

★ D-DAY ★



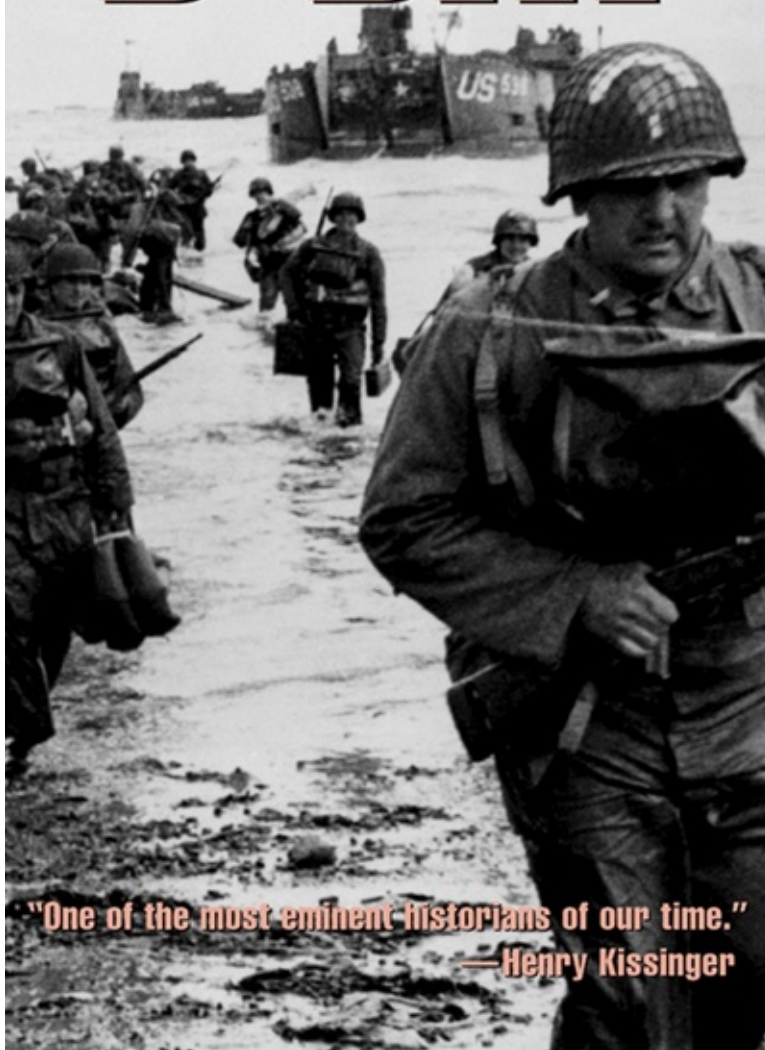
Martin
Gilbert

**"One of the most eminent historians of our time."
—Henry Kissinger**


TURNING
POINTS

★ D-DAY ★

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**"One of the most eminent historians of our time."
—Henry Kissinger**



Contents

[Cover](#)

[Half Title page](#)

[Title page](#)

[Copyright page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Preface](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[List of Maps](#)

[Chapter 1: The Genesis of a Plan](#)

[Chapter 2: Adversaries and Allies](#)

[Chapter 3: Toward Overlord](#)

[Chapter 4: Preparations Intensify](#)

[Chapter 5: Planning and Deception](#)

[Chapter 6: The Mounting Costs](#)

[Chapter 7: The Month of May](#)

[Chapter 8: The First Five Days of June](#)

[Chapter 9: D-Day: From Midnight to Dawn](#)

[Chapter 10: D-Day: Fighting on Land Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, and](#)

[Sword](#)

[Chapter 11: Establishing the Beachhead](#)

[Chapter 12: Beyond the Point of No Return](#)

[Maps](#)

[Bibliography of Works Consulted](#)

[Index](#)

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T U R N I N G P O I N T S

D-Day

MARTIN GILBERT



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

Published simultaneously in Canada

Design and production by Navta Associates, Inc.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Gilbert, Martin, date.

D-Day / Sir Martin Gilbert.

p. cm. — (Turning points)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-471-42340-8 (alk. paper)

1. World War, 1939–1945—Campaigns—France—Normandy. 2. Normandy (France)—History, Military—20th century. I. Title. II. Turning points (John Wiley & Sons)
D756.5.N6 G58 2004
940.54'2142—dc22
2003023858

*Dedicated to my fellow travelers in Normandy
during our visit in 2003*

*Dr. Carl Herbert
Michael Phillips
Bernard Pucker
Daniel Solomon
David Solomon
and
Sir Harry Solomon*

Preface

The Allied landings in 1944 might have ended in disaster. Winston Churchill thought he would be woken up to be told of massive casualties. General Eisenhower prepared a short, solemn broadcast announcing that the enterprise had failed.

D-Day in military parlance is the starting “day” of any offensive. In 1943 there had been both Sicily D-Day and an Italy D-Day before the cross-Channel assault. But because the Normandy landings on 6 June 1944 marked so significant a turning point in the Second World War, the term “D-Day” has come to signify that day alone. My aim in these pages is to show how that turning point in history came about. The period of preparation, lasting almost two years—amid the strains and uncertainties of war elsewhere—was one of inventiveness, hard work, experimentation, secrecy, and wide-ranging deception plans.

This was no chance or accidental turning point, but a calculated, planned, evolving, intricate struggle to ensure the overthrow of a tyrannical regime, and to liberate those who had suffered under its harsh rule for four years. It was a struggle that involved men and women in offices and factories, training camps and clandestine venues—almost none of them knowing the specific destination—working as a vast team to put together a comprehensive plan that would ensure the destruction of Hitler and his regime and the liberation of the captive peoples of Europe.

The turning point of 6 June 1944 owed its evolution and impact to many individuals and groups of individuals. Among them were the two statesmen, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose joint vision it was, despite disagreements and hesitations along the way; to General George C. Marshall and General Sir Alan Brooke, the respective heads of the vast American and British military organizations, who worked for it at the highest level of strategic planning; to General Dwight D. Eisenhower and General Bernard Montgomery, the American Supreme Commander and the British Commander-in-Chief, respectively, who had to carry out the strategy and work together in tandem. There were also the two staffs of both the commanders, men and women who had to coordinate a hundred different enterprises, and to the special organizations within those staffs, working to devise a successful amphibious landing on a scale never before attempted.

Others without whom the whole vast enterprise could not have been launched were the intelligence chiefs who masterminded the sending of Allied agents into Europe, and who controlled the double agents in Britain through whom the essential deception plans were promoted. Then there were the factory workers and engineers and builders and technicians and inventors who made the wide array of equipment needed. Much was also owed to the pilots and aircrews who were in action long before D-Day, on the day itself, and after it, helping to ensure success; to the sailors who cleared the seas and transported the invasion force and kept it supplied; and above all to the soldiers of all Allied armies, all ranks, and all branches of the armed services, who trained for action, and then went into action on the beaches and landing grounds of Normandy, and then fought their way across the Continent. It was a collective effort on an unprecedented scale. Without that effort the turning point would have been impossible.

Those who planned for a successful turning point had two unexpected advantages, one of which was beyond their control, the other of which they engineered. These were both mistakes made by the enemy. Hitler’s decision to declare war on the United States, six months after he had invaded the Soviet Union, ensured that he had to confront a second powerful adversary before he had defeated the first. The Normandy landings would not have been possible without the substantial participation of the

United States. Hitler's second mistake was carefully encouraged by the Allies: his belief that the destination of the Allied forces—even after the landings had been made on the Normandy coast—was elsewhere, at the Pas-de-Calais. But the possibility always remained, until after the actual landings, that if the Germans decided to bring their maximum forces to bear on the beachhead, the Allied armies could be defeated on the shore.

Despite the enormous energy and ingenuity that went into the planning for D-Day, and despite the successful deception, the specter of failure was always present. Indeed, the debate over whether this was the best way to challenge the Nazi domination of Europe had been a long and divisive one. Even Churchill, who, in both the earliest and later stages was to be a strong advocate of the landings, had his doubts. As he later wrote: "I was not convinced that this was the only way of winning the war." Even after the decision to embark on a cross-Channel landing had been made, he had pressed for different military initiatives.

A failed Allied landing would not only have been a setback, it could also have been a disaster for the Allied cause. Hitler's regime would have seen an opportunity to regain the ascendant, and it possessed the means to do so. New, terrifying flying bombs and the even more powerful rocket bombs—with their one-ton warheads—were almost ready to be launched. Long-distance submarines were in the final stage of development, and these would enable Hitler's naval power to reach the eastern seaboard of the United States without having to refuel at sea. In addition, a mine against which there was no known defense was in the final stages of preparation: the first examples were actually used on D-Day.

Relieved from the need to fight an Allied army in the West, an enormous quantity of planes, tanks, troops, and armaments—a third of Germany's first-class fighting forces—would have been available to meet the Soviet eastern offensive, which had been planned by the Allies to follow the Normandy landings. The last remaining Jews of Europe—more than a million—were listed for deportation and death; the collaborators, trains, and gas chambers would have been available to seek them out and deport them, to internment and their deaths.

Failure at Normandy could have given Hitler—whose armies and Gestapo were in occupation control from the Atlantic coast of France to the Polish-Soviet borderlands—the prospect of victory. The Soviet Union, after three years of war, was still fighting the German forces on its own soil, and still bleeding and burning on its own territory. Britain did not have the resources for a second amphibious assault without the United States. If the American armies had been forced to leave Normandy bloodied and defeated, the United States might well have decided—after two and a half years of focusing on the war in North Africa and Europe—to turn its main energies to the ever-growing demands of the war in the Pacific, and Europe would have been left to its own devices. Had that happened, I doubt that I—a seven-year-old British schoolboy at the time of the landings—would be alive to write this book, or free to express my opinions without fear of imprisonment—or death.

Sir Martin Gilbert
Honorary Fellow
Merton College
Oxford
25 November 2000

Acknowledgments

My first thanks are to the schoolmasters of Highgate School, who, in 1950, took a school group to the Normandy beaches. Signs of the landings were much in evidence then, as was the Allied destruction of Caen. In 1969 I made the first of several visits to Field Marshal Montgomery, who gave me an inscribed copy of his book *Normandy to the Baltic*, showed me his command caravans, and encouraged me in my work.

On my own subsequent visits to Normandy, most recently with a group of friends in 2003, I have benefited from the exceptional work done by Winston Ramsey, the editor of the two-volume *D-Day: Then and Now*, and by Major and Mrs. Holt's most informative *Battlefield Guide to the Normandy Landing Beaches*; their respective volumes are an indispensable preliminary to any visit to or study of the Normandy landings. These, and many other historical works on which I have drawn, and without which no history of the Normandy landings could be written, are listed in the bibliography. I am also grateful to those who have sent me material or answered my queries, in particular Major Robert de Cazenove, Gunner Connell, Sue Ann Dunford, Lady Dunluce, Suzan E. Hagstrom, Benjamin Meirtchak, Esther Poznansky, Sir Harry Solomon, Professor George J. Winter, and Morley Wolfe Q.C.

Michael A. Accordino, a veteran of the Normandy landings, sent me his typescript "Memoirs of a Soldier." James H. Burke sent me his recollections, compiled primarily as a record for his family "and its future descendants." Charles Delworth gave me his recollections of D-Day, as seen by an Allied soldier in Italy. John E. Dunford set out for me his personal account of the Normandy landings, as did Alf Freeman. Professor M. R. D. Foot gave me his personal recollections of the British parachute deception that drew German troops away from the American landing on Omaha Beach. Melvyn Greene, O.B.E., a British schoolboy at the time of D-Day, gave me a copy of his unpublished recollections, "A Boy's Memories alongside World Events." Judith Kramer gave me access to the diary of her father, Abe Kramer. Sir John Keegan gave me permission to quote from his own schoolboy recollections in his book *Six Armies in Normandy*. Tom Rice gave me access to his own memories, and those of his company officer Eugene D. Brierre, of parachuting on D-Day. Irving Rosenbluth recalled June 5 on an air base in Britain. Eugene D. Shales gave me his account, written for his grandchildren, of coming ashore on D-Day.

Max Arthur read the text with a knowledgeable eye. Erica Hunningher, Rima Weinberg Dudko, and Kimberly Monroe-Hill gave me the benefit of their expert editorial skills. Tim Aspden has transformed my rough draft maps into his usual high standard of clarity and presentation. Kathleen Thomson assisted with the substantial task of correspondence and organization, and also read the text.

Maps

- [1. Commando training bases.](#)
- [2. Landing craft building yards in the United States.](#)
- [3. Amphibious landing training sites.](#)
- [4. “Big Week” bombing raids, 20–26 February 1944.](#)
- [5. German Intelligence assessment of the location of the “bogus” First United States Army Group \(FUSAG\).](#)
- [6. German Intelligence assessment of the “bogus” Allied army in Scotland, 15 May 1944.](#)
- [7. Anglo-American bombing targets in France and Belgium before D-Day.](#)
- [8. General Guderian’s journey, 20 April to 8 May 1944.](#)
- [9. Field Marshal Rommel’s tours of inspection in the month before D-Day.](#)
- [10. The Anglo-American bombing campaign against the river bridges, 7 May to 6 June 1944.](#)
- [11. Anglo-American plans and deception plans.](#)
- [12. General Eisenhower’s journey, 5 June 1944.](#)
- [13. German-dominated Europe on 6 June 1944.](#)
- [14. Troop concentrations in Britain and the movement by sea toward Normandy, 1–6 June 1944.](#)
- [15. United States Army Air Force assembly and flight paths on the eve of the Normandy landings.](#)
- [16. Naval forces in action, 6 June 1944: the Western Task Force.](#)
- [17. Naval forces in action, 6 June 1944: the Eastern Task Force.](#)
- [18. The Utah and Omaha Beach landings, 6 June 1944.](#)
- [19. The Gold, Juno, and Sword Beach landings, 6 June 1944.](#)
- [20. Allied forces ashore by midnight, 6 June 1944.](#)
- [21. Allied forces ashore by midnight, 10 June 1944.](#)
- [22. Allied forces ashore by midnight, 17 June 1944.](#)
- [23. German Intelligence assessment of the location of the “bogus” First United States Army Group \(FUSAG\), 19 June 1944.](#)
- [24. The Mulberry Harbor at Arromanches.](#)
- [25. The Allied military advance, 1–25 August 1944.](#)
- [26. Places in France mentioned in this book.](#)
- [27. Places in England mentioned in this book.](#)

The Genesis of a Plan

From the moment France was overrun by the German army in June 1940, it was clear that Germany could only be driven out of its western European conquests by a cross-Channel assault. It was also clear that British soil, which at its closest point was visible from the coast of German-occupied France, would have to be the launching ground. Following the Dunkirk evacuation, when 338,226 British, French, and other Allied troops had been evacuated, Hitler's military strength offered him the prospect of the mastery of Europe. To challenge that mastery a much larger army would be needed to cross back over the Channel.

Britain's military resources by themselves could never be sufficient for such a return in the strength needed to offer any prospect of success. Only if the United States, with its potential air, land, and naval strength—including landing craft—were to enter the war, would a return to Europe be possible. But even while substantially assisting Britain's war effort, America remained neutral throughout 1940 and until early December 1941.

Determined to find a means of launching a cross-Channel attack, Churchill—who had told the British people after Dunkirk, "Wars are not won by evacuations"—ordered the design and construction of landing craft. On 6 June 1940, only four days after the final evacuations from Dunkirk, he asked his defense staff to put forward "Proposals for transporting and landing tanks on the beach, observing that we are supposed to have command of the sea, while the enemy have not." On June 20, with his mind still on a return to Europe, he wrote again to his defense staff: "We ought to have a corps of at least 5,000 parachute troops. I hear something is being done already to form such a corps, but only, I believe, on a small scale."

That day the British War Cabinet approved Churchill's proposal to establish the Special Operations Executive, known as SOE. Its purpose was sabotage, subversion, brief cross-Channel raids, and the creation of a secret force of agents behind the lines. Churchill set out the aim of this new body in three words: "Set Europe Ablaze!" Clandestine guerrilla operations would harass an occupying power and, when the moment came, assist an invading force.

On the day after the War Cabinet gave its approval to SOE, Churchill outlined its tasks. "It is of course urgent and indispensable," he wrote to a member of the War Cabinet, "that every effort should be made to obtain secretly the best possible information about the German forces in the various countries overrun, and to establish intimate contacts with local people, and to plant agents. This, I hope, is being done on the largest scale, as opportunity serves. ..."

What Churchill had in mind was a series of raids of "not less than five nor more than ten thousand men," two or three of which raids he thought could be carried out against the French coast during the coming winter. "After these medium raids have had their chance, there will be no objection to stirring up the French coast by minor forays." These were to be followed during the spring and summer of 1941 by "large armoured irruptions."

To plan for future amphibious operations, on 15 October 1940, the Combined Operations Training Centre was established at Inveraray in Scotland, to provide training for embarkation, disembarkation,

and landing under fire. A second component of the cross-Channel invasion was airborne attack by paratroopers. The first British paratroop operation, Operation Colossus, took place inside Italy on 1 February 1941, when thirty-five men were dropped on a sabotage mission to blow up a railway viaduct in the Apennines. The sabotage was successful, but the commandos were captured. Their colleagues continued to perfect their skills. On March 4, two commando units, each of 250 men, supported by two Royal Engineer demolition detachments, landed on the Lofoten Islands, off the northwestern coast of Norway, as part of an operation to seize an Enigma machine and codebook. The Enigma machine was the top-secret method of radio communication between the German High Command and their commanders-in-chief on land, at sea, and in the air.

The Lofoten Islands operation was successful, its secrecy maintained by the deception of a raid to destroy the local fish-oil factories and all available German shipping.

The first substantial SOE operation on mainland Europe was launched in March 1941, when nine agents were parachuted into France, near Vannes, on the Bay of Biscay, to ambush two buses carrying German aircrews on their nightly journey to a German air base used for bombing raids against Britain. Unfortunately for the plan, between its preparation and execution the Germans tightened their security arrangements for the transfer of men to the airfield, and the mission had to be abandoned. It did, however, bring back to London valuable information about the situation in France.

Other operations followed: acts of sabotage, the establishing of SOE circuits inside France, contact with the French Resistance, and help for the Resistance in its own sabotage activities. It was clear, however, that the main task of these Resistance networks and their SOE helpers would come when the Allies were ready to make a major amphibious landing. In all, SOE established eighty-three circuits—groups of agents operating with the French Resistance—in France between the summer of 1941 and the Normandy landings three years later. Of these eighty-three circuits, thirty-three were destroyed by the Germans, some as a result of betrayal, others as a result of mischance. But fifty circuits were still functioning on the day of the cross-Channel landings. Of the 393 agents who worked in France, 111 were executed by the Gestapo or killed while carrying out their duties. Several thousand French men and women were also executed for their part in helping these circuits.

Hitler's European conquests continued throughout 1941. Greece and Yugoslavia were overrun throughout April, and in June the German onslaught turned against the Soviet Union. From the first months of the German attack, which penetrated deep into Russia, Britain gave massive help to the Soviet forces in the form of weapons, tanks, aircraft, munitions, medical supplies, and Intelligence information, making an important contribution to Russia's ability to continue to resist the German onslaught.

Britain also launched a number of commando raids in the West. On 27 July 1941 there was a small hit-and-run raid on the French coast near Ambleteuse, by an officer and sixteen men of No. 10 Commando.

On September 27 there was a further hit-and-run raid near the French seaside town of Luc-sur-Mer, which was later to be at the center of the Normandy landings. It was carried out by men of No. 10 Commando, who managed to cross the seawall, but were then met by machine gun fire and withdrew. Two commandos were taken prisoner, and one was wounded.

Within a month of this commando raid against the Normandy coast, Churchill instructed the newly appointed Commodore of Combined Operations, Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, and his Combined Operations staff, to make plans for "our great counterinvasion of Europe." Churchill told Mountbatten: "The South Coast of England is a bastion of defence against Hitler's invasion; you must turn it into a springboard to launch an attack."

A raid on the French coast at Houlgate on November 23 was carried out by eighty-eight men of No. 9 Commando. It failed in its hit-and-run objective but taught Mountbatten “that the vital lesson establishing and maintaining communications between shore and ship had not been learned.” The learning was begun in earnest.

On 7 December 1941 Japan struck at Pearl Harbor. The American government and people were suddenly embroiled in war in the Pacific. Four days later, Hitler declared war on the United States. In Europe the work of the British commandos continued. On December 27 they carried out their largest raid thus far, when 51 officers and 525 men secured the temporary occupation of the port of Southerness, Vaagso, on the coast of central Norway, a crucial German shipping anchorage and coastal transport point. Men of No. 2, No. 3, No. 4 and No. 6 Commando took part, with considerable British naval and air forces participating, including a cruiser and four destroyers. The troops were put ashore in two lightly armored infantry assault ships (LCAs—Landing Craft, Assault), which had earlier been used as Belgian cross-Channel steamers.

A special unit of correspondents, photographers, and cameramen was also landed at Vaagso, to witness and report as German coastal defenses were demolished and 16,000 tons of German shipping destroyed. Before the German defenders were overrun, twenty of the raiding force were killed. Ninety-eight Germans were taken prisoner. Hitler concluded, “Norway is the zone of destiny in this war,” and ordered substantial reinforcements. This gave the Allies a clear indication of where their future deception plans could be used to good effect.

In Washington, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, recently appointed a member of the War Plans Division of the War Department, and confronted during his first weeks with the division by the Japanese onslaught in the Pacific, felt that it was in the Pacific that the power of the United States should be concentrated. “I’ve been insisting Far East is central,” he wrote on 1 January 1942, “and no other side shows should be undertaken until air and ground are in satisfactory state.” With the grave situation of the Americans, British, and Dutch in the Far East, Eisenhower opposed two recently agreed-on Anglo-American projects: Operation Magnet, the dispatch of American troops to Britain, and Operation Gymnast, a proposed Anglo-American assault on Vichy France in North Africa.

Three weeks later, as the Japanese stood ready to defeat the British in Malaya and the Americans in the Philippines, Eisenhower came around to the view that was beginning to prevail in Washington, and that he—in due course—was so massively to enhance. “We’ve got to go to Europe and fight,” he wrote, “and we’ve got to quit wasting our resources all over the world—and still worse—wasting time.” Eisenhower added: “If we’re to keep Russia in, save the Middle East, India and Burma, we’ve got to begin slugging with air at western Europe; to be followed with a land attack as soon as possible.”

Within a month of Hitler’s declaration of war on the United States, Churchill traveled to Washington to see President Roosevelt, to secure an American commitment to the defeat of Germany in Europe before the defeat of Japan. His views fell on fertile ground. In the autumn of 1941 one of the leading American strategic thinkers, General Albert C. Wedemeyer, a staff officer in the War Department in Washington—who, as a captain, had spent three years before the war at the German staff college in Berlin—had presented a “Victory Plan” that stressed the massive mobilization of resources and manpower that would be needed to defeat Germany in the event of war. “Our principal theater of war is Central Europe,” he wrote; Africa, the Near East, Spain, Scandinavia, and the Far East would be “subsidiary theaters.”

At the Washington conference in December 1941, code-named Arcadia, Roosevelt, Churchill, and

their military staffs agreed, as a basis of Anglo-American strategy, that “only the minimum force necessary for the safeguarding of vital interests in other theaters should be diverted from operations against Germany.” Following this guideline, and adopting the central theme of General Wedemeyer’s earlier plan, on 20 February 1942 General Eisenhower, recently appointed Director of the War Plans Division, confirmed his support for “offensive operations” in the European Theater “and concurrent defensive operations in all others.”

Chapter 2

Adversaries and Allies

On 26 January 1942 the first American servicemen arrived in Britain. This was Operation Bolero. The transit of these troops across the Atlantic was an essential preliminary to any cross-Channel landing. The question of the actual date by which that landing would be possible was under active discussion that month between the British and American military, naval, and air chiefs. Germany's victories against Russia made it essential to find a way to stop Russia from being defeated. The summer of 1942 was considered by the Allied planners as the earliest possible date for a cross-Channel assault with any chance of success, perhaps in securing a permanent foothold on the Cotentin Peninsula, or Brittany. Churchill strongly favored such action.

British commando raids against the French coast continued, including the first British wartime airborne operation into France. On the night of 27–28 February 1942 a raid was made at Bruneval near Le Havre, to seize a German radar installation used to control the German night fighters opposing the Allied bomber offensive against Germany. Among those taking part were paratroops of the British 1st Airborne Division. The radar equipment was dismantled and taken back to Britain.

From Moscow, Stalin was calling for a Second Front as soon as possible. He wanted an Allied landing in the summer of 1942—in two or three months' time. Hitler could not know when any such attempt would be made, but sensing that it must come sooner or later he was taking steps to deal with a possible Allied assault in the West. His plan was for a defensive barrier—known as the Atlantic Wall—from the Atlantic coast of Norway to the French border with neutral Spain in the Bay of Biscay. It was to consist of 15,000 fortified concrete bunkers built at fifty to a hundred yard intervals. In March 1942 Field Marshal von Rundstedt was appointed to command Army Group West (Commander-in-Chief West). He at once gave orders to incorporate the heavy gun emplacements at Calais—which had been erected as part of Germany's plans to invade Britain—into the new defensive structure.

On March 23 Hitler issued Führer Directive No. 40, Command Organization on the Coasts. In this he declared: "The preparation and execution of defensive operations must unequivocally and unreservedly be concentrated in the hands of one man." This was a wise decision, but the complexity of the German command structure meant that it was never carried out—to the ultimate benefit of the Allies. Instead of a unified control, orders could be received by the troops in the field from three separate sources. The first was the commander of Army Group B, responsible for the defense of the area from Holland to the Atlantic coast of France (from February 1944 this command was held by Field Marshal Rommel). The second was the Commander-in-Chief, West, Field Marshal von Rundstedt. The third was Hitler himself. Von Rundstedt was never able to obtain operational authority over either the German Air Force or the Navy.

Neither Stalin's needs nor Churchill's wishes for a cross-Channel operation in 1942 could be met. The blow came from Washington, which alone had the military manpower, and the airpower, sufficient to enable any cross-Channel landing to take place. On 7 March 1942, a black day for the "Second Front Now" campaign, Roosevelt informed Churchill, in strictest secrecy, that as a result of demands in the

Pacific war zones, the American contribution to land operations on the continent of Europe in the summer of 1942, the earliest possible date for some form of cross-Channel assault, would be “materially reduced.” That is to say, the landings would have to be postponed.

Roosevelt warned Churchill that the shipping then available to the United States would allow only 130,000 troops to be transported across the Atlantic by June 1942. Even with new United States naval construction, a vast increase on what had come before, no more than 170,000 American troops could be brought across by June 1943, and a total of 270,000 by December 1943. These were decisive factors. In his March telegram, Roosevelt stated that the earliest possible date by which the “troop-carrying capacity” of the United States could reach 400,000, the minimum figure then envisaged for a major amphibious landing, was June 1944.

The facts set out in Roosevelt’s telegram were a blow, to both Churchill and Stalin. But they represented the reality of the situation. Neither the Second Front—Stalin’s succor—nor Hitler’s defeat were imminent, or even near. But at the War Plans Division in Washington, Eisenhower was still an advocate of serious military action in northern Europe. On March 9, after speaking to General McNaughton, commander of the Canadian forces then in Britain, Eisenhower wrote: “—he believes in attacking in Europe. Thank God!”

Eisenhower’s work had become crucial in the direction of American strategy. On March 25—two days after Hitler’s order for a unified defense structure to meet an invasion—Eisenhower submitted his plan of future action to General George C. Marshall, the United States Army Chief of Staff, who presented it to Roosevelt that same day. The President was impressed, so much so that Eisenhower was asked to elaborate on the paper so that General Marshall could take it to Britain to present to Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff.

Eisenhower’s plan became known as the Marshall Memorandum. It proposed two possible amphibious operations. The first, code-named Round-up, was a full-scale amphibious cross-Channel landing, to be carried out on 1 April 1943. It envisaged a massive buildup of troops in Britain, far greater than previously believed possible. Thirty American and eighteen British divisions—almost 1,500,000 men—would be landed on the coast of northern France between Le Havre and Boulogne and advance on Antwerp. Seven thousand landing craft—they had not yet been built—would put the men on shore.

The second amphibious operation, to be launched no later than autumn 1942, would take place only if the Soviet Union was in danger of defeat, or if Germany’s own military situation was “critically weakened.” This was a much less ambitious, emergency plan, code-named Sledgehammer, an assault against Cherbourg, Brest, or both. Five British and five American divisions—some 330,000 men—would take part. These would include the 170,000 American troops whom Roosevelt had told Churchill could be available by June 1943.

Between April 10 and 14, in London, General Marshall and General Wedemeyer, accompanied by Roosevelt’s personal emissary Harry Hopkins, presented Round-up and Sledgehammer to the three men whose support was essential: the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Alan Brooke; Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten; and Churchill. Some caveats were put forward. With regard to Round-up, Brooke felt that the Japanese victories in the Pacific might force the Allies to concentrate their main military effort on the defense of India and the Middle East. With regard to Sledgehammer, he pointed out that only nine, not ten divisions would be available for such a landing by the autumn and that the Germans would have overwhelming military superiority.

Mountbatten stressed, with regard to both operations, that the Allies did not have the number of

landing craft needed. These were serious criticisms, but they could not override the imperative need for a plan of action. Britain and the United States would march together, Churchill told Marshall, “in noble brotherhood of arms”; and to Roosevelt, Churchill telegraphed that “our agreed programme is crescendo of activity on the Continent.”

In Washington, at the War Plans Division, Eisenhower was relieved. “I hope that—at long last and after months of struggle by this division—we are all definitely committed to one concept of fighting. Neither Round-up nor Sledgehammer were to come to pass; but in them lay the genesis of the veritable landings that Eisenhower was in due course to command. In the United States, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and along the eastern seaboard, a veritable armada of landing craft was even then under construction that would make those landings possible. (See the map on page 183.)

In London, on May 15, the first meeting was held of the Combined Commanders: senior British naval, air, and army chiefs whose task was to prepare an outline for military operations on the continent of Europe, and to make proposals for the detailed, complex, wide-ranging work that would have to be put in hand. They were joined within six weeks by General Eisenhower, who on June 2 was appointed Commanding General, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (ETOUSA), a post he was to hold until sent to North Africa at the end of 1942 to command the Allied forces there.

Stalin, whose forces were being hard-pressed by Hitler’s armies for the second summer in succession, continued to demand a cross-Channel landing during the summer of 1942. On June 20, in New York, Churchill discussed this urgent appeal with Roosevelt. According to Roosevelt’s advisers, the United States could provide only 700 of the 5,700 combat aircraft then judged necessary to secure air mastery over the landing beaches. With the full backing of the British Chiefs of Staff, Churchill told the President that “no responsible British military authority” could see any chance for a cross-Channel landing later that year.

Receiving daily reports of the fierce fighting and heavy casualties on the Eastern Front, Stalin continued to press that a Second Front be opened without delay. To explain the Anglo-American position to him, Churchill flew to Moscow, accompanied by Roosevelt’s emissary Averell Harriman. They would present Stalin with a united Anglo-American position.

At a meeting with Stalin on the evening of August 3, Stalin handed Churchill a document denouncing the British decision not to launch a cross-Channel attack in 1942. This decision, the document declared, “inflicts a mortal blow to the whole of Soviet public opinion” and “complicates the situation of the Red Army at the front and prejudices the plan of the Soviet Command.”

According to the Soviet protest, the “most favourable” conditions existed for the creation of a second front in Europe in 1942, “inasmuch as almost all the forces of the German army, and the best forces to boot have been withdrawn to the Eastern front, leaving in Europe an inconsiderable amount of forces and these of inferior quality.”

Churchill then repeated his arguments against a cross-Channel landing in 1942. “It would be no help to Russia,” he said, “if the United Nations were to do something that would lead simply to disaster involving them in profitless loss.” When Harriman declared, in support of Churchill, that “the President was prepared for any sacrifice which offered a reasonable prospect of success,” Stalin replied that “if, as he assumed, Mr. Harriman was speaking of the ‘torch’ project, this operation does not concern the Soviet directly.”

Torch was the code name for the operation favored by Britain and the United States: an amphibious landing in force on the Vichy French coast of North Africa, to secure Morocco for the Allies. As far as

the second front was concerned, Stalin replied with bitterness that there was “a difference of view to the importance of the Russian front.” The Eastern Front, Stalin insisted, “was of first-rank importance, while he understood the British and American governments held it to be only of secondary importance.” Hearing these angry words, Churchill “protested that this was not the case.”

Churchill and his advisers prepared an answer to the Soviet document. It was a strong assertion that “the best front in 1942 and the only large-scale operation possible from the Atlantic is Torch.” If this could be effected in October 1942, Stalin was told, “it will give more aid to Russia than any other plan.” It also “prepares the way” for some further assault in 1943. But a cross-Channel attack on Cherbourg and the Channel Islands, Stalin was warned, “would be a hazardous and futile operation that in the opinion of all British naval, military, and air authorities “could only end in disaster.”

Even if such a landing itself took place successfully, “it would not bring a single division back from Russia,” and would serve far more as “a running sore for us than for the enemy,” using up “wasteful and wantonly the key men and the landing craft required for real action in 1943.” That, the British stated, “is our settled view.” Stalin, expressing admiration for the North African plan, accepted what he could not change.

The future course of the war was set. The United States would work for the defeat of Hitler in Europe with a cross-Channel landing as its principal means. First, however, Britain and the United States would fight together to drive the Germans from North Africa and to establish Allied control from the Atlantic coast of Africa to the Suez Canal. Such help as could be given to the Soviet Union would continue to be sent, both by northern convoy and, increasingly, by the trans-Persia Caspian route—Persia (now Iran) having been occupied jointly by the Soviet Union and Britain.

At Stalin’s request the Anglo-American bombing of German cities would be intensified. But the timing of the “Second Front” would be determined in London and Washington, not in Moscow. There would be no cross-Channel landing in 1942, nor until such time as Churchill, Roosevelt, and the military advisers judged it to be a feasible operation. For the remaining four and a half months of 1942, North Africa would be the focal point of Anglo-American efforts.

On 19 August 1942, as preparations began for the North African landings, a European operation was carried out. This was a small-scale, predominantly Canadian cross-Channel raid against the Channel port of Dieppe. Designed to secure technical and intelligence gains for the Allies as well as to test the defenses of the port, the Dieppe raid was undertaken on the insistence of the Chief of Combined Operations, Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. The British Air Ministry had rejected his call for a substantial force of British heavy bombers, insisting that they were needed for the ongoing strategic air offensive against Germany.

The Dieppe raid made clear the problems that the much larger assault would face, of having not only to hold a swathe of territory, but also to drive the German forces back to Paris, Brussels, and, in due course, the Rhine. A factor that assisted the defenders was the fortified bunkers of the Atlantic Wall. Above all, the Dieppe raid highlighted the difficulties of attacking a defended port.

The principal force taking part in the Dieppe raid were 4,963 Canadian and 1,075 British troops. Also taking part were fifty American rangers and two dozen Free French soldiers, including Lieutenant Francis Vouch of No. 10 Inter-Allied Commando, who sixteen months later was to go ashore in Normandy on a pre-D-Day clandestine mission.

The Dieppe landing, code-named Operation Jubilee, was intended to be brief. Allied casualties were high; just over a thousand of the raiding force were killed—907 of them Canadian—and a further two thousand taken prisoner, while all vehicles and equipment had to be left behind on the beach. “This

the first time,” mocked Hitler, “that the British have had the courtesy to cross the sea to offer the enemy a complete sample of their weapons.” Later, however, Hitler warned his commanders: “We must realize that we are not alone in learning a lesson from Dieppe. The British have also learned. We must reckon with a totally different mode of attack and a quite different place.”

Hitler was right. The British were already evolving a quite different cross-Channel strategy. On the day after the Dieppe raid, Mountbatten told the British War Cabinet that the lessons learned from the Dieppe raid would be “invaluable” in planning for the future cross-Channel invasion. Many years later he was to say that the Dieppe raid “gave the Allies the priceless secret of victory.”

Three lessons in particular were learned at Dieppe, each of which was to have a direct impact on the Normandy landings. The first was that a frontal assault on a fortified harbor must not be attempted. This was overcome by the creation of floating harbors that could be assembled off the beach. The second lesson was that the assault troops in any cross-Channel landing must be accompanied by armored vehicles capable of defeating pillboxes. To meet this need, special floating tanks were devised. The third lesson related to security.

No attempt had been made at Dieppe—either by General Montgomery, who first devised the plan, or by Admiral Mountbatten, who eventually carried it out—to coordinate with the Inter-Service Security Board (ISSB), the organization charged with security and secrecy essential for military, naval, and air operations. For all future such operations, the ISSB was brought in as a matter of course. It was regarded as imperative that there should be no leakage or even hint of where an operation would take place. To this end, security was perfected to a remarkable degree, and deception was made a central part of the security scheme.

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