

109 D-DAY AND KAMIKAZES



Just after midnight on June 6, 1944, Allied forces struck the coast of German-held France. Out of stormy weather and the chaos of battle, the Allies forged a victorious landing that turned the tide of the war.

In the spring of 1944, nearly three million Allied soldiers crowded into southern England. Some of the men had finished parachute training. Others had completed mock combat exercises. They were waiting for the order to invade France.

The Nazis were expecting the Allies to attack occupied France. The Allies, however, would have to cross the English Channel (body of water between Great Britain and France). Troops, tanks, ammunition, food, and medical equipment also had to be transported across the water, and landed right in front of the German Army.

There were other problems. In only a few harbors, could supplies be unloaded quickly and easily. Weather conditions and tides had to be exactly right. The Allies also ran the risk of the Germans learning of their plans.

These were chances General Dwight D. Eisenhower decided to take. Eisenhower, known as Ike, was the Allied commander. By the end of May, he knew that the tides would be best on June 5, 6, and 7. But storms were forecast for those days. Only the evening of June 5 might be clear. On that night, he sent the first wave of Allied

troops to the beaches of Normandy in France. Approximately 4000 ships carried 175,000 men. Planes and gliders carrying more men and equipment flew overhead. They covered 35 miles in their journey, arriving the next morning. This event would be known as **D-day** (the invasion of Western Europe by the Allies on June 6, 1944).

Disaster Day?

The crossing was rough. A storm blew in, and many boats and planes went off course in the fog and clouds. Many of the planes overshot their drop sites by two miles. Some of the men who parachuted out of these planes were completely lost. They didn't know the countryside, and the maps didn't always help. Some carried over 100 pounds of equipment and could not move, especially in marshy, flooded areas.

Anticipating an invasion, Nazi Field Marshal Erwin Rommel had ordered German machine-guns to hide in the sand dunes. "As we went in toward the beach, there was no sign of life or resistance," remembered one soldier. "There was an intense quiet, so quiet that it was suspicious." Once the boats were in range, the Nazis opened fire.

Many of the boats were hit. Some soldiers had to disembark in very deep water and couldn't reach the shore. Some boats were ripped apart by German mines. Gradually, the remainder of the troops reached the shore, where land mines, iron

spikes, and rolls of barbed wire turned the fields of Normandy into deathtraps.

On June 6, at a landing site known as Omaha Beach, the Americans were attacked by a top German unit. "It seemed that everything went wrong," one soldier said. Another said, "It seemed we had entered hell itself. The whole beach was a great, burning fury. All around were burning vehicles, piled-up bodies. . . . The water was burning." The Americans gained little ground at Omaha Beach.

Allies Dig In

But as troops poured in, the Allies wedged their way onto French soil. The terrible confusion of the first days did not stop the flow of troops. Artificial harbors were floated into positions offshore so boats with supplies and troops could continue to dock.

Most important, Nazi resistance was not as strong as it might have been. Field



Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969), Supreme Commander of Allied Forces, addresses troops just before they began their part in the D-day invasion.

Marshal Rommel had been in Normandy before the invasion, but the weather had been so bad that he was sure the invasion would be postponed. Just before the Allies landed, Rommel had left to meet with Hitler to discuss the Nazi defense.

When Hitler learned of the Allies' offensive, he was convinced it was a fake. He thought the real invasion would strike on another part of the coast. He refused to let Rommel take reinforcements back to Normandy. The landing was safe.

Soon after the successful landing, the Allies broke through German lines and chased the German army across France. In August, they liberated Paris from four years of German rule. In October, the weary Allies crossed the Rhine River into Germany and the end of the war seemed near.

War in the Pacific

Halfway around the globe, fighting continued in the Pacific. Both the Americans and the Japanese relied on air power. Fighter pilots bombed strategic targets and aircraft carriers were introduced as floating runways for the planes. By October 1944, when the war in Europe seemed near an end, the Japanese were in trouble.

The Pacific battles had been fierce and destructive. In the months after Pearl Harbor, the Japanese had conquered much of the Pacific region. Their conquests included the Philippines, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Indochina, and many small islands.

Not until June 1942, did the United States begin to change the course of the war. When the Japanese attacked the U.S. base on tiny Midway Island, the Americans were ready. They had stopped and decoded a secret Japanese message. U.S. ships sped to Midway's defense and American planes

sank four Japanese aircraft carriers. The Battle of Midway, Japan's worst naval defeat of the war, halted the Japanese advance.

In February of 1943, the U.S. armed forces defeated the Japanese on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. After Guadalcanal, the U.S. strategy was to move toward Japan by "island hopping." The Americans did not try to capture all of Japan's important outposts. Instead, they attacked certain islands that they could use as bases to advance closer toward Japan.

The strategy worked. By the spring of 1945, American forces were beginning to close in on Japan itself. The Japanese military commanders were growing desperate. There had to be some way to turn back the American forces. One Japanese admiral, Masafumi Arima, suggested **kamikaze** (aerial attack of an enemy ship in which pilot kills himself) to his commanders. But they did not approve his idea. On October 13, Arima decided his time had come. He aimed his plane into the U.S. aircraft carrier *Franklin*. More than 1000 sailors were killed or wounded.

Even though this first kamikaze flight did not destroy its target, the crash convinced Japanese commanders that kamikaze missions might work. The Japanese were running out of supplies and trained pilots. Unskilled pilots could be sacrificed to damage the enemy as much as possible.

In Japanese, kamikaze means "divine wind." Japanese leaders during World War II hoped that a new kind of kamikaze would push back the Americans. Kamikaze planes had enough fuel for pilots to reach their targets, but not enough to get them back to Japan. The pilots believed they would die with honor when they crashed their planes.



Japan's kamikaze pilots were a serious threat to Allied forces in the Pacific. This kamikaze attacker just missed crashing into the U.S.S. *Sangamon*.

At the Battle of Leyte Gulf in late October, the kamikazes sank only one destroyer. But American sailors in the Pacific realized they faced a new threat. At the fighting on Iwo Jima in February 1945, waves of kamikazes struck hard. They sank one aircraft carrier and 700 men were killed or wounded. Two months later, the Americans attacked Okinawa. The kamikazes attacked many ships, including the U.S. aircraft carrier *Bunker Hill*.

The Americans knew the kamikazes had to be stopped if America was going to take Japan. American bombers tried, but failed, to stop the kamikazes before they left the ground. Americans bombed kamikaze airfields, airplane factories, and the countryside. The American bombing missions continued, but the Japanese would not surrender.

CHAPTER CHECK

WORD MATCH

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| 1. D-day | a. body of water connecting Great Britain and France |
| 2. Guadalcanal | b. where U.S. defeated Japanese in the Pacific |
| 3. kamikaze | c. the invasion of Western Europe by Allies on June 6, 1944 |
| 4. English Channel | d. where U.S. troops landed to defeat Germans in France |
| 5. Normandy | e. aerial attack of an enemy ship in which pilot kills himself |

QUICK QUIZ

1. What order did Hitler give to Rommel that had a great impact on the Allies' invasion of Europe?
2. Besides enemy defenses, what made D-day landing so difficult and dangerous?
3. After Pearl Harbor, the Japanese conquered much of the Pacific. What military event halted the Japanese advance in the Pacific?

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Why do you think the Allies chose to attack Europe where they did? Why do you think the Nazis expected them to do this?
2. Why do you think the kamikaze was such an effective weapon?