

Introduction

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the half century that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose.

Highly relevant today, World War II has much to teach us, not only about the profession of arms, but also about military preparedness, global strategy, and combined operations in the coalition war against fascism. During the next several years, the U.S. Army will participate in the nation's 50th anniversary commemoration of World War II. The commemoration will include the publication of various materials to help educate Americans about that war. The works produced will provide great opportunities to learn about and renew pride in an Army that fought so magnificently in what has been called "the mighty endeavor."

A Brief History of the U.S. Army in World War II highlights the major ground force campaigns during the six years of the war, offers suggestions for further reading, and provides Americans an opportunity to learn about the Army's role in World War II. This brochure was prepared at the U.S. Army Center of Military History by Wayne M. Dzwonchyk (Europe) and John Ray Skates (Pacific). I hope this absorbing account of that period will enhance your appreciation of American achievements during World War II.

M. P. W. Stone
Secretary of the Army

Sicily and Italy

Meeting in Casablanca in January 1943, President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided that the large Italian island of Sicily would be their next target. Montgomery's British forces landed on the southeast coast, while Patton's newly activated Seventh Army landed on the southwest, with the mission of seizing airfields and protecting the flank of the British drive. Airborne troops spearheading the attacks scattered wide of their targets but managed to disrupt enemy communications. Hours after the initial landings on 9 July, German armor struck the American beaches. Naval gunfire, infantry counterattacks, and the direct fire of field artillery landing at the critical juncture broke up the German formations. But two attempts to reinforce the beaches with parachute and glider-borne troops ended in disaster when Allied antiaircraft batteries mistook the transport planes for enemy aircraft and opened fire, causing severe losses.

Meanwhile, the Germans solidly blocked the British drive on the Sicilian capital, Messina. General Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, Allied ground commander, ordered Patton to push toward Palermo, at the western tip of the island. Once in Palermo, since the British drive was still stalled, his forces attacked Messina from the north. Patton used a series of small amphibious end runs to outflank German positions on the northern coastal road. American and British troops arrived in Messina on 17 August, just as the last Axis troops evacuated Sicily.

In late July the Allies decided to follow up their success in Sicily with an invasion of Italy. Having lost hope of victory, the *Italian High Command*, backed by the king, opened secret negotiations with the Allies. The Germans, suspecting that Italy was about to desert the Axis, rushed in additional troops.

The Germans swiftly disarmed the Italian Army and took over its defensive positions. A British fleet sailed into the harbor of Taranto and disembarked troops onto the docks, while the U.S. Fifth Army under Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark landed on the beaches near Salerno on 9 September. The Germans reacted in strength. For four days vigorous attacks by German armor threatened the beaches. But on 16 September American and British forces made contact, and two weeks later American troops entered Naples, the largest city south of Rome. Allied plans called for a continued advance to tie down German troops and prevent their transfer to France or Russia, while Hitler decided to hold as much of Italy as possible.