



NORMANDY

On June 6, 1944, the combined forces of the Allied Powers including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and more, launched the largest amphibious invasion in history. Across 50 miles of coastline, Allied soldiers gained a foothold from which to liberate Europe from Nazi tyranny. Their stories of heroism, sacrifice, and determination have become legendary. On Omaha Beach, Lieutenant Jimmie Montieth rallied his men to the top of the cliffs under tough resistance. His actions silenced the guns at several German positions at the cost of his own life. On Utah Beach, Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. recognized the landing craft reached the shore almost one mile off-course. Rallying the troops, he moved along the beach redirecting their efforts. At La Fiere Bridge, PFC Charles DeGlopper provided covering fire, allowing his fellow soldiers to regroup and finally secure a vital causeway. All three men earned the Medal of Honor for their actions, but each was awarded posthumously.

BRITTANY

Brittany, the region to the west of Normandy, was the next objective in the liberation of France. Securing the port at Brest would allow an influx of supplies into France, but there were numerous German troops stationed throughout the region, including in the historic walled city of Saint-Malo. The fighting was devastating. In Saint-Malo, photojournalist Lee Miller witnessed the shelling of German troops in the citadel. The picturesque city that had previously seen many privateers come and go in its colorful history was in ruin. As Miller recounted, "Instead of a chattering crowd of brightly dressed aperitif-drinkers, there were a few tired soldiers." The nearby tidal island of Mont St. Michel was a glorious site to the soldiers. Relatively unscarred by the war, it became a meeting place for some of the world's top journalists such as Ernest Hemmingway and Robert Capa.

LOIRE VALLEY

The Pays de Loire region, including the wine-producing Loire Valley experienced numerous bombing raids in 1944. The region was home to several industrial facilities used by the Germans during the war including the Renault factory in Le Mans, the largest armament production facility in France. The men of the United States Eight Air Force flew from their bases near Cambridge and Norwich, England. After long, often tedious flights, they would suddenly experience intense combat over the skies of Europe. German fighters and flak were constant dangers to the bombers as they flew over the skies of Europe. Unable to break course without risking the safety of the entire formation, the bomber crews develop nerves of steel.

CHARTRES

As American forces approached Chartres and its magnificent Gothic cathedral, rumors swirled that German snipers occupied the towers. When faced with the destruction of a cultural treasure or saving the lives of soldiers, military leaders had the authority to destroy the historic monuments as a last resort. Earlier in the war, the abbey of Montecassino in Italy suffered total destruction to prevent German snipers from using its advantageous positions. Chartres Cathedral, however, survived the war due to the efforts of two American soldiers. Colonel Wellborn Griffith and a fellow soldier moved into Chartres undetected by the Germans. Climbing the towers, they noticed no signs of any Germans. Returning to his unit, Griffith informed his officers of his findings.

WWII BATTLEFIELDS

General Patton reached Verdun in September 1944. Patton's arrival in Verdun along with the British arrival in Flanders represented the Allies retaking the heavily-contested battlefields from World War I. In the interwar period, places such as Ypres, Arras, and Verdun became sites of pilgrimage and tourism for those wanting to honor the fallen. Verdun is one of the most striking representations of the folly of war. Cemeteries holding the remains of those killed from 1914-1918 are abound. The French National Cemetery and Douaumont Ossuary hold the remains of 130,000 soldiers. Remains are still found and brought to the Ossuary every year. The nearby Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery is the final resting place of 14,246 American soldiers.

METZ

In October 1944, the Allied advance slowed. Operation Market-Garden, an airborne-led attack in the Netherlands failed to bring the Allies across the Rhine River into Germany. In the dark and foreboding Huertgen Forest, Allied units struggled against the terrain and a determined enemy and could not reach Germany's Ruhr Valley. In Italy, Allied troops stalled north of Florence as the Germans dug into the mountains. German resistance and the looming winter showed that the war would not be over by Christmas. On September 27, General Patton's Third Army moved on the fortress city of Metz, long a point of contention between the French and Germans. Hitler's orders forbidding a retreat and the formidable fortresses around the city led to a protracted struggle that lasted through the end of November.

LUXEMBOURG CITY

Luxembourg City was liberated in September 1944 with little fighting. It would now serve as a forward headquarters for the American advance across the Saar and Our Rivers. On December 20, 1944, General Patton entered Luxembourg City with a new mission. He was to move north and reinforce the town of Bastogne, Belgium. Over the previous four days, it became clear that the Third Army would not cross the Saar; it would combat the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge. On December 23, Patton visited the chapel at the Fondation Pescatore to pray for good weather to allow his tanks to move quickly. He asked for four days of good weather to allow his bombers to fly and his tanks to roll.

BASTOGNE

When the Germans launched their offensive, soon to be known as the Battle of the Bulge, on December 16, 1944, Bastogne was a primary objective. All major roads in the vicinity converged on the town, making its capture essential for the Germans to keep their planned timetable. Stationed between Bastogne and the invading Germans, the 28th Infantry Division mounted a valiant stand. Outnumbered and overpowered, the 28th held as long as they could near towns such as Ettelbruck, Diekirch, and Clervaux. Meanwhile, the 101st Airborne arrived to reinforce Bastogne. On December 22, the Germans demanded surrender to which American General Anthony McAuliffe responded

“To the German Commander,

NUTS!

The American Commander”

Tanks from the Third Army arrived on the outskirts of Bastogne on December 26, breaking the siege. Hitler's last gamble failed, and the advance to Germany could proceed.