

## D-Day Invasion

Everyone knew in 1944 that the attack was coming, but when, where, and how, and who would lead it? The job would require a quick grasp of changing situations, diplomacy in dealing with difficult political and military leaders, and a clear concept of modern war. The selection of the commanding officer was up to Roosevelt, and even though he knew that the Army Chief of Staff George Marshall wanted the position and could do it well, the president felt that Marshall was too valuable in Washington, so he selected Dwight D. Eisenhower.

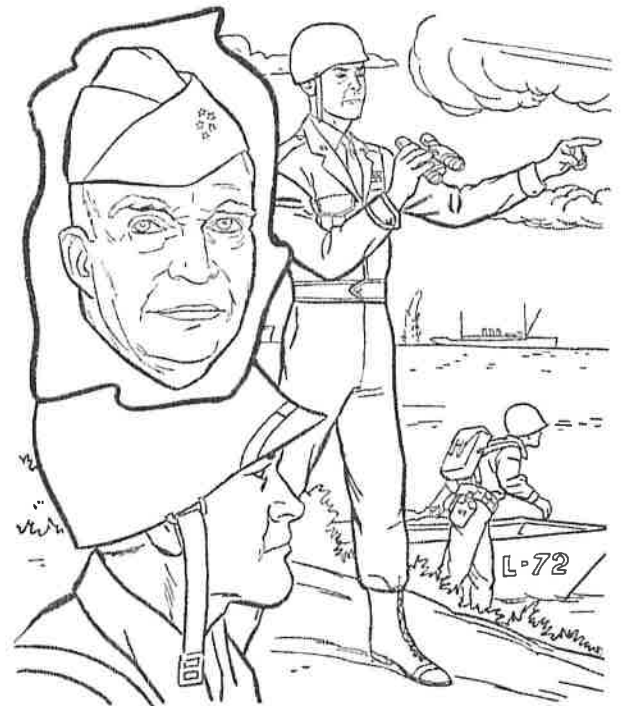
When the United States had entered the war Marshall had passed on many senior officers to put Eisenhower in command of the European forces due to his wide knowledge. A lieutenant colonel when the war began Eisenhower had risen very slowly in the peacetime army. While his jobs were routine, they added up to his understanding of many phases of the army. He had trained tank commanders, served in an infantry battalion, had traveled to France twice, and wrote a book on French WWI battlefields. He had served on the Asst. Secretary of War's staff and on MacArthur's staff in the Philippines. He had learned to fly and wore an aviator's wings. As important as all of that was his ability to get along with his peers and to keep the common touch. Often called "Ike," his big smile and outgoing manner gave his men feelings of optimism and trust.

As the head of operations, Eisenhower selected his commanders and began working on the game plan. "Operation Overlord," the invasion of France, would become the most extensive, most complex landing ever to take place. It would involve 3 million men from many nations, 11,000 airplanes, 500 warships, and 4,000 support craft. They were to hit the Germans by surprise. The plan involved tying down German reserve forces so they would not reinforce the troops dug in along the French coast. This would be accomplished by creating two phony armies to make the German commanders believe that the real landing at Normandy was only a diversion.

It was important that the Germans be misled as to where the real landing would take place. Of the two phony armies, the most effective was "Operation Fortitude." This plan was designed to make the Germans believe that the allies would strike at Calais and not Normandy. Its leader was General George S. Patton, who had recently been removed from command for slapping two soldiers suffering from shell shock and ordering them back to the front. The German commanders viewed Patton as the most qualified general in the Allied forces and felt that the slapping incident was an effort to mislead them. Patton's 'army' was equipped with inflatable rubber tanks, actors dressed as soldiers, fake radio communications, and ammunition dumps, camps, guns, and tanks all made of canvas. The Germans took the bait and focused on Calais. The time had come for the invasion.

June 5, 1944, was a stormy, sleepless night for those on the coast of Normandy, France. In fact, the weather had been so bad that the German defenders had relaxed, thinking that no attack would attack in such miserable weather.

At Calais, German radar began picking fake signals produced by clever British





engineers. Echoes of troop transports were made by reflector balloons and strips of aluminum foil dropped from RAF bombers simulated more planes. Most of the *Luftwaffe* in the region were rushed to Calais to stop the nonexistent invaders.

The beaches of Normandy had been given codenames by the planners: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and Sword. Utah and Omaha were to be taken by U.S. troops, the others by British and Canadian troops. U.S. parachute and glider drops behind enemy lines at Utah Beach were to proceed to the landing zone; British drops behind the lines at Sword were given the difficult job of taking out enemy guns. Despite many obstacles, they succeeded, and saved many lives as a result.

The slow German reaction time was critical to the success of the invasion at "Operation Overlord." By the time the Germans concluded that Normandy was the invasion site and the order for reserves was placed, hundreds of Allied ships and landing craft could be

seen on the horizon. Then the naval barrage began, and the ground shook along the fifty mile invasion front. By the time the reserves arrived the Allies were already on the beaches.

Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., a veteran of three other landings, went with the men landing at Utah Beach. Fortunately for them, they were 2,000 yards away from the assigned landing site. Their beach was deserted, and they moved quickly inland. Omaha beach was much more dangerous and casualties were high. Defensive positions were on bluffs that were hard to reach and Germans machine gun nests sprayed fire down upon the beach. When Brigadier General Norman "Dutch" Cotta arrived at Omaha Beach, he found that his men were terrified and struggling to break through. Finding a group of Army Rangers, he said: "If you're Rangers, get up and lead the way." They took this challenge and advanced on the bluff. Through fierce fighting they began to force gaps in the German lines. More U.S. troops, in groups ranging from company size to just a few men, followed the Rangers to the top of the bluff and soon began their advance inland. The British and the Canadians struggled on their beaches as well, but once that broke through the German defenses they moved forward to meet up with U.S. troops. In one day, the Allies had cracked the Atlantic Wall of the German forces.

It was fortunate for the Allies that D-Day, as it came to be known, was a success. Three months later German scientists developed the V-2 rocket, which was an extremely sophisticated weapon. They flew up to an altitude of 120 miles, then dropped on a target at 2,000 mph. No anti-aircraft defense system could stop them and British cities could be targeted from German soil.

If the invasion had been delayed or defeated, these attacks would have changed the war and given Germany time to develop other weapons. The Germans would go on to have some success against the advancing Allies that winter in the Battle of the Bulge; , but eventually the German offensive stalled and the Allies moved closer to Berlin. It was the beginning of the end for Hitler and the Nazis.