

This Day in History... September 3, 1943

Allied Invasion of Italy

On September 3, 1943, the Allies launched their invasion of Italy during World War II.

There was disagreement among the Big Three – Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt – concerning the Allied invasion of Western Europe. Stalin argued that a second fighting front should be established in Western Europe, but Roosevelt and Churchill could not agree on when and where to invade.

FDR wanted to take northern France as soon as possible. Churchill, however, felt an invasion of France before Allied forces were fully prepared would be disastrous. He pushed for invading Italy instead. In January of 1943, the two met in Casablanca, where they agreed to invade Sicily. It was hoped that this move would make the Mediterranean safe for Allied ships, as well as drive a weary Italy out of the war.



Sicily attacked by Allied forces, July 1943

Stamp pictures Allied troops in Sicily.

Mussolini's successor, Pietro Badoglio, secretly held peace talks with the Allies. At the same time, Albert Kesselring, commander of German Forces in the Mediterranean, was preparing to fight for control of Italy. On September 3, Allied troops landed in Italy facing little opposition. Many of the Italian units surrendered quickly. That same day, Badoglio secretly surrendered to Allies in the Armistice of Cassibile. Fearing German retaliation, the Italians asked that the surrender be kept quiet until the larger Allied attack a few days later. Hoping to surprise the Germans, Eisenhower agreed.



Allies free Rome, June 4; Paris, Aug. 25, 1944

Stamp honors the liberation of Rome and Paris in 1944.

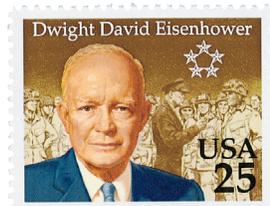


Italy invaded by Allies, September 1943

From the WWII: Turning the Tide stamp sheet

On July 10, 1943, Allied forces embarked on "Operation Husky," the largest amphibious operation in history. Ignorant of the enemy's plans to attack Sicily, the Axis forces were ill-prepared on that fateful day. Coastal defenses, manned mainly by Sicilians unwilling to turn their homeland into a battleground, rapidly collapsed.

On July 25, Mussolini fell from power and Italy's new premier Pietro Badoglio began secret peace talks with the Allies. Meanwhile, the Germans had retreated and escaped to the mainland. Spurred on by the success of the Sicilian campaign, Eisenhower favored an amphibious assault on the Italian mainland.



Eisenhower was the supreme allied commander of the Mediterranean theater.

On September 9, Allied forces swarmed onto the beaches of Salerno, which was secured after nine days of fighting. Encouraged, the Allies pushed north to Naples. Although they met little resistance, they found the port in shambles. Following Hitler's orders, German troops had demolished the city, reducing it to a mere shell of its former self.

Believing the Germans would continue to steadily retreat north, Eisenhower decided to go for the glittering prize of Rome. German forces south of the city held the Allies at bay for months, however. Rome was finally liberated in June 1944.

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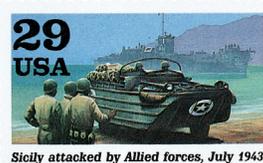
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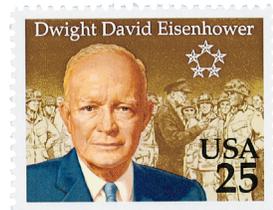
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