

World War 2 – European Theatre Sequence of Events

GERMAN EXPANSION

- 1933 – The Nazi Party came to power in Germany (the Third Reich forms). Hitler began to rebuild the military in direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles (secretly at first, and in public by 1935 – the Western democracies do nothing).
- March 1936 – Germans occupied the **Rhineland** with troops – again violating the Treaty of Versailles and again resulting in no reaction from the Western democracies.
- March 1938 – **Austria** was annexed by the Third Reich.
- Sept 1938 – **Munich Agreement**. Britain and France agreed to Hitler’s demands to ‘free’ oppressed German people that lived within the Czech Republic. German troops occupied the **Sudetenland** in the first weeks of October.
- March 1939 – Germany seized the remainder of western **Czechoslovakia**. The western democracies finally realized Hitler’s true intention of conquest. The southeastern portion became the Slovak Republic, allied with Germany.
- April 1939 – Similarly, Italy invaded Albania and then become officially allied with Germany with the “**Pact of Steel**” in May.
- 1 September 1939 – **Germany invaded Poland** with two Army Groups. On 17 Sept the Soviet Union, who had previously signed a non-aggression agreement with Germany (Molotov-Rippentrop Pact: 23 August 1939) invaded and occupied eastern Poland. France and Britain declared war on Germany.
- 27 September 1940 – **Tripartite Pact**: The Axis Powers formally came into being. Germany, Japan and Italy signed this agreement to mutually support each other in their quest to conquer their spheres of influence. Hungary and Romania joined in November ’40 and Bulgaria joined in March 41.
- October 1939-April 1940 – **The “Phony War”**. Germany built up forces to invade France while France established defenses behind her Maginot Line (a series of strong fortifications on the French-German Border). Since the Maginot Line did not extend beyond that border, the French positioned their more mobile forces, including the British Expeditionary Force, on the Belgium Border, which would cross that border should the Germans attempt a repeat of the Schlieffen plan they had executed at the beginning of WW I. This, the Dyer Plan, would meet and defeat any German attack trying to swing around the Maginot Line, through Belgium/Netherlands.
- 9 April 40 – German forces occupied **Denmark**
- 9 April – June 40 – Germans invaded **Norway**. These two actions protect the German trade routes with Sweden (Iron Ore) and assisted Germany to execute her future submarine campaign in the Atlantic.
- 10 May 1940 – **Battle of France**. The Germans invaded the Netherlands and Belgium (bypassing the Maginot Line). Britain and France moved to counter this attack. German Army Group A (containing the majority of the Panzer Units) attacks through the Ardennes Forrest and cuts off two French Armies and the BEF from the rest of the French Forces. These troops either surrendered or were evacuated at Dunkirk.

- 22 June – **The Battle of France ends.** After the disaster in the Low Countries, the French Army becomes almost totally ineffective, and the Germans easily attack through northern and eastern France. France surrenders and Vichy France was established, which is Southern France, Corsica and the French Colonies that now became essentially allied with Germany.
- July – October 1940 – **Battle of Britain.** An attempt by Germany to gain air superiority, in order to invade Britain (*Operation Sea Lion*). The Germans failed and eventually called off the Operation. NOT SHOWN: Sept 1940-Nov 1942: North Africa Campaign. A series of see-saw battles between German/Italian Forces (Libya) and the British (Egypt).
- October 1940 – Italy attempted to invade Greece, but failed miserably. They actually lose half of Albania, and the British sent forces to defend Greece.
- April 1941 – Germany goes to the aid of Italy by invading **Greece**, and consequently **Yugoslavia** when the Yugoslav government was overthrown, cancelling her previous agreement to allow the Germans to pass through their country.
- 20-31 May 1941 – Germany seized **Crete** with an almost purely Airborne Assault. They suffered such great losses, they never again conducted a major airborne assault.
- 22 June – December 1941 – **Operation Barbarossa.** Three German Army Groups attacked into the Soviet Union, but were finally stopped just short of Moscow by stiff Soviet resistance, strategic overreach and the winter.

NORTH AFRICA AND ITALY

- 8 November 1942 – **Operation Torch.** Knowing that they are not yet strong enough for a direct assault into Europe, but realizing they must attack somewhere, the Allied Combined Chiefs of Staff decided to attack North Africa to assist the British 8th Army destroy the German/Italian Forces that were fighting in the vicinity of Egypt. At three landing sites, the Allies landed in Morocco and Algeria and quickly defeat the Vichy forces there.
- 10 November 1942 – Germans occupied Southern France and Corsica as the Vichy government began to topple (due to defections in N. Africa).
- November 1942 – The allies advanced toward Tunisia to seize critical supply ports. However, the Germans rushed troops into Tunisia from Italy/Sicily and form the 5th Panzer Army. The Germans successfully halted the Allied advance just short of their goal. The British 1st Army was now forced to go on the defense and wait for supplies and reinforcements to arrive from their very long supply lines, as well as wait for better weather. A French and American Corps occupied positions to the south of the main British Corps. In early February, Panzer Army Afrika (Rommel) arrived in Tunisia after being driven from Egypt by the 8th Army. Rommel proposed that the combined German Armies attack the weak allied right flank to attempt to cut the 1st Br Army from its supply lines prior to the 8th Army's arrival in force.
- Feb 1943 – **Battle of Kasserine Pass:** This battle was a tactical defeat for the Americans, but an operational failure for the Germans who are unable to follow up on their initial success. The 8th Army finally arrived in force and the two

- German Armies surrendered in May 1943. With the Allies still unprepared to invade Europe, a decision was made at the Casablanca Conference to attack into Sicily (the decision to invade Italy was made with the success of the Sicilian operation).
- 10 July 43 – 15th Army Group (AG) with the US 7th Army (Patton) and the British 8th Army (Montgomery) invade Sicily (*Operation Husky*). 505th Parachute Regt (82nd Airborne Division) and 1st British Airborne Division assist.
 - 10 July – 17 August 43 – **Sicily** was conquered. The US 7th Army attacked up the western side of the island, protecting the flank of the British 8th Army that attacked up the eastern side. The Germans were able to evacuate much of their men and equipment.
 - 3 Sept 43 – British 8th Army invaded the ‘toe’ of **Italy** as a diversion (*Operation Baytown*). The US 5th Army (Clark) then made the Allied main amphibious assault (*Operation Avalanche*) at **Salerno** on 9 September, while the 1st British Airborne Division conducted a supporting amphibious assault (*Operation Slapstick*) at the ‘heel’ of Italy. Salerno was a very difficult operation for the allies, but poor German coordination resulted in a successful invasion. Just prior to the Salerno invasion, Italy surrendered to the Allies. This was announced during the invasion to create havoc for the Germans. The Germans, however, had anticipated this capitulation and rapidly disarmed the Italian forces.
 - 16 Sept – 8 Oct 43 – **Movement to the Gustav Line**. The British 8th Army linked up with the US 5th Army by 16 Sept and the Germans (under Luftwaffe Field Marshall Kesselring) withdrew to and held the Gustav line by 8 October.
 - July-Nov 43 – After two failed German offensives (Stalingrad in 1942 and Kursk in July 1943), the Soviet Union begin the 1st of their major offensives to push the Germans back to Germany. This offensive occurred along the majority of the eastern front and reached the Dnieper River.

INVASION OF EUROPE

- 24 December 1943 – Montgomery is named the 21st AG commander (the US 1st Army and the British 2nd Army) and the final preparations for the invasion of Europe (*Operation Overlord*) began.
- Fall 1943 – With the capture of Foggia in Italy, the US Army Air Force now had two locations to conduct the **Strategic Bombing** of the German industry and resources. The 8th Air Force had begun limited operations from England in the summer of 1942, and now with the 15th Air Force in Italy (and with the British Bomber command conducting night raids against German moral) the US Strategic bombers conducted large, 1000 bomber raids (with emphasis on transportation and oil production) deep into enemy territory. These initial raids proved to be very costly, but continued through the rest of the war.
- 22 Jan 1944 – After continuously unsuccessful attacks on the Monte Casino and the rest of the Gustav Line, the 15th AG attempted to break the stalemate by conducting another major amphibious landing with the US VI Corps at **Anzio** (*Operation Shingle*). While the landing was virtually unopposed, the US Corps Commander, General Lucas, failed to advance. Simultaneously, the drive by the US 5th Army (to link up with VI Corps) failed again to break the Gustav line.

- 16-19 Feb 44 – The Germans counter-attacked the US beachhead, and almost pushed them back to the sea, but ultimately failed. Anzio now turned into a siege until May.
- 19-25 Feb 44 – **Bomber Offensive**. The US orient on the destruction of the German aircraft industry. The scale and success of the attacks resulted in it being called '**Big Week**' after the fact. US Fighter Planes were now able to escort the bombers all the way to their targets and back (due to drop tanks). They (and the heavily defended bombers) destroyed so many German fighter planes, that air superiority was assured for the coming Overlord invasion. The Germans can now only defend their most critical industrial locations.
- Jan-Apr 44 – Soviet Spring Offensive frees Leningrad from it's two year siege and pushes into the Ukraine.
- 11 May – 4 June 44 – In attempt to draw German units into the Italian Theater (and thus away from the Overlord Invasion) the 15th AG conducted ***Operation Diadem*** and finally broke the Gustav Line. The 5th Army linked up with the VI Corps at Anzio and entered Rome on 4 June (two days prior to Overlord).
- 6 June 44 – ***Operation Overlord*** – 3 Airborne Divisions (82nd, 101st and 6th British) landed in Normandy in the early hours, to protect the flanks of the amphibious landing sites. ***Operation Overlord*** – 21st AG landed in Normandy on 5 beachheads: Utah (4th ID), Omaha (1st and 29th ID), Gold (50th British ID), Juno, (3rd Canadian ID) and Sword (3rd British ID). Allied air forces successfully conducted strikes which slowed and even prevented German reinforcements from arriving at the Normandy beachheads.
- June-Oct 44 – After the fall of Rome, the 15th AG was able to push the Germans north on the Italian Peninsula. They quickly break the German Gothic line but cannot push much further and the opposing forces settled into a static line for the winter/spring of 44/45.

BREAKOUT

- 25 July 1944 – ***Operation Cobra***. After an immense buildup of forces and the slow expansion of the allied beachhead, the US 8th and 9th Air forces (strategic and tactical) conduct a concentrated 'carpet bombing' mission which assisted in the breakout attack of the US 1st Army through the very difficult bocage countryside.
- 1 August 44 – With this breakout, the US 12th Army Group (Bradley) was formed – US 1st Army (Hodges) and US 3rd Army (Patton).
- 1-25 August 44 – **Patton's 3rd Army** poured through and **exploits the breakout** created by *Operation Cobra* and attacked in two directions – Brittany and the Seine River. With this rapid movement, the German 7th and 5th Panzer Armies are almost cut off, but escape with a large portion of their men (but not equipment) at the Falaise Gap when the Canadian 1st Army failed to rapidly link up with the US 3rd Army. Paris was liberated on 25 August.
- 15 August 44 – ***Operation Anvil (Dragoon)*** – US 7th Army landed in Southern France in support of the attack in Normandy.
- June-August 44 – The Soviets crush the German Army Group Center and reach the outskirts of Warsaw.

- 25 August – 15 September 44 – Eisenhower takes over direct control of the ground battle from Montgomery (1 September) and the 21st and 12th Army Groups attacked along a '**Broad Front**' toward the Rhine River. The 12th Army Group linked up the newly formed 6th AG (Devers) which contained the US 7th and French 1st Armies. Also, the 9th Army (Simpson) is formed in 5 September and clears the rest of Brittany (The port of Brest). General Clark became the 15th AG commander in October. **Operation Market-Garden**: 21st AG's attempt to rapidly cross many rivers/canals in the Netherlands (2 part operation)
- 17 Sept 44 – **Operation Market** - 101st, 82nd, and 1st British Airborne divisions are dropped to capture a series of bridges located between Arnhem and the British front lines.
- 17-20 September 44 – **Operation Garden** - British XXX Corps attacks to link up with the Airborne (ABN) units and cross the captured bridges. The XXX Corps is finally stopped after it links up with the US 82nd ABN just short of the British 1st ABN at Arnhem. Only 2,200 of that surrounded division escaped back to British lines.
- August – December 44 – Soviet offensive to clear the Balkans. Romania and Bulgaria surrender and join the Allies.
- Nov 8 – 15 Dec 44 – Eisenhower shifted the **Main Effort to the 12 AG**. Both the 3rd and 7th Armies attacked to the German "West Wall". This was also the time that 1st Army fights the costly battle of the Hurtgen Forrest. The 9th Army, initially paced between 1st and 3rd Armies, was moved to the 12 AG's northern boundary. Bradley, anticipating a future transfer of forces to Montgomery, made the shift as he did not want to lose his veteran Army.

Battle of The Bulge and Final German Defeat

- 16 Dec 44 – 25 Jan 45 – Ardennes Offensive (**Operation Watch on the Rhine**)
The Germans massed the 6th SS Panzer, 5th Panzer and 7th Armies for a final counter-attack against the Western Allies. Hitler planned to split the US from the British at the lightest defended portion of the American line – the Ardennes (the same location that they concentrated their panzer forces to defeat the French in 1940). This attack would then continue to the coast and capture the critical supply port of Antwerp. This would become known as the Battle of the Bulge.
- 15-24 Dec 44 – **Battle of the Bulge (1)** - Germany attacked and created a 'bulge' in the allied line.
- As the 1st and 9th Armies are cut off from the 12th AG (due to the 'bulge'), command of these two armies shift to the 21st AG.
- 20-21 Dec 44 – 3rd Army displaced from its front lines and reoriented to attack into the southern portion of the 'bulge'. Patton began his attack on 22 December.
- 26 Dec – 7 Feb 45 – **Battle of the Bulge (2)** - the 12th and 21st AGs pushed the Germans back to their start line.
- Jan – Apr 45 – The Soviets pushed to the Oder river in the north, followed by attacks in Hungary and Austria in the south.
- 22 Feb – 21 March 45 – **Rhineland Campaign**. All Army Groups pushed forward to the Rhine River. By chance, the US 1st Army was able to capture a bridge still intact on 7 March at Remagen and created an unexpected bridgehead

- on the east side of the Rhine River. (The 1st Army was returned to 12 AG after the Battle of the Bulge)
- 22 & 23 March 45 – The US 3rd and British 2nd Armies conducted river crossings of the Rhine.
 - 28 March – 7 May 45 – Attack and occupation of Germany. The German Army Group B (Model) is captured in the Rhur Pocket. The 15th AG made a final push to capture the rest of Italy and the US 5th and 7th Armies linked up on 4 May.
 - 15 Apr – 6 May 45 – Soviets attacked into Eastern Germany and captured Berlin. Hitler committed suicide on 30 April and the Germans surrendered on 7 May.

Post War Occupation of Germany:

- US Sector
- British Sector
- Soviet Sector
- French Sector
- All 4 Powers divide Berlin