

# D-Day: The Invasion of Normandy

On June 6, 1944 the Allied Forces of Britain, America, Canada, and France attacked German forces on the coast of Normandy, France. With a huge force of over 150,000 soldiers, the Allies attacked and gained a victory that became the turning point for World War II in Europe. This famous battle is sometimes called D-Day or the Invasion of Normandy.



US troops landing during the Invasion of Normandy

## Leading up to the Battle

Germany had invaded France and was trying to take over all of Europe including Britain. However, Britain and the United States had managed to slow down the expanding German forces. They were now able to turn on the offensive.

To prepare for the invasion, the Allies amassed troops and equipment in Britain. They also increased the number of air strikes and bombings in German territory. Right before the invasion, over 1000 bombers a day were hitting German targets. They bombed railroads, bridges, airfields, and other strategic places in order to slow down and hinder the German army.

## Deception

The Germans knew that an invasion was coming. They could tell by all the forces that were gathering in Britain as well as by the additional air strikes. What they didn't know was where the Allies would strike. In order to confuse the Germans, the Allies tried to make it look like they were going to attack north of Normandy at Pas de Calais.

## The Weather

Although the D-Day invasion had been planned for months, it was almost cancelled due to bad weather. General Eisenhower finally agreed to attack despite the overcast skies. Although the weather did have some affect and on the Allies ability to attack, it also caused the Germans to think that no attack was coming. They were less prepared as a result.

## The Invasion

The first wave of the attack began with the paratroopers. These were men who jumped out of planes using parachutes. They jumped at night in the pitch dark and landed behind enemy lines. Their job was to destroy key targets and capture bridges in order for the main invasion force to land on the beach. Thousands of dummies were also dropped in order to draw fire and confuse the enemy.

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In the next stage of the battle thousands of planes dropped bombs on German defenses. Soon after, warships began to bomb the beaches from the water. While the bombing was going on, underground members of the French Resistance sabotaged the Germans by cutting telephone lines and destroying railroads.

Soon the main invasion force of over 6,000 ships carrying troops, weapons, tanks, and equipment approached the beaches of Normandy.

### **Omaha and Utah Beaches**

American troops landed at Omaha and Utah beaches. The Utah landing was successful, but the fighting at Omaha beach was fierce. Many US soldiers lost their lives at Omaha, but they were finally able to take the beach.



Troops and supplies coming to shore at Normandy

### **After the Battle**

By the end of D-Day over 150,000 troops had landed in Normandy. They pushed their way inland allowing more troops to land over the next several days. By June 17th over half a million Allied troops had arrived and they began to push the Germans out of France.

### **The Generals**

The Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces was Dwight D. Eisenhower of the United States. Other Allied generals included Omar Bradley from the United States as well as Bernard Montgomery and Trafford Leigh-Mallory from Britain. The Germans were led by Erwin Rommel and Gerd von Rundstedt.

### **Interesting Facts about D-Day**

- The troops needed the light of a full moon to see to attack. For this reason there were only a few days during a month when the Allies could attack. This led Eisenhower to go ahead with the invasion despite the bad weather.
- The Allies wanted to attack during high tide as this helped the ships to avoid obstacles put in the water by the Germans.
- Although June 6 is often called D-Day, D-Day is also a generic military term that stands for the day, D, of any major attack.
- The overall military operation was called "Operation Overlord". The actual landings at Normandy were called "Operation Neptune".
- D-Day is known as the beginning of the end for Hitler and the Nazi Party. After D-Day, Allied forces continued their attacks forcing the Germans to retreat towards Berlin.

# The Battle of Britain

## What was it?

The Battle of Britain was an important battle in World War II. After Germany and Hitler had conquered most of Europe, including France, the only major country left to fight them was Great Britain. Germany wanted to invade Great Britain, but first they needed to destroy Great Britain's Royal Air Force. The Battle of Britain was when Germany bombed Great Britain in order to try and destroy their air force and prepare for invasion.



German planes attacking Britain

## When was it?

The Battle of Britain started on July 10th, 1940. It lasted many months as the Germans continued to bomb Britain.

## How did it get its name?

The name comes from a speech by the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Winston Churchill. After Germany had overrun France, he said that "the Battle of France is over. The Battle of Britain is about to begin."

## The Battle

Germany needed to prepare for the invasion of Britain, so they first attacked towns and army defenses on the southern coast. However, they soon found that Britain's Royal Air Force was a formidable opponent. The Germans decided to focus their efforts on defeating the Royal Air Force. This meant they bombed airport runways and British radar.

Although the German bombings continued, the British did not stop fighting back. Hitler began to get frustrated at how long it was taking to defeat Great Britain. He soon switched tactics and started bombing large cities including London.



Soldier on the lookout for German planes

## **Battle of Britain Day**

On September 15, 1940 Germany launched a large bombing attack on the city of London. They felt that they were closing in on victory. The British Royal Air force took to the sky and scattered the German bombers. They shot down a number of German planes. It was clear from this battle that Britain was not defeated and that Germany was not being successful. Although Germany would continue bombing London and other targets in Great Britain for a long time, the raids began to slow as they realized they could not defeat the Royal Air Force.

### **Who won the Battle of Britain?**

Although the Germans had more planes and pilots, the British were able to fight them off and win the battle. This was because they had the advantage of fighting over their own territory, they were defending their homeland, and they had radar. Radar allowed the British to know when and where German planes were coming to attack. This gave them time to get their own planes in the air to help defend.



A London street after a bombing

### **Interesting Facts**

- Great Britain's air force was called the RAF or the Royal Air Force. Germany's air force was called the Luftwaffe.
- The code name for Hitler's invasion plans was Operation Sea Lion.
- It is estimated that around 1,000 British planes were shot down during the battle, while over 1,800 German planes were destroyed.
- The main types of fighter planes used in the battle were the Messerschmitt Bf109 and the Bf110 by the German Luftwaffe and Hurricane Mk and Spitfire Mk by the Royal Air Force.
- The leader of the German Luftwaffe was Herman Goering. The leader of the Royal Air Force was Sir Hugh Dowding.
- Germany continued to bomb London at night until May of 1941. This series of bombings was called the Blitz. At one point London was bombed for 57 nights in a row.
- Hitler finally stopped bombing London because he needed his bombers to invade Russia.

# Battle of Stalingrad

The Battle of Stalingrad was one of the largest and deadliest battles in World War II. It was a turning point in the war. After losing the battle, the German army lost so many soldiers and took such a defeat that they never quite recovered.



Soviet Union tanks defend Stalingrad

## About Stalingrad the City

Stalingrad was located in Southwest Russia on the Volga River. It was a major industrial and communications center for the Soviet Union in the south. Also, it was named after the Soviet leader Josef Stalin. This made the city important to Stalin and also important to Hitler, who hated Stalin.

Stalingrad was called Tsaritsyn until 1925 when it was renamed Stalingrad in honor of Josef Stalin. In 1961 the city's name was changed to Volgograd, meaning Volga City.

## When was the Battle?

The battle took place during the last part of 1942 and early 1943. After months of fighting and finally nearly starving to death, the Germans surrendered on February 2, 1943.

## The Battle

The battle began with the German air force, the Luftwaffe, bombing the Volga River and then the city of Stalingrad. They reduced much of the city to rubble. Soon the German army moved in and was able to take a large portion of the city.

However, the Soviet troops were not ready to give up. Fighting in the city of Stalingrad was fierce. Soviets hid all over the city, in buildings and even the sewers, attacking the German soldiers. This brutal battle began to take its toll on the Germans.



Soviet Soldiers fight in the streets of the city

## **Surrender**

In November, the Soviets gathered and made a counter attack. They trapped the German army inside of Stalingrad. Soon the Germans began to run out of food. Finally, weak from lack of food and freezing from the cold winter, the majority of the German army surrendered. Hitler was angry with General Paulus for surrendering. He expected Paulus to fight to the death or commit suicide, rather than surrender. Paulus, however, surrendered and later spoke out against the Nazi's while in Soviet captivity.

## **How many soldiers fought at the Battle of Stalingrad?**

Both sides had large armies of over 1 million soldiers. They also each had hundreds of tanks and over 1,000 planes. It is estimated that around 750,000 soldiers from the German army died and nearly 500,000 Russians.

## **Who were the leaders?**

The German army was led by General Friedrich Paulus. He was promoted to Field Marshall right before he surrendered to the Russians. Hitler was hoping that promoting Paulus would boost his moral and cause him not to surrender.

The Soviet Union army was led by General Georgy Zhukov.

## **Interesting Facts**

- Adolf Hitler was very angry at General Paulus for losing the battle. He stripped Paulus of his rank and held a national day of mourning for the shame Paulus had brought on Germany by losing.
- German tanks had trouble fighting in the streets of Stalingrad. Much of the city was turned into rubble which the tanks could not go around or over.
- General Zhukov would lead the Soviet Union to many more victories by the end of World War II. He was one of the most decorated generals in the history of the Soviet Union.
- Around 91,000 German soldiers were captured at the end of the battle.

# Battle of the Bulge

The Battle of the Bulge was a major battle in Europe during World War II. It was Germany's final attempt to drive the Allies off of mainland Europe. Most of the troops involved on the Allied side were American troops. It is considered one of the greatest battles ever fought by the United States military.



Soldiers moving during the battle

## When was it fought?

After the Allies had freed France and defeated Germany at Normandy, many thought that World War II in Europe was coming to an end. However, Adolf Hitler of Germany had different ideas. Early in the morning on December 16, 1944 Germany launched a major attack. The battle lasted for around one month as American forces fought back and kept Germany's army from overrunning Europe.

## What's with the funny name?

The Battle of the Bulge actually took place in the Ardennes Forest of Belgium. When the Germans attacked, they pushed back the center of the Allied forces' line. If you were to look at a map of the Allied army front, there would have been a bulge where the Germans attacked.

## What happened?

When Germany attacked they used over 200,000 troops and nearly 1,000 tanks to break through the US lines. It was winter and the weather was snowy and cold. The Americans were not ready for the attack. The Germans broke through the line and killed thousands of American troops. They tried to advance quickly.



Soldiers had to deal with snow and bad weather

The Germans had a good plan. They also had English speaking German spies drop in behind the Allied lines. These Germans were dressed in American uniforms and told lies to try and confuse the Americans so they

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wouldn't know what was going on.

### **American Heroes**

Despite the quick advance and the overwhelming forces of the Germans, many American soldiers held their ground. They did not want Hitler to take over again. The Battle of the Bulge is famous for all the small pockets of American soldiers who attacked and harassed the Germans as they tried to advance.

One of the famous small fights that occurred was at Bastogne, Belgium. This city was at a key crossroads. The US troops of the 101st Airborne Division and the 10th Armored division were surrounded by Germans. They were ordered to surrender or die. US General Anthony McAuliffe didn't want to give up, so he replied to the Germans "Nuts!" Then his soldiers managed to hold out until more US troops could arrive.



Soldiers in white for camouflage

It was small groups of American troops throughout the front who dug in and held out until reinforcements could come that won the battle for the Allies. Their courage and fierce fighting won the battle and sealed the fate of Hitler and the Nazi's in World War II.

### **Interesting Facts about the Battle of the Bulge**

- The Prime Minister of Britain, Winston Churchill, said "This is undoubtedly the greatest American battle of the war...."
- One of the main reasons the Germans lost the battle was they did not have enough fuel for their tanks. American troops and bombers destroyed all the fuel depots they could and eventually the German tanks ran out of fuel.
- Over 600,000 American troops fought in the Battle of the Bulge. There were 89,000 US casualties including 19,000 who died.
- General George Patton's 3rd Army was able to reinforce the lines within a few days of the initial attack.

Source: [http://www.ducksters.com/history/world\\_war\\_ii/battle\\_of\\_the\\_bulge.php](http://www.ducksters.com/history/world_war_ii/battle_of_the_bulge.php)



# Battle of Iwo Jima

The Battle of Iwo Jima took place during World War II between the United States and Japan. It was the first major battle of World War II to take place on Japanese homeland. The island of Iwo Jima was a strategic location because the US needed a place for fighter planes and bombers to land and take off when attacking Japan.



US Marines storm the beach of Iwo Jima

## Where is Iwo Jima?

Iwo Jima is a small island located 750 miles south of Tokyo, Japan. The island is only 8 square miles in size. It is mostly flat except for a mountain, called Mount Suribachi, located on the southern end of the island.

## When was the battle?

The Battle of Iwo Jima took place near the end of World War II. US Marines first landed on the island on February 19, 1945. The generals who planned the attack had thought that it would take around a week to take the island. They were wrong. The Japanese had many surprises for the US soldiers and it took over a month (36 days) of furious fighting for the US to finally capture the island.

## The Battle

On the first day of the battle 30,000 US marines landed on the shores of Iwo Jima. The first soldiers that landed weren't attacked by the Japanese. They thought that the bombings from US planes and battleships may have killed the Japanese. They were wrong.

The Japanese had dug all sorts of tunnels and hiding places all over the island. They were waiting quietly for more marines to get on shore. Once a number of marines were on shore they attacked. Many US soldiers were killed.

The battle went on for days. The Japanese would move from area to area in their secret tunnels. Sometimes the US soldiers would kill the Japanese in a bunker. They would move on thinking it was safe. However, more Japanese would sneak into the bunker through a tunnel and then attack from behind.



The first flag that was raised on Iwo Jima

### **Raising the Flag of the United States**

After 36 days of brutal fighting, the US had finally secured the island of Iwo Jima. They placed a flag on top of Mount Suribachi. When they raised the flag a picture was taken by photographer Joe Rosenthal. This picture became famous in the United States. Later a statue was made of the picture. It became the US Marine Corps Memorial located just outside Washington, DC.



Marine Corps Memorial

### **Interesting Facts**

- The famous picture of the US Flag being raised on Iwo Jima was actually not the first flag raised by the US. Another smaller flag pole had been put there earlier.
- Although the US had more soldiers wounded on Iwo Jima than the Japanese, the Japanese had many more deaths. This was because the Japanese had decided to fight to the death. Out of 18,000 Japanese soldiers only 216 were taken prisoner. The rest died in the battle.
- Around 6,800 American soldiers died in the battle.
- The US government awarded 27 soldiers with the Medal of Honor for their bravery during the battle.
- There were six men in the famous picture showing the US flag being raised. Three were killed later in the battle. The other three became famous celebrities in the US.
- The Japanese dug 11 miles of tunnels within the island of Iwo Jima.