

Overview of Allied and Axis Leaders in World War II

Dwight D. Eisenhower was an American lieutenant general chosen to lead the American and Allied forces in England. Eisenhower's first major operation was Operation Torch—the American invasion of North Africa. Although Eisenhower came under heavy fire for “mishandling the Darlan incident,”¹ Eisenhower successfully led the campaign to victory in May 1943. Eisenhower oversaw the invasions of Sicily and Italy before President Franklin D. Roosevelt informed Eisenhower that he would be in charge of Operation Overlord—the allied invasion across the English channel and onto the beaches of Normandy. Eisenhower was a major reason for the success of the invasion because he increased the number of troops on D-day and he decided to attack on June 6 despite poor weather conditions the day before.² Eisenhower was also in charge of Allied command during the Battle of the Bulge. Eisenhower was criticized by many for overextending his lines in the battle, but others have noted that he was not entirely responsible for this problem due to poor weather conditions. By the end of the war, Eisenhower was General of the Army with five stars and he was later elected President of the United States in 1952.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was President of the United States during World War II. Roosevelt, much to the chagrin of his military advisers, decided that the United States should lead Operation Torch. Roosevelt's military advisers, such as George Marshall, were convinced that the Allies should mount a direct offensive across the English Channel and retake France from the Germans. Churchill persuaded Roosevelt that the Allies were not in position to invade France at this time.³ In addition to Operation Torch, Roosevelt played an important role in other parts of the war. He worked with Churchill and Joseph Stalin throughout the war to develop strategies for the allies to win the war.⁴ Unfortunately, Roosevelt did not see the end of the war because he died on April 12, 1945.

Bernard C. Montgomery was placed in command of the British 3rd Division Army in 1939. Montgomery immediately set out to reform the army's morale and equipment because both had been seriously depleted during the British's encounter with the Germans in Dunkirk, France. Montgomery stayed in England for a number of months preparing for a German invasion that never came. Upon his request to be transferred to combat, Montgomery was put in charge of the British 8th Army. Once again Montgomery faced the task of rebuilding a demoralized army. During this time of rebuilding, Montgomery was

¹ See contextual essay for more information the Darlan fiasco.

² The increase in troops turned out to be important because the Allies faced fierce German resistance during the invasion. The decision to invade on June 6 caught the Germans by surprise because they did not think that the Allies would attempt an invasion in the poor weather. Moreover, the Germans did not have access to the weather forecast.

³ Churchill stressed to Roosevelt that the Allies did not have enough ships for the battle and that the American troops did not have enough experience to defeat the Germans. Churchill was correct about the American troops because the Americans were inefficient at the beginning of Operation Torch.

⁴ Roosevelt attended such meetings as the Casablanca Conference and the Tehran Conference to debate strategy with his allied colleagues.

criticized for taking too long to engage the enemy. He refused to give in to the criticism because he believed that it was important to take a trained army into battle. As a result of Montgomery's hard work, the British 8th Army began to win battles against the Germans. Moreover, Montgomery and the Americans were able to defeat the Germans in North Africa. In spite of his accomplishments, Montgomery had some shortcomings. The major flaw with Montgomery was that he believed that he was always right and he heavily criticized those that he disagreed with. After the Normandy invasion, Montgomery was almost removed from command because he refused to pursue the Germans at a time when he could have easily defeated them. Despite his shortcomings, however, Montgomery is recognized as one of the great British military leaders.

Joseph Stalin was ruler of the Soviet Union from 1929 until 1953. Stalin came to power in the Soviet Union through an association with Vladimir Lenin, who was leader of the Bolshevik Party. After Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin successfully eliminated his political competitors by 1929; thus, becoming the leader of the Soviet Union. During the 1930s, Stalin instituted industrial reforms that transformed the Soviet Union into an economically viable country. Stalin also began to enforce authoritative rule in Soviet society that forced kulaks, or landholding peasants, to surrender produce to the state or face imprisonment in work camps. When World War II became imminent in the late 1930s, Stalin sought to make an alliance with Britain and France because he believed these countries would try to invade the Soviet Union. When Stalin's efforts failed, he signed a nonaggression treaty with Adolf Hitler on September 28, 1939. Despite warnings from both his own political advisers and foreign dignitaries, Stalin ignored warning signs that Hitler planned to invade the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was devastated both psychologically and physically when Germany did invade on June 22, 1941. After two years of poor military planning, Stalin began to turn things around so that by July of 1943, the Soviet army was able to keep the German forces at bay until the war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945. Although Stalin had collaborated with the United States during the war, Stalin developed a distrust for the United States after the war that led to the development of the Cold War and the subsequent arms race. Stalin ruled for almost eight years after the war until his death on March 5, 1953.

Winston Churchill was appointed Prime Minister in 1940 because Neville Chamberlain became unpopular for supporting the failed Munich pact. Churchill quickly became popular by giving persuasive speeches that helped to restore moral that had been lost during the reign of Chamberlain. Chamberlain was the most prominent British leader during World War II because he enacted both political and military policy during the war. Together with Franklin D. Roosevelt, Churchill led the allies to victory. Following the war, Churchill resigned as Prime Minister in 1945 because his conservative party lost out to the labor party. After he was reappointed as Prime Minister in 1951, Churchill went on to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 1953. Winston Churchill would serve as Prime Minister until his resignation in 1955. Churchill continued to write after his resignation and serve Britain in other capacities. Winston Churchill died on January 24, 1965.

Benito Mussolini was appointed leader of Parliament on October 29, 1922. Mussolini arose to power in Italy because the country was beset by chaos due to numerous lynchings that were carried out by fascist gangsters. Moreover, Mussolini became extremely popular because he was an excellent orator, and he authorized the successful invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935. When World War II began in 1939, Mussolini allied with Adolf Hitler and the Nazis in what is commonly called the Axis powers. It was not until June of 1940 that Mussolini and the Italians would enter the war. The Italians were very unsuccessful in the war because of insufficient manpower and inefficient equipment. In 1943, Mussolini was placed under arrest by King Victor Emmanuel. Hitler was eventually rescued from prison by the Germans in 1943. On April 28, 1945, however, Benito Mussolini was killed by German soldiers when he tried to escape Italy to Austria.

Adolf Hitler was responsible for beginning World War II by ordering the German army to invade Poland. Hitler was determined to bring the German race together in one unified country. Hitler also determined to eradicate the Jews as he believed they were an inferior race that had undermined German national interests. Hitler and the Germans were very efficient at the beginning of the war; hence, Germany took control of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and France very quickly. Hitler's momentum dissipated in 1942 when the Americans began to exert their superior resources, and when the Germans began to suffer heavy casualties in the Soviet Union. Hitler continued to insist on fighting and the Germans put up a gallant fight until 1945 when they were forced to surrender. Adolf Hitler was certainly a very ambitious and charismatic leader that enjoyed remarkable success in his devious actions. In the end, however, his ambition clouded his judgment concerning the superiority of the Americans and the desperate situation in the Soviet Union. Consequently, the Germans lost the war. Moreover, Hitler ended his own life in May 1945 by committing suicide.

Omar Bradley quickly rose through the ranks of the American army because he knew how to transform an underachieving division of soldiers. He began his tour of duty in the North Africa campaign as major general over the 82nd Infantry Division, and he quickly became leader of the 28th Infantry Division. Bradley was later appointed by Dwight D. Eisenhower as commander of the II Corps. Bradley led the Corps to victory in the North Africa campaign and Bradley is credited with ending the North African campaign for the allies. Bradley also served in the Sicilian campaign and later in the D-Day invasion at Normandy. Bradley was appointed as four-star general after the Normandy invasion because he was instrumental in the allies breaking through the Siegfried line into Germany. Bradley would go on to become a five-star general in 1950 and he would serve in the military until 1953. After his retirement from the military, Bradley was a successful business man in the watch industry. Omar Bradley died on April 8, 1981.

George C. Marshall was appointed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as Chief of Staff of the army in 1939. Marshall immediately impacted the army and other areas of the military. It was Marshall that kept the various chief of staffs in unity during the planning process for World War II. This was important because

these men were extremely volatile and were not acquainted with working diplomatically with one another. Marshall believed that the primary purpose of the war should be to stop Germany. Although he came under heavy fire for this belief, Marshall's idea became the official policy of the United States. During the war, Marshall also acted as an adviser to President Roosevelt at the Casablanca, Teheran, and Yalta conferences. Marshall would later share in the decision with Harry S Truman to drop the atomic bomb. After his service in the military, Marshall served as secretary of state and secretary of defense. George C. Marshall died on October 16, 1959.

George Patton, also known as Blood and Guts Patton, was a colorful American general during World War II. Patton led the American forces in an invasion at Casablanca, Morocco as part of Operation Torch. Patton's notoriety, however, came into being during the Sicilian Campaign in which he led the U.S. 7th Army to victory. Patton also made his share of mistakes. For example, he slapped a GI that was in a hospital and accused him of cowardice. The GI was really suffering from shell shock. Despite his harsh treatment of the GI, Patton was not removed from command. Patton finished the war by leading the 3rd Army Division in removing German troops from France after the Allies broke out of the beachhead at Normandy. After the war, Patton was removed from command by Dwight D. Eisenhower for using Nazi officials in administrative positions. Patton was killed in an automobile accident on December 21, 1945.

Erwin Rommel was a German military leader during World War II. Rommel, as a lieutenant general, was appointed commander of the *Afrika Korps* in February of 1942. Rommel quickly became very efficient at leading his army because he demanded excellence and toughness from his soldiers. Because of his diligence and his ability to get the most from his soldiers, Rommel succeeded in driving the British from Libya. Rommel was promoted to field marshal for his efforts in Libya. Despite Rommel's ability, he was not able to overcome Hitler's disregard for the African campaign and subsequent shortages of supplies and men; thus, the Germans were forced to surrender North Africa in May of 1943. Rommel would later serve in Normandy during the famous D-Day invasion where he was injured and forced to return to Germany. After returning to Germany, Rommel became very critical of Hitler. When a plan was developed by German officers to assassinate Hitler, the officers chose Rommel to be the new leader of Germany. Unfortunately for the German officers and Rommel, the plot did not succeed. Rommel was instructed by Nazi officials to either poison himself or face a Nazi tribunal. Rommel chose to poison himself on October 14, 1944 and he was given a state funeral by Hitler and the Nazis.