

The Commanders of Operation *Overlord*

“When pressure mounts and strain increases everyone begins to show the weaknesses in his makeup. It is up to the Commander to conceal his: above all to conceal doubt, fear and distrust.”
--General Dwight D. Eisenhower

The seven men selected to lead the invasion of Normandy, Operation *Overlord*—three Americans and four British—sat down together for the first time in January 1944. All had at least thirty years of military experience, and were regarded by their peers as exceptional in their fields. Many had served together in previous campaigns, and almost all had participated in the amphibious assaults in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. They knew that *Overlord* would require Allied collaboration on an unprecedented scale.

In the months leading up to D-Day the commanders worked around the clock, planning strategic and tactical operations, conducting training exercises, and coordinating the resources and efforts of the ground, air, and naval forces. There were numerous setbacks, many stemming from personality clashes and conflicting beliefs about the best course of action. When tempers flared, Eisenhower, as Supreme Commander, intervened to ease tensions among his colleagues so that *Overlord* would not be jeopardized. It was essential that they cooperate in what Winston Churchill called “much the greatest the thing we have ever attempted.”

The organization formed to direct *Overlord* was known as Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF). All of the commanders in SHAEF reported to Eisenhower. Though the leaders of the ground forces, General Montgomery and General Bradley, were not technically part of SHAEF, they took their orders directly from the Supreme Commander and worked closely with SHAEF staff.



The leaders of SHAEF:

(Standing from left) Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley; Admiral Sir Bertram H. Ramsay; Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory; Lieutenant General Walter Bedell Smith;
(Seated from left) Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder; Supreme Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower; General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery.