bridges, and the trains and tracks themselves, wreaking such havoc that it was almost impossible for any military traffic to move by rail anywhere in France. These air attacks assisted the am-



The cruiser USS *Philadelphia* points her antiaircraft guns skyward while making a smoke screen off the Anzio beachhead.

phibious assault. In fact, the Allied air strikes in France and Germany *had* to be successful if Operation Overlord was to be a success.

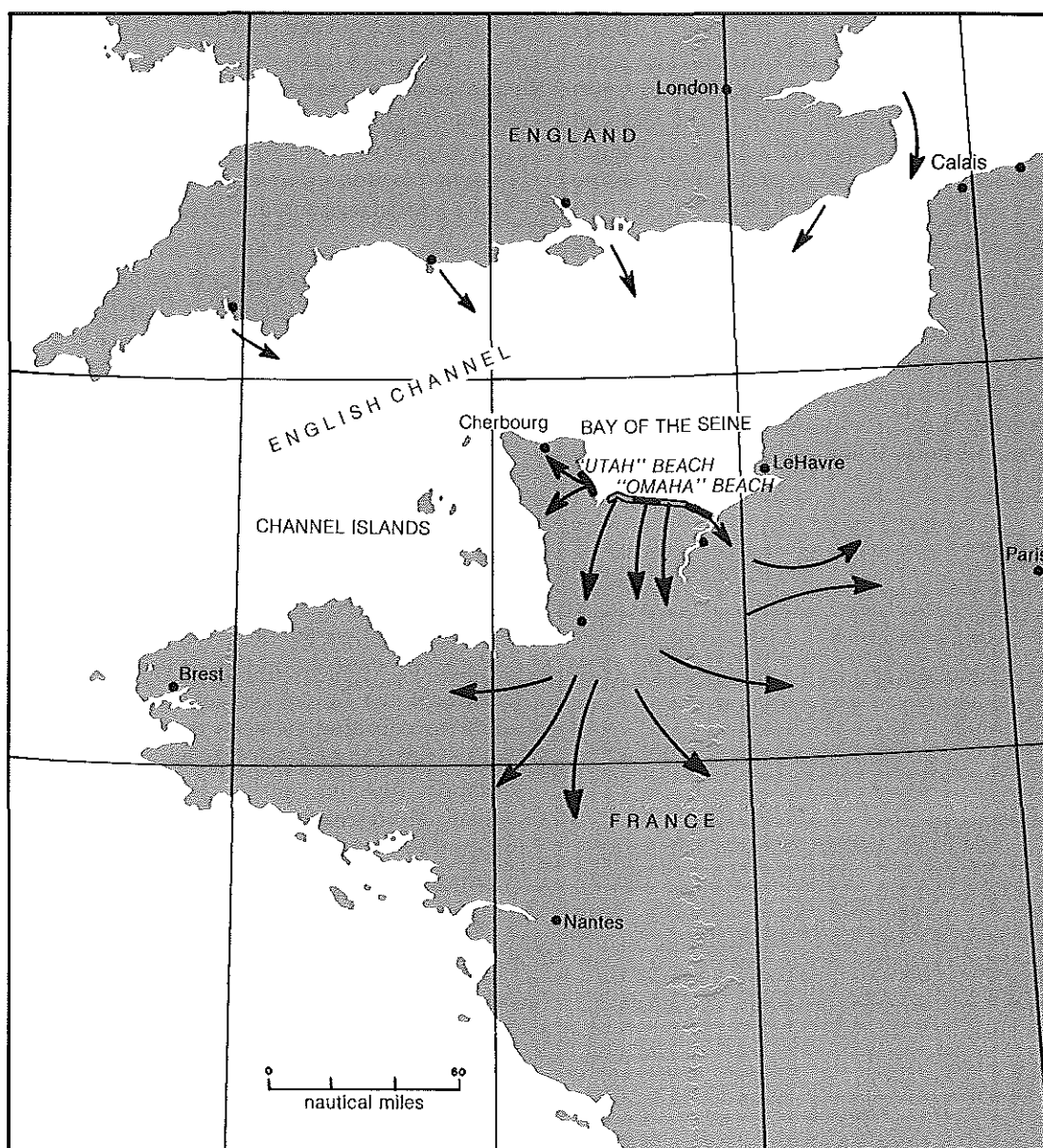
D DAY AT NORMANDY

The invasion at Normandy was originally set for 1 May 1944, but Eisenhower postponed the date to 1 June in order to get an additional month's production of landing craft.

The physical conditions of tide, visibility, and weather all were of utmost importance to the planners. The tide was especially crucial. It had to be rising at the time of the

initial landings, so the landing craft could unload and retract without becoming stranded. At the same time, the tide had to be low enough to expose sunken obstacles so underwater demolition teams could destroy them.

The Allies finally selected one hour after low tide for the first landings. This meant that each succeeding wave of boats would come in on higher tides, with less beach to cross. Only three successive days each month would provide the desired tidal heights. The closest dates to 1 June were 5, 6, and 7 June. Eisenhower selected 5 June as his first choice for D Day (debarkation day), and then chose H hours (times for operations to begin) from 0630 to 0755 for the best tidal conditions for each beach.



The Allied landing areas on D Day in Normandy. U.S. forces landed on Utah and Omaha Beaches; British and Canadians landed on Gold, Juno, and Sword. Breakout occurred in mid-August, and Paris was liberated on 24 August.



The invasion at Normandy. Troops waded ashore from LCVs into withering German machine-gun fire.

The Allies planned to land on five beaches located between the Cotentin Peninsula and the Orne River mouth, near the city of Caen. The Americans were to land at Omaha and Utah Beaches on the right flank, and the British were to hit Gold, Juno, and Sword on the left flank. The principal objective of the landings, beyond establishing the beachhead itself, was to capture the port city of Cherbourg so the enormous flow of supplies could be handled quickly.

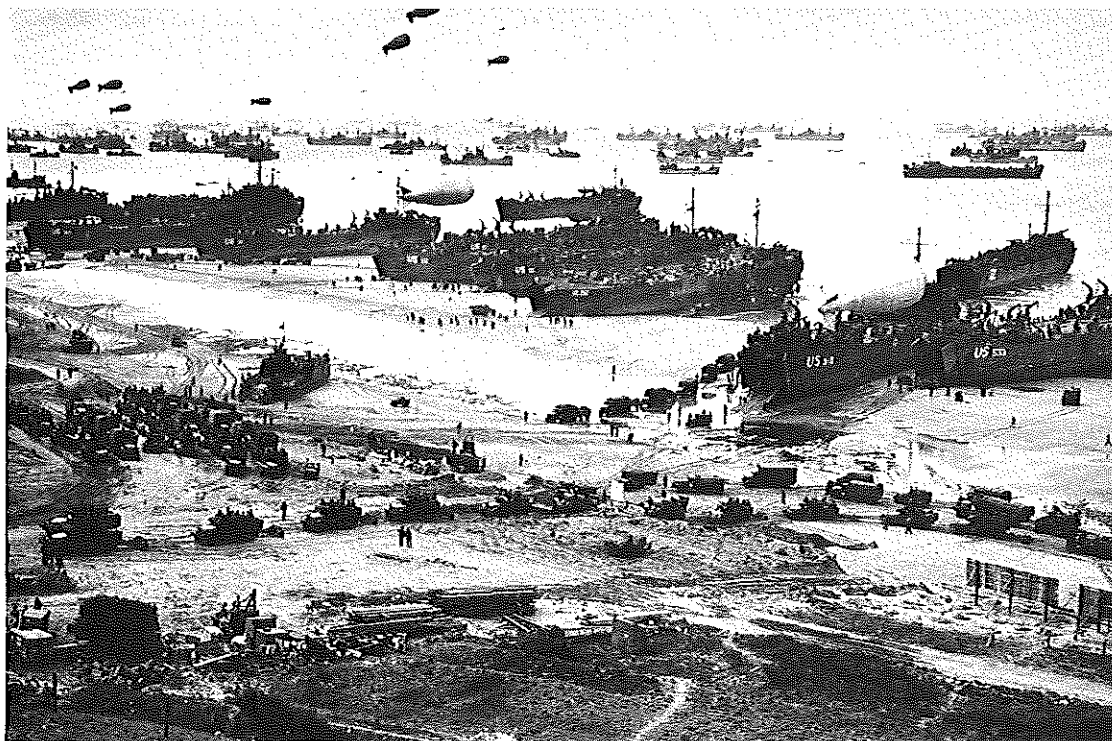
The landings took place on 6 June 1944—a day later than planned because of bad weather, which would have limited air support. In commemoration of the event, this date has been memorialized as “D Day” ever since. Minor opposition was encountered on four of the five beaches, but at Omaha Beach crack German troops were well dug in and opposed the landing fiercely, causing heavy casualties. Many of the Germans assigned to the other beaches had been lured inland to counter Allied paratroops—dropped there for just that reason. The bad weather of the fifth had in fact led the Germans to think that a landing would not occur under such conditions. But a hole in the clouds on 6 June proved to be their undoing.

The Allied troops consolidated their beachhead while expanding south and west to cut off Cherbourg on the Cotentin Peninsula. By the twenty-fourth the 40,000 Germans in Cherbourg were surrounded. A U.S. naval force of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers was called

in to pound the heavily fortified Cherbourg into submission. The Germans put up a determined counterbattery fire. The battleships prevailed, but not before three destroyers and the battleship USS *Texas* were hit. On 25 June the Germans surrendered Cherbourg, and the Allies began the salvage of the wrecked harbor. It was back in commission and receiving cargo within two weeks.

Throughout the Normandy invasion, the single most deadly weapon used by the Germans was the mine. The Germans had planted every kind of mine in the seas off Normandy: contact mines, which exploded upon impact; magnetic mines, detonated by the magnetic fields of steel ships; and pressure mines, set off by ships passing over them. The Allies used nearly 400 minesweepers to try to clear these mines in the days prior to the landings. Nevertheless, over 30 ships were sunk by mines during the invasion, and others were sunk in succeeding weeks as they ferried supplies across the channel.

Despite the mines and the German resistance ashore, the Allies advanced. Taking advantage of a weak spot in the German lines found by General Omar Bradley’s First Army, General Patton drove through with the U.S. Third Army, creating a major breakout and trapping 50,000 German troops. On 24 August Paris fell, and General Eisenhower assumed command of the Allied ground forces on the continent. The Germans were in full retreat. A new Free French government under Charles de Gaulle replaced what was left of the Vichy regime.



Navy LSTs off-load cargo following the invasion at Omaha Beach at Normandy. Note the large number of Allied ships in the background and the barrage balloons tethered above the beach to deter air attacks.

OPERATION ANVIL: INVASION OF SOUTHERN FRANCE

Only one more invasion remained to be staged in the European theater. Operation Anvil was to take place on the French Riviera near Marseille. The operation had two objectives: to gain another port for supplies flowing into France and to serve as a diversion drawing German forces away from the primary beaches in Normandy. The landing was delayed until 15 August, however, because of a shortage of landing craft.

Admiral Hewitt was given the opportunity to conduct this first daylight landing in the Mediterranean. The assault was preceded by 1,300 bombers, which pounded the German defenses for nearly one and a half hours, and by over half an hour of heavy naval shore bombardment. The landing craft moved in under a canopy of rockets fired by amphibious ships. The rockets, naval gunfire, and bombing eliminated German resistance, and Free French and American forces quickly took the offensive. Within two weeks they had captured the port of Marseille, the naval base at Toulon, and the Riviera cities of Nice and Cannes. The Allies then surged northward through the Rhône Valley, joining with Patton's forces near Dijon on 12 September. Most of France, Belgium, and Luxembourg had been liberated, and the Germans were settling in behind their west wall, the Siegfried Line.

GERMANY IS DEFEATED

The rapid movement of Allied forces through France was made possible mainly because of the complete control of the air. When winter weather arrived, however, air cover was reduced because of poor flying conditions. On 16 December von Rundstedt launched a major counteroffensive, named the Battle of the Bulge, in the Ardennes area of Belgium. The Nazis made quick advances through a break in the U.S. lines before being stopped by massive attacks on their flanks by Allied armies. The Germans had surrounded elements of the U.S. 101st Airborne Division at the Belgian town of Bastogne. After several days of fierce fighting, the German commander demanded that the cutoff Americans surrender. The American commander, Brigadier General Anthony C. McAuliffe, gained instant and lasting fame for himself and his troops when he sent back one of the most eloquent replies in the annals of military history: "Nuts!" The terrible siege was broken on 27 December, when the U.S. Third Army, led by General George Patton, broke through the German lines. The Battle of the Bulge was Germany's last offensive.

In early 1945 the Allies resumed their attacks on the German Reich—Americans, British, French, and Canadians on the western and Italian fronts, and the Soviets on the eastern front. In March the Allied forces reached the Rhine River, and the U.S. Navy was called on to make its

last direct contribution in the fight against Germany. Navy landing craft, which had been carried across Belgium by trucks and trains, helped ferry elements of Bradley's armies over the river in most of their initial crossings.

Then, on 7 March, the First Army captured the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen, establishing a major bridgehead across the Rhine. The bridge held up for ten days under heavy German artillery fire. This was sufficient time for major forces to cross the river. The final push was now on from the west, while the Russians surged toward Berlin from the east. On 25 April U.S. and Soviet forces met at the Elbe River. They had cut Germany in half from west to east.

On 28 April Mussolini was captured and killed by Italian antifascist guerrillas while trying to escape to Switzerland. Two days later, Hitler, besieged in his bunker in Berlin by Soviet forces, committed suicide after naming Admiral Dönitz as his successor. On 7 May 1945 hostilities ceased in Europe. The representatives of the German Army, Navy, and government signed the unconditional surrender document at Eisenhower's headquarters in a little red schoolhouse in Reims, France. World War II was over in Europe after five years, eight months, and six days of death and destruction. ■

CRITICAL THINKING

1. The Allied effort to hunt down and eventually sink the German battleship *Bismarck* was one of the most storied events of World War II in the Atlantic. Research the exploits of the *Bismarck* and how she came to her end off France in May 1941.
2. Convoy tactics were one of the most significant factors that led to the defeat of the German U-boat offensive in the Atlantic in both world wars. Research how convoys were formed and how they defended against the U-boat threat.

Chronology

14 June 1940	France falls to Germany
7 Dec. 1941	Japan bombs Pearl Harbor
8 Nov. 1942	Allies invade North Africa
9 July 1943	Sicily attacked
9 Sept. 1943	Italy invaded
22 Jan. 1944	Anzio landing
4 June 1944	U-505 captured
6 June 1944	D Day at Normandy

24 Aug. 1944	Allies liberate Paris
16–27 Dec. 1944	Battle of the Bulge
7 May 1945	World War II ends in Europe

Study Guide Questions

1. What was the Maginot Line in Europe?
2. What French city was the site of an amazing evacuation of trapped English troops in May 1940?
3. What actions took place during the Battle of Britain in 1940–41?
4. Who was the senior U.S. naval leader who took over the leadership of the U.S. Navy following Pearl Harbor?
5. What was the Battle of the Atlantic?
6. What was the German U-boat wolf-pack tactic?
7. Why was the German conquest of Norway and France important to U-boat warfare?
8. What famous antisubmarine group exploit was carried out under the leadership of Captain Dan Gallery in June 1944?
9. What factors finally led to the defeat of U-boat warfare in the Battle of the Atlantic?
10. What was Operation Torch?
11. What battle turned the tide for the Allies on the eastern front in 1942–43?
12. What was the most significant result of the Sicilian campaign of 1943 for the Allies?
13. Where did the Allies stage an invasion in January 1944 to try to accomplish an “end run” around the Gustav Line in Italy?
14. A. Where did the massive Allied invasion of northern France take place in June 1944?
B. By what name has 6 June 1944 been called ever since?
15. What was the last major German offensive against the Allies?
16. When and where did Germany surrender to Allied forces?

Vocabulary

nonaggression pact	Maginot Line
Luftwaffe	sea valve
wolf-pack tactics	D Day
silhouette	demolition charge
snorkel	unconditional surrender
Vichy French	zeroed in
beachhead	counterbattery fire
paratroops	