The landing of the Allied troops in Normandy, France, June 1944. Photo12/UIG via Getty Images

The last in a four-part series.

June 6, 1944 was a very significant day. It is also known as D-Day. Germany had taken control of parts of France during World War II. This included many beaches. On D-Day, the United States, Canada and Britain rushed onto one of these beaches to take back control. It was the largest invasion onto a beach in history. It was the beginning of the end of World War II.
Eisenhower's crucial role

General Dwight D. Eisenhower was in charge of the invasion. He did four exceptional things. First, he decided to invade even though there was a bad weather forecast. This helped him surprise the Germans. They thought the weather was so bad that no one could invade.

Second, he prepared a message in case the invasion failed. In the message he blamed himself for failing. Luckily that message never had to be read.

Third, Eisenhower visited the soldiers the day before the invasion. He walked among the young men. He talked with them about their hometowns. He recognized the risk they would soon face.

Finally, Eisenhower wrote an encouraging message. He read it to the troops as they set out across the English channel.

The end of the war

The D-Day landings went very well. Over the coming months, Germany was crushed. Adolf Hitler killed himself in April 1945. Germany surrendered within a week.

Japan never had a chance against the United States. America was a giant country with almost never-ending supplies. Though Japan kept fighting, it could not compete.

America dropped two atomic bombs on Japanese cities in August 1945. By then, Japan had to realize that more fighting was pointless. After President Roosevelt's death in April 1945, Harry Truman took his place. President Truman announced that the war was over that month. In September, the Japanese government surrendered. World War II was over.

The war in retrospect

The United States was the big winner in World War II in many ways. It had fewer deaths than other countries. Its big cities were never attacked. It had a military better than any other in the world. In 1945, the United States led the world.
But no one would say that World War II had been easy. Many suffered great losses. The years of fear and longing stayed with the people who had lived through them.

Professor Kenneth T. Jackson teaches history and the Social Sciences at Columbia University. He runs the university's Center on American History. He has written books about New York City.