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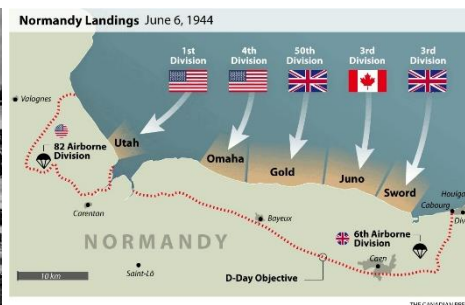


## D-Day: Operation OVERLORD & Europe's Liberation An Expedition for Hunt Scholar Students, Alumni & Friends of SMU

**May 14-22, 2024**

Southern Methodist University's (SMU's) Center for Presidential History's Jeffrey A. Engel and Essential History Expeditions' Brian DeToy are pleased to partner for an on-site exploration of London, Portsmouth, Normandy and Paris, walking the cities and beaches where Churchill schemed, Ike commanded, and soldiers fought for Europe's liberation. This intergenerational tour offers SMU Hunt Scholar students, alumni and friends the opportunity to see the places history took place.

This fully guided and immersive tour will explore the people and places of Operation OVERLORD, the June 1944 invasion of Normandy that began Europe's liberation from Nazi rule. We will walk the beaches and cliffs, learn from local experts and guest lecturers, and be assigned a renowned (or reviled) figure from history to investigate and role-play. Plus, we'll have plenty of time to explore these iconic sites on your own and to reconnect with SMU friends and students in some of Europe's most scenic sites. This trip will also provide opportunities to connect with current SMU students through meaningful discussions and mentorship.



Long before they launched across the Channel, the Allies transformed Great Britain into a vast armed camp, with millions of soldiers, sailors and airmen poised to assault Hitler's Fortress Europa. We begin in London, examining the War Rooms of Winston Churchill's Cabinet along with centuries of history and culture in the capital of the British Empire, and an optional night of London theater. We will visit the Imperial War Museum at the WWII airbase, RAF Duxford, and visit the grounds of Bletchley Park where, secret for decades, the ULTRA codebreakers worked tirelessly for allied victory. After a night in Windsor, it's off to Portsmouth, on the Channel coast, where we will discuss seaborne preparations, and visit the invasion headquarters of Dwight Eisenhower at Southwick House. From there we board the large, modern *MV Normandie* for the crossing to the beaches of France!

The events of June 6, 1944, continue to inspire long after the guns have fallen silent. The largest invasion in history, on the isolated Normandy coast, drastically altered the conduct of the war and demonstrated the unflinching resolve of freedom-loving peoples. This D-Day tour will bring guests to the beaches, cliffs and fields; and villages, towns and cities where the Greatest Generation made their most indelible mark. From British glidermen at Pegasus Bridge, to the American infantrymen assaulting the beaches at Bloody Omaha; from American paratroopers jumping behind enemy lines at Ste Mere Eglise and Brecourt Manor to the Rangers climbing the cliffs at Pointe du Hoc to the building of the artificial harbors at Arromanches. And so many other iconic sites.

After six weeks in the bocage hedgerows, the allied armies broke out in Operation COBRA in late July and swept south and west around the German army before turning east to encircle them and move on to Paris. We will follow this advance from St Lo near Avranches (where Patton's Third Army merged) and to the border of Brittany. There, we will explore the mystical isle of Mont St Michel, a World Heritage Site of renowned beauty and history. After the crowds depart, we will spend the night on this enchanted island.

The culmination of the Operation COBRA breakout was the capture of Paris in late August 1944. We will trace the route of allied soldiers from Normandy across the plains to the French capital. In the City of Light, we will visit sites connected with the war, along with time to sample the treasures of several millennia of Western culture. From Ernest Hemingway's bar in the Ritz Hotel to the Holocaust Memorial to the chance to visit the Louvre, the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower and so much more; or simply stroll the Right or Left banks of the Seine as you wander from one amazing location to another.



## Day 1, Tuesday, May 14<sup>th</sup>: Introduction to London in WWII

- We will meet at noon at the Conrad London St James (or similar) for a welcome lunch in the lovely Orchard Room. We will engage in introductions and an overview of the expedition. SMU's Director of Presidential History Dr Jeffrey Engel and Essential History Expeditions' Dr. Brian DeToy will provide opening remarks.
- Walking tour of central London from Parliament Square along Whitehall, the center of British government, to Trafalgar Square and its iconic monuments, museums and public buildings, including Parliament and Westminster Abbey, the World Heritage Site with more than a thousand years of history, including coronations, weddings and burials of kings, queens, poets, warriors and heroes.
- Group visit to the Churchill Cabinet War Rooms — from this location, near both to Parliament and No. 10 Downing, the War Cabinet received information, held high-level meetings and conducted its world-wide imperial war effort.
- Enjoy an evening in London on your own, including dinner.
- London hotel: Conrad London St James or similar



## Day 2, Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup>: Airpower in Europe – RAF Duxford & Cambridge, and the ULTRA Secret at Bletchley Park

- Breakfast
- Bus drive to RAF Duxford, a WWII base for British and American air groups. Today it is an arm of the Imperial War Museum focused on airpower. We will explore and discuss various aspects of airpower in both WWII and the Normandy invasion, in particular. There will be plenty of aircraft, vehicles and other equipment to examine.
- At Bletchley Park, we'll visit the ULTRA Code Breakers compound — a vital component in Allied victory and real-life inspiration for the recent Oscar-winning film "The Imitation Game." Guided tour and lecture with Bletchley Park's research historian, David Kenyon.
- Drive to Windsor, home of the Royal Family's famed castle home, for dinner and an evening on your own.
- Windsor hotel: Castle Hotel M Gallery





### Day 3, Thursday, May 16<sup>th</sup>: Southwick House & Seaborne Preparations for OVERLORD, and Cross-Channel Ferry to Normandy

- Breakfast
- Load luggage and depart hotel.
- First, we drive south to the coast to visit Southwick House, the Headquarters of the Allied High Command in the days before the invasion, and the location where, in the dark hours of night with torrential rains beating against the windows, Ike made the decision — “Let’s go!” Director COL (Ret) Jeremy Green will provide our lecture. For the visit to Southwick House, each person must have a photo ID available. The dress code also dictates nice attire with no torn jeans or sportswear.
- Group lunch in Southwick Village at the Golden Lion, a traditional British pub with a rich history of visits from legendary leaders such as Montgomery and Eisenhower.
- We’ll board the *MV Normandie* for the Channel Crossing from Portsmouth to Caen-Ouistreham, France. The Brittany Ferries fleet of ships are modern seagoing ships similar to a small cruise ship with restaurants, bars, and entertainment options. We will enjoy comfortable reserved lounge seating for our crossing.
- Dinner on your own on the ship.
- Arriving in the port of Ouistreham, we will drive to our lodgings in Bayeux.
- Normandy hotel: Villa Lara (adults) and Hotel Churchill (students)



## Day 4, Friday, May 17<sup>th</sup>: British Airborne, Beaches & Bayeux

- Breakfast
- First, we will visit Pegasus Bridge, where glidermen of the British 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division captured the key bridge over the Orne and liberated the first French house in the invasion – today's Café Gondree, where you can enjoy a coffee and may meet the owner, Madame Arlette Gondree, who saw the invasion as a little girl.
- The critical capture of the Merville Battery by British paratroopers is our next stop. An American C-17 that dropped 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne troopers on D-Day is a must-see part of this visit.
- Visit the nearby Ranville British Cemetery, where the first Allied killed in action are buried. (We will also visit cemeteries of the Germans and Americans to see how each remembers their fallen.)
- Group lunch at 3 Planeurs near Pegasus Bridge.
- Drive along SWORD Beach.
- We will visit Courselles, the heart of JUNO Beach, where we will discuss the Canadians, Free French and the French Resistance in the success of the invasion.
- Arromanches is next, the site of GOLD Beach, another British landing site for the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the location of the British Mulberry artificial harbor.
- At 5:45pm, in the old town of Bayeux, we will visit the famed Tapestry Museum, where the story of William's conquering of England has been portrayed for 1000 years!
- A walk through the ancient center of Bayeux will include the glorious Cathedral and medieval streets.
- Group dinner in one of the many great restaurants in old Bayeux.
- Normandy hotel: Villa Lara (adults) and Hotel Churchill (students)





## Day 5, Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup>: American Airborne & UTAH Beach

- Breakfast
- At the UTAH Beach Memorial with 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, we will see where General Teddy Roosevelt Jr led the first Americans ashore on June 6<sup>th</sup>.
- Next is the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division landings near Ste Marie du Mont, and the Band of Brothers of Easy Company, including their leader Dick Winters, at Brecourt Manor. The monuments to these men are a perfect place to examine the minute tactical battle detail of Americans in combat.
- In the quaint town of St Mere Eglise, we will discuss the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in the first French village liberated by Americans. You will have the opportunity to visit the church, which beautifully commemorates the airborne paratroopers, and walk the town. Lunch on your own in St Mere Eglise.
- At La Fiere Bridge we will observe the tough defense by the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division to hold the town of Ste Mere Eglise and secure the crossings over the Merderet River.
- Our final stop of the day is La Cambe, to visit the German Normandy Cemetery. The somber landscape stands in contrast to those of the Allies although the remembrance remains extremely moving.
- On return to Bayeux, dinner on your own in the Old Town.
- Normandy hotel: Villa Lara (adults) and Hotel Churchill (students)



## Day 6, Sunday, May 19<sup>th</sup>: Pointe du Hoc & OMAHA Beach

- Breakfast
- Our first stop is one of the most dramatic landscapes of the entire region! Marvel at the climb of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalion up the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc. The capture of the guns here was critical to invasion success.
- At the western end of OMAHA Beach, we will discuss the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at Vierville. This is the area where the fierce landing scenes in *Saving Private Ryan* took place. It is also the location of the remains of the American Mulberry artificial harbor.
- Group lunch at a restaurant overlooking OMAHA Beach.
- Moving to eastern OMAHA Beach, we will see the incredibly difficult high-ground facing the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division at Colleville and we will follow their climb to the top of the bluffs for success against great odds.
- Atop the bluffs we will visit one of the most memorable, beautiful and awe-inspiring sites in American military history – the incomparable Normandy American Cemetery. The bus is available to drive those who do not wish to hike up the ridge.
- Dinner on your own in Bayeux.
- Normandy hotel: Villa Lara (adults) and Hotel Churchill (students)



### Day 7, Monday, May 20<sup>th</sup>: COBRA and Mont St Michel

- Breakfast
- Visit the key crossroads town of St Lo, the capture of which in July 1944 marked the end of the bocage fighting and set the stage for the allied breakout – COBRA
- Visit the island of Mont St Michel – check into lodgings and explore the ancient monastery and narrow streets and alleys of this enchanted village perched on a rock in the bay. Lunch on your own along the ramparts on Mont St Michel.
- Return to Bayeux and dinner on your own.
- Hotel: Villa Lara (adults) and Hotel Churchill (students)



## Day 8, Tuesday, May 21<sup>st</sup>: Paris in WWII

- Breakfast and load luggage/checkout.
- Depart for Paris.
- Check in to Paris lodgings.
- After a lunch on your own near the hotel, we'll conduct a short walking tour of WWII Paris events and personalities, with sites including the Opera, the Ritz Hotel and the Hemingway Bar, and German Military HQ near the Louvre and the Tuileries Gardens.
- We will enjoy a farewell dinner and lecture with SMU's Dr. Jeffrey Engel.
- Hotel: Paris Marriott Opera (alumni/friends) or similar and Holiday Inn Paris Opera Grand Boulevards (students) or similar



## Day 9, Wednesday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>: Departures and Onward Journeys

- Breakfast
- Check-out of lodgings and begin onward journeys.





## Important Information for Your Upcoming Trip to England & France

### Initial Contact Information

- Sheryl Shafer: phone 303.517.9676; email [sheryl@historyexp.com](mailto:sheryl@historyexp.com)
- Dr. Brian DeToy: phone 253.468.7374; email [brian@historyexp.com](mailto:brian@historyexp.com)

**Lodging:** Our lodging and channel crossing is as follows:

Alumni/Friend	Student
London	
Conrad London St James (or similar)	
Windsor	
Castle Hotel, M Gallery	
Normandy	
Villa Lara	Churchill Hotel
Paris	
Paris Marriott Opera Ambassador	Holiday Inn Paris Opera Grand Boulevards

**Tour dates:** May 14<sup>th</sup> through May 22<sup>nd</sup>. Arrival in London and departure from Paris.

**Meeting Location on May 14<sup>th</sup> at 12pm:** TBD.

**Passport:** Please send me your passport information – either a copy of the photo page or just the full name, birth date, passport number, expiration date and nationality. I will need this information for the Brittany Ferries manifest. Students: this information will be provided through the Hunt Scholar office.

**Accommodations:** Please let us know if you have any medical, dietary or mobility limitations or issues so we can make every effort to accommodate you and provide the best experience. If you have dietary restrictions, I can ensure restaurants can accommodate you if I know in advance. Please also let me know if you require a walk-in shower rather than a tub/shower.

**Mentoring Component:** We have established a mentoring component for the students to learn from the alumni/friends. On previous SMU CPH trips, this has proven to be a wonderful success from both the alumni/friend as well as student perspective. While most of alumni/friends chose to participate, the few who did not later expressed regret for missing the engaging experience. In fact, several of our mentor/mentee relationships have continued well past the trip!

Please respond with two pieces of information: 1. Are you willing to talk with students who may be interested in your professional or life experiences at some point during the trip? 2. If so, please send me a short bio, including information you'd be willing to share with students, so that we can match up interests. If you'd prefer not to take on a mentoring role, that's absolutely fine, too. Thank you!

**Arrival and Departure:** We do not coordinate transport service to/from the airport and hotel in London and Paris. However, if you prefer to have a car hire service rather than take public transportation or a taxi, we highly recommend Blacklane (<https://www.blacklane.com/en>). We have worked with them in multiple cities in England and France in the past and the service has always been reliable and highly professional. When organizing transportation, you have the option to select the type of car you prefer, such as Mercedes, BMW, Tesla, Audi or similar.

**Earbuds:** We will use audio units to ensure everyone can hear Drs Engel and DeToy clearly. We will have earbuds available but if you have pair you prefer, please be sure to bring them.

**Power Converter:** You will need power converters for both England and France (two different types). You can purchase these at a travel store or on Amazon. If you will have multiple devices to charge each evening, we also recommend bringing a splitter (like a mini extension cord without the cord) so that you can plug in more items into one outlet.

**Transportation During Tour:** We will have a bus for the transportation during the tour. The bus will include one bottle of water per person per day, but it likely will not have wifi service.

**Packing:** Bring layered clothing for warmth, a rain jacket, an umbrella and good walking shoes. The weather in our locations in late May can run the gamut from postcard-perfect to overcast with wind and rain. It's springtime in northwest Europe! (Note: Layering is key and we can always remove layers as necessary. If you have a small duffel bag, you can roll/fold it up empty in your suitcase and then bring it with extra clothing items in the bus each day of the touring). Remember, good walking shoes are important!

**Luggage:** There are no hard limits on luggage. The bus stowage should be sufficient for the size of bus as compared to our group size. For the ferry, the luggage can remain on the bus as we will be taking a day crossing.

**Family Connection:** As we prepare for this trip, could you let us know if you had any relatives with ties to Normandy and the D-Day invasion? Perhaps a parent or grandparent who served at that time? Brian had three uncles serve in Europe and one in the first USAAF unit (a P-47 squadron) onto the continent on an airstrip carved right near Pointe du Hoc days after the landing. If you can give us the name and unit or organization, we will identify a time/place we can include that story in the touring.

**Participation:** Under the auspices of the CPH, Director Professor Jeff Engel's students will be portraying historical characters while we are in Europe.

Brian has developed a list of roles for people to portray. For the students, this is a mandatory exercise; for the remainder of you, this is entirely voluntary and optional but highly encouraged! For those who would like to do this, it will make the trip even more worthwhile as you dig into understanding a person who was critical to the history. Here's how it works: Brian will let you know at what location(s) he will ask you to speak to the group and for how long. He will give you a short list of possible talking points and questions you may want to address. No worries, at all – Brian is prepared to speak and lead the entire thing. But we are confident it will be more

enjoyable if we hear some other voices. For some others of you, he will provide a short reading that he will call on you to read at a specific point. There's no preparation required at all for those. Here is an initial list of possible characters and topics; if you have another that you would like to add, do not hesitate to suggest them:

- Winston Churchill
- GEN Dwight Eisenhower
- Professor Alan Turing
- Woman at Bletchley
- GRP CPT James Stagg
- ADM Bertram Ramsay
- Field Marshal Erwin Rommel
- GEN Bernard Montgomery
- LTG Omar Bradley
- MAJ John Howard and British airborne at Pegasus Bridge
- LTC James Rudder and Rangers at Pointe Du Hoc
- CPT Joe Dawson and Infantry at Omaha Beach
- BG Teddy Roosevelt Jr at Utah beach
- COL Hans von Luck at Caen
- CPL Helen Denton – Ike's WAC secretary
- The French Resistance
- Airpower in the invasion
- Logistics in the invasion
- Medical care
- BG James Gavin and US airborne at Ste Mere Eglise
- LT Dick Winters and Easy Company at Brecourt Manor
- CPT Michael Wittman – German Tiger ace
- MAJ Thomas Howie – “the Major of St Lo”
- LTG George Patton
- MG Phillipe LeClerc in Paris
- GEN Dietrich von Choltitz in Paris
- Ernest Hemingway

If you would like to participate, please respond to this email with your character/topic choice.

**Movies:** Some D-Day films to watch:

- *The Longest Day*
- *Saving Private Ryan*
- There are many others, of course, but the first gives a very good overview and the second (especially in its initial 25 and final 25 minutes) provides a superb view of the chaos, madness, and simplicities and complexities of infantry warfare at the tip of the spear.



- Although not concerning the Normandy invasion, per se, these two recent films give a great view of the British psyche in 1940 as they prepared to stand-alone against the Axis – *Dunkirk* and *Darkest Hour*. While Brian, as a former Army infantryman, found issues with the portrayal of ground side in *Dunkirk*, he thought the air and, especially, the sea portions were exceedingly well done and the director’s story-telling and bringing all three strands together at a single point to be superb. We found *Darkest Hour* to be quite informative, entertaining and a very good examination of the British will in the darkest days of May 1940. The movie provides an excellent view of the Cabinet War Rooms – better known as the Churchill War Rooms – which we will visit on our first day in London. Gary Oldman’s portrayal of Winston Churchill is magnificent – and the Oscars rewarded him for his performance!

**Reading:** If you want to do some reading beforehand, we recommend:

- Max Hastings *Overlord* for the larger view
- Stephen Ambrose’s *D-Day* for an incredible selection of telling vignettes
- *The Longest Day* by Cornelius Ryan
- *Six Armies in Normandy* by John Keegan
- *Decision in Normandy: The Unwritten Story of Montgomery and the Allied Campaign* by Carlo D’Este
- *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* by Anthony Beevor
- *Omaha Beach: D-Day, June 6, 1944* by Joseph Balkoski
- *Double Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies* by Ben MacIntyre
- *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* by Rick Atkinson (portions on D-Day, but the entire Liberation Trilogy is magnificent)

We will provide additional shorter reading suggestions in the coming months.

The required student reading for the course includes:

*Available at the SMU bookstore*

- Douglas Brinkley, *The Boys of Pointe du Hoc: Ronald Reagan, D-Day, and the US Army 2<sup>nd</sup> Ranger Battalion* (New York: Harper, 2006).
- Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt’s Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012)
- Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York: Vintage, 2006).
- Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997)
- Norman Rich, *Hitler’s War Aims: Ideology, The Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992)

*On-Line Texts: Canvas*

- Andrew Preston, “Monsters Everywhere: A Genealogy of National Security,” *Diplomatic History*, 38:3 (June 2014).
- Mark Stoler, “George C. Marshall and the ‘Europe-First Strategy, 1939-1951: A Study in Diplomatic as well as Military History,” *The Journal of Military History*, 79:2 (April 2015).

**Leadership Team and Bios of Guest Lecturers (will add to this list as information is available):**

- **Jeffrey A. Engel** is founding director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University and a Senior Fellow of the John Goodwin Tower Center for Political Studies. Author or editor of ten books on American foreign policy, his latest is *When the World Seemed New: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War*. Jeff earned a BA from Cornell University in History and a PhD from University of Wisconsin-Madison in American History.
- Essential History Expeditions’ president, expert historian and guide, Lt Col (Ret) **Brian DeToy** served as Director of the Defense & Strategic Studies program at the United States Military Academy, West Point from 2007-13. He has appeared in numerous documentaries for programming such as History, Discovery, A&E and Military channels. He is also an accomplished author and presenter at international history conferences. Brian earned a BA in History from Notre Dame University and an MA and PhD in European History from Florida State University.
- **Sheryl Rankin Shafer** serves as full-time expedition director, committed to meeting the unique needs of each group. She is also a freelance writer, researcher and editor focusing on educational leadership. She holds a BA in English from Texas A&M, an MA in in Education Leadership, Policy and Politics from Columbia University’s Teachers College and a Master of Nonprofit Management from Regis University.
- **Ronna Spitz** joined the Center for Presidential History as Coordinator in the Fall of 2012. Her professional background includes university, government, and large corporate marketing, event planning, and project management. She has worked in multiple fields, including the petroleum industry; electricity generation, distribution and government regulation; and business intelligence software. Ronna holds a BS in finance and a MBA in marketing from Oklahoma City University. Ronna has done a tremendous job of coordinating our trip from the SMU campus. However, she will not join us in Europe.
- **Colonel Jeremy Green OBE, Regimental Secretary, Royal Military Police:** Jeremy’s association with the D-Day Map Room at Southwick House started in 1994, when he was responsible for the planning and command of the military’s Counter-Terrorist searches associated with President Clinton’s visit to Portsmouth and its environs as part of the 50th Anniversary commemorations for D-Day. Since then, he has gained something of a reputation for his talks to the public, on television and when hosting national and international visitors: royal; diplomatic; governmental; military; and D-Day veterans to both the Map Room and in Normandy, most recently, appearing with ‘Suggs’ in an episode of ‘WW2 Treasure Hunter’s’ broadcast on The History Channel, to discuss Southwick House’s role in the D-Day story. In his spare time Jeremy advises television and film producers on military police matters most recently for the BBC’s critically-acclaimed ‘Strike’ productions of

J K Rowling's (writing as Robert Galbraith) bestselling crime thrillers. He has also provided input for programmes such as Carlton TV's 'Bodyguards' shown in the 1990's and ITV's ever-popular 'Dr Martin' and 'Endeavour' series. In November 2017, as part of the 75th anniversary commemorations of Operation TORCH, Jeremy was the UK's delegate lecturing at the expert discussion organised and hosted by the National Institute for Strategic Global Studies in Algiers to debate the effects of the allies' landings in North Africa in 1942.

**Monthly Historical Update:** Here is the timeline of World War II events leading to D-Day, showing the context of what was going on in the war at-large and also the background leading to Operation OVERLORD. **This update takes us up through the end of February 1944.**

Items in **Bold** are directly related to the Normandy operations.

## **1941**

**June:** Germany invades her former ally the Soviet Union (which consequently becomes Britain's ally). This begins the bloody struggle on the Eastern Front, which continues until the end of the war in 1945.

**December:** Japan attacks the US fleet at Pearl Harbor, inflicting serious damage and involving the US directly in the Second World War. Germany declares war on the USA, bringing American into the war in Europe. At the Washington Conference, Britain and the US agree a strategy of "Europe first" – in other words, that they will concentrate on the defeat of Germany before turning to deal with Japan. This begins the train of events that would lead to D-Day.

## **1942**

**April:** The build-up of US forces in Britain (**Operation BOLERO**) begins, in preparation for D-Day.

**August:** The Allied raid on the French coastal town of Dieppe (using mainly Canadian troops) is repulsed with heavy casualties. The raid graphically illustrates how difficult the Allied invasion of Europe would be.

**October – December:** The critical Allied victories that will lead to the defeat of Axis (German and Italian) forces in North Africa – The Battle of El Alamein is won by the British Eighth Army under General Montgomery; American/British forces land in Morocco and Algeria, commanded by General Eisenhower.

## **1943**

**January:** At the Casablanca Conference, the Allies agree that the conditions are not right for D-Day to take place in 1943. Instead, the Allies will capture Sicily. They decide to form an Anglo-American staff to begin the detailed planning for D-Day.



**March:** The Anglo-American staff is formed under the command of British Lieutenant General Morgan. He is given the title of COSSAC (Chief of Staff, Supreme Allied Commander). The Supreme Allied Commander has not yet been appointed.

**July and September:** The Allied landings in Sicily and mainland Italy respectively lead to the Italian surrender and open a new front in the war in Europe.

**August:** At the Quebec Conference, the Allies adopt COSSAC's outline plan for D-Day.

**October:** British Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay is appointed as the Allied naval commander for D-Day.

**November:** The British, American and Soviet leaders – Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin – meet together for the first time, at the Teheran Conference. **Stalin urgently wants to know when the Allies will land in France, to aid the Soviet armies fighting on the Eastern Front. Churchill and Roosevelt tell him that the planned date is May 1944.** Discussions are also held on related matters, such as the planned Allied landings in the south of France (in the event, these will take place in August 1944).

**December:** Field Marshal Erwin Rommel is given responsibility for improving the German defenses on the French coast, which the Allies will have to overcome on D-Day (including minefields, obstacles to sink landing craft, and pillboxes). He is later appointed commander of the German Army Group B in France. Construction work also begins at various points along the English coasts, in this case however on the first sections of the Mulberry Harbors. These artificial harbors, made in huge sections from steel and concrete, will be towed over to Normandy after D-Day and assembled there. They will enable the Allies to land troops and equipment at a faster rate than is possible straight onto the beaches. Also, after months of indecision on the part of the Allied leaders, US General Dwight D. Eisenhower is finally appointed as Supreme Allied Commander, in overall charge of Operation Overlord (the D-Day landings and subsequent fighting in Normandy). General Bernard Montgomery ("Monty") is appointed to command 21st Army Group, with responsibility for the assault landings on D-Day and the following ground fighting. Earlier in the war, he had fought – and beaten – Rommel's forces in North Africa.

## **1944**

**January:** With the new year, the planning for D-Day takes on greater urgency. The newly appointed Allied commanders begin revising the draft plans that had been drawn up by COSSAC. In particular, they decide that the number of troops to be landed in the first waves on D-Day needs to be considerably increased. Further naval forces and aircraft must therefore be found to support these additional troops. The target date for D-Day is moved from 1 May to 31 May, to allow time for these preparations. Midget submarines of the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties (COPP) secretly visit the Normandy beaches to take sand samples. These are needed to confirm that the sand on certain sections of the chosen landing beaches will support the weight of the tanks that the Allies plan to land on D-Day. Across many parts of Europe, including France, British and US aircraft begin to drop weapons and supplies to the Resistance. This will enable

them to fight back against the occupying Germans. Back in the UK, the first amphibious exercise for American troops takes place at Slapton Sands, Devon. The exercise involves 16,000 assault troops and is a rehearsal of the techniques that will be used on D-Day itself.

**February:** Over a long period, Allied air forces (RAF Bomber Command, and the United States Army Air Force's 8th Air Force) have been making a series of heavy air raids against German cities. German fighter aircraft defend against these attacks, and there are heavy casualties on both sides in this aerial fighting (and many German civilians are also killed). The Germans are less able to replace these losses of airmen and aircraft than the Allies. As a result, by the time of D-Day the German air force will not be strong enough to oppose the Allied landings in France. In response to these attacks, the Germans begin a series of bombing raids on the UK, known as the "Little Blitz". They are less intense than the Blitz of 1940 – 1941 and last until March, although the worst attacks are during February. Meanwhile, back in the UK, the training and preparations for D-Day continue.

1: U.S. Marines mop up on Roi and Namur in the northern part of the Kwajalein atoll in the Marshall Islands.

2: The Narva front near the east border of Estonia is formed between the Soviet and German forces.

: Germans defeat American troops in the Battle of Cisterna near Anzio.

3: American planes bomb Eniwetok in the Marshalls, later to be a major B-29 base.

4: Kwajalein, the world's largest atoll and a major Japanese naval base, is secured.

5: The American Navy bombards the Kuril Islands, northernmost in the Japanese homelands.

**8: The plan for the invasion of France, Operation OVERLORD, is confirmed.**

10: Winston Churchill urges Harold Alexander to order the Anzio generals to show more aggression.

11: German forces sent to relieve the Korsun pocket in Ukraine are now only 10 miles away.

**14: Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) headquarters are established in Britain by U.S. General Dwight D. Eisenhower**

15: The second Battle of Monte Cassino begins with the destruction of the historic Benedictine monastery on Monte Cassino by Allied bombing. The Allies believed the grounds were used as an observation post by the Germans.

: The Soviet bridgehead on the west coast of Lake Peipus is annihilated.

: Soviet Leningrad Front initiates the Narva Offensive, February 15–28.

16: Germans launch a major counter-attack at Anzio, threatening the American beachhead.

: Germans, with Panzer forces leading, fail to break out of the Korsun pocket.

: Diplomats from the USSR and Finland meet to sign an armistice.

17: American Marines land on Eniwetok.

18: The light cruiser HMS Penelope is torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Anzio with a loss of 415 crew.

: American naval air raid takes place on the Truk islands, a major Japanese naval base, but they will be one of the bypassed fortresses of the Japanese outer defense ring.

**19: Leipzig, Germany is bombed for two straight nights. This marks the beginning of a "Big Week" bombing campaign against German industrial cities by Allied bombers.**

20: A colonial military garrison in Luluabourg in the Belgian Congo mutinies, killing three.

22: John Lucas is replaced with major general Lucian Truscott at Anzio.

23: US Navy planes attack the Mariana Islands of Saipan, Guam and Tinian.

**26: The "Big Week" bombing campaign comes to a successful conclusion; the American P-51 Mustang fighter with its long range proves invaluable in protecting American bombers over Germany.**

: Red Air Force continues to bomb Helsinki, as Finland continues peace talks.

27: USS Cod sinks a Japanese merchant ship by torpedo.

28: The Admiralty Islands are invaded by U.S. forces, marked by the Battle of Los Negros and Operation Brewer. The struggle for this important fleet anchorage will continue until May. Rabaul is now completely isolated.