All the tanks, weapons, ships and trucks being made in the United States at the beginning of World War II would be useful only if brave men could be found to use them in battle. That didn't seem to be a problem in the United States. After the Japanese attack on American naval base Pearl Harbor, recruitment centers across the nation were swamped with volunteers. Even so, in 1943 Washington had resorted to a draft of males between 18 and 40. The draft required all men to enlist in the Army if they were healthy enough. The
Marine Corps expanded from one division to five. The Navy put more than a thousand ships to sea. The Army was the largest of all the services. By 1945, about 16 million Americans had served in uniform, not including the Merchant Marine, which helped deliver troops and supplies to the front lines.

The Allied powers — the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union — continued to fight the Axis powers — Germany, Italy and Japan. As millions of new people joined the armed forces, separation and longing became common feelings. Songs of the time had names like "Till We Meet Again" and "I'll Be Seeing You, in All the Old Familiar Places." This reflected the feelings of loneliness that were felt in every town and by almost every family. Eventually, most soldiers and Marines were shipped overseas.

**American Troops On The Way**

Before going overseas, men would stay for a few days in the port towns of New York City and San Francisco. This last period in the United States often offered the opportunity for a few days of liberty — especially in New York City. There, they drank and laughed and pretended to be confident and happy.

The next step was to board a troopship. Quarters were tight, pleasures were few and danger was constant. In the Atlantic Ocean, German submarines lurked beneath the surface. The most common way to get to Europe was in a group of about 50 or 60 similar ships, all protected by a screen of destroyers and maybe one cruiser. Luckily, the Allied navies gained superiority over the Nazi submarines before most American soldiers crossed the ocean. Only 8,000 men were lost out of 4 million who made the journey aboard the defenseless cargo vessels.

**Allied Forces Gain Ground Against Germany And Japan**

By late 1942, the tide had turned against the Axis. In June, the U.S. Navy won its greatest victory ever in the Battle of Midway in the Pacific. There, an outnumbered American force inflicted devastating losses on the then-superior Japanese fleet. By September, American Marines were on an island-hopping campaign that required them to fight their way across the Pacific. The good news, however, was that after the Battle of Midway, the Japanese were no longer able to attack. It was just a matter of time before Japan was crushed by American air and naval superiority.
The German army was another matter. It had superbly trained and battle-hardened soldiers, sophisticated weapons and brilliant tactical leaders. Only an enormous sacrifice by many nations could bring it down. But it happened. In the fall of 1942, the British Eighth Army counterattacked against German forces in Africa and sent them scurrying home to Germany. Meanwhile, the Americans who had landed in Morocco and Algeria trapped thousands of Nazi soldiers who could not escape across the Mediterranean Sea. In 1943, a combined English and American force invaded Sicily and then Italy, ultimately knocking that country out of the war. And in perhaps the most devastating battle of all time, at Stalingrad between August 1942 and February 1943, the proud German Sixth Army, who had conquered France, was systematically annihilated by Russia's vengeful Red Army. Thereafter, Hitler's legions were rarely able to attack. Instead, they were destroyed by enormous forces coordinated by the Big Three — Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin.

**Allies Prepare For Invasion Of Normandy**

In 1943, the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army made a recommendation to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He suggested that Dwight D. Eisenhower be made Supreme Commander of the Allied crusade in Europe.

So it fell to Eisenhower, then an unknown man from Kansas, to take charge of the greatest invasion in history. He was not high in rank when the war began in 1939. But his good judgment, hard work and devotion to duty were recognized early, and he was quickly promoted over dozens of senior generals. By the early months of 1944, Eisenhower was in charge of all American and Allied ground, sea and air forces in Europe. His mission was to assault the Nazi Atlantic Wall, a network of weapons, beach hazards and fortresses that were designed to slaughter anyone foolish enough to come out of the water.

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