AWESOME stories

WHO WILL COMMAND?

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General Dwight D. Eisenhower, as Supreme Allied Commander, will make the call on when the Cross-Channel attack begins. In this image, he meets with departing paratroopers, telling them: “Full victory—nothing else.” National Archives image online via the U.S. Army Center for Military History.

Once the Allies agreed to launch an invasion, when would it occur?

A staggering amount of planning was needed. Approximately 156,000 men would eventually storm the beaches of Normandy. How would such a plan remain secret?

An enormous amount of resources - men and materiel - would be required. Who would supply them? And, significantly, who would be in charge of the entire operation?

During the "Trident Conference," held in Washington during May of 1943, the Allies agreed to launch the invasion one year later - in May of 1944. A meeting in Quebec the following month, referred to as the Quadrant Conference, reaffirmed that decision.

In November of that year, Joseph Stalin pushed for the appointment of a Supreme Commander who would head the operation.

Because so many American resources would be involved in the attack, Roosevelt and Churchill agreed the chief commander would be an American. Initially, they thought the main coordinator of the U.S. military efforts - Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall - would be the best choice.

Although the position was offered to him, Marshall told the President the selection decision should be the Commander-in-Chief's. Deciding to find someone else, FDR reportedly told Marshall:

> *I feel I could not sleep at night with you out of the country.*

In December of 1943, the job went to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then commander of Allied Forces in North Africa and the Mediterranean Sea.

As Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, Eisenhower was also commanding general of all U.S. forces in the European Theater of Operations. He was given responsibility for the "direction" of strategic air forces as well.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/WHO-WILL-COMMAND-Normandy-Invasion

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/WHO-WILL-COMMAND-Normandy-Invasion

Questions 2 Ponder

Is Being the Commander Ever Too Heavy a Burden?

The Allies selected American General Dwight D. Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, so it was Ike who decided when the Normandy Invasion would begin.

Before his elevation to the top position, Eisenhower was commander of Allied Forces in North Africa and the Mediterranean Sea.

On the day when Ike ordered the Allied forces to begin their cross-channel mission, he wrote a message accepting personal responsibility if the Normandy Invasion failed. Intending the note as a press release, the General tucked it away in his wallet, then forgot about it.

On the 11th of July, Eisenhower found the note. He would write other notes, like this one, in the event things went bad, but he always tore them up.

His naval aide, Capt. Harry C. Butcher, convinced the General not to destroy this note so that future generations would understand how the Supreme Commander viewed his responsibilities the night before thousands of men would die on Normandy's beaches and in the skies above France.

Here are the words of the note which Ike misdated, writing down “July 5" instead of June 5:

> *Our landings in the Cherbourg-Havre area have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time and place was based upon the best information available. The troops, the air and the Navy did all that Bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone.*

What does this note tell us about General Eisenhower?

How did he view his responsibilities as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe?

What does the misdating tell us about the General’s emotions the night before the attack began?

Do you think it is ever possible that being a commander is too-heavy a burden? Explain your answer.

Media Stream

General Eisenhower with Paratroopers
U.S. National Archives
View this asset at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/General-Eisenhower-with-Paratroopers

D-Day - Storming the Beaches
Image online, courtesy the (UMKC) University of Missouri website.
View this asset at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/D-Day-Storming-the-Beaches

D-Day - Materiel for the Invasion Force

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.
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View this asset at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/D-Day-Materiel-for-the-Invasion-Force

Quadrant Conference - Photo

Image online, courtesy the Truman Presidential Museum and Library.
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http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Quadrant-Conference-Photo

General George C. Marshall

Image online, courtesy George Marshall Society.
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Dwight D. Eisenhower

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