

# How to Win a War With the Weather Report

What do you need to win a battle? Win a war? A great and well trained army? A brilliant strategist in charge? Masses of hi-tech equipment? The weather report?

I'm sure the weather was probably not on your list of top 10 factors in the success of a battle or war. Strangely enough, many of the bloodiest conflicts in history have actually been decided not by the money spent on weaponry or the strength of an army, but by the weather!

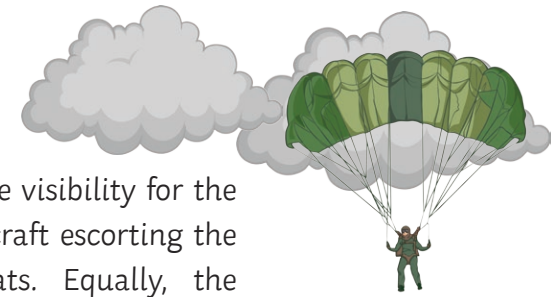
## A Fine Day for a Beach Landing



D Day, the Normandy Landings, Operations Neptune and Overlord: the deciding Allied push of the Second World War has many names and is deemed to be one of the most strategically brilliant operations of the war. You may have heard of the landings many times, but did you realise that the weather was a key factor in the success of the entire venture that day in June?

The landing of thousands of Allied troops on the beaches of Normandy in June 1944 ensured the success of operations to push the Germans out of France. It is often seen as the true turning point of the Second World War. D Day's anniversary is celebrated on 6th June as this is the date on which the great assault of the Normandy beaches occurred. The thing is, the landings were supposed to occur on 5th June instead!

Along with other extensive planning and the setting up of counter intelligence to fool the Germans, the British and American strategists knew that the timing would be key to the success of their mission. They all agreed: the weather had to be perfect. There needed to be a full moon to ensure the highest tides each month. This



would give visibility for the Allied aircraft escorting the troop boats. Equally, the arrival at the beach would have to take place just before dawn, when the sky was light, and the seas needed to be as calm as possible, with wind at a minimum.

When the meteorological office checked forthcoming conditions on 4th June, they were not optimistic. The weather looked bleak for the next day; although there would be a full moon, there would also be high winds and stormy seas. It looked like the landings would have to be postponed. Someone, however, noted that 6th June looked much more favourable and the rest, as they say, was history.



Interestingly, the Germans had less reliable weather reports coming from their Luftwaffe meteorologists. Since it looked like two weeks of poor weather was coming, several pilots and commanders were given leave to attend war games in Rennes. Many German soldiers were given leave and Field Marshall Rommell returned home for his wife's birthday. This meant the German forces were even more poorly prepared for the invasion than the Allies had expected.

### The British and the Weather

Britain is a small island, constantly buffeted by sea storms and rain. No wonder, then, that this country has had several battles decided by the weather. One of the most famous of these was the . It was fought on French soil, so we can't really call it 'English weather', but it still helped the English to win.



The field on which the English faced the French was sodden. It had rained continuously for two weeks prior to the battle and the newly ploughed ground was a quagmire. The French army had been made to march to the site in full plate armour, which was very heavy. They were exhausted and overcome with fatigue before they even faced their enemy. The battle, which took place on 25th October 1415, was a deciding victory in the Hundred Years War with France.

Another great example of weather working for the English was during the period of Queen Elizabeth I (August 1588). The Spanish fleet (the Armada), under the supervision of the Duke of Medina Sidonia, sailed towards England. The Spanish were attempting to attack England with a strong army from Flanders (the Spanish Netherlands). They wished to overthrow Queen Elizabeth (a protestant) in favour of a Catholic king from mainland Europe. The plan was to sail up the channel, pick up the army in Flanders, sail around the top of Scotland and attack England from the west. The Spanish were not successful. In a great set of storms which became known as the 'Protestant Winds', many of the 130 ships of the Spanish fleet were beached and lost off

the coast of Ireland. Unfortunately, the English didn't simply rest on their laurels. They decided a counter Armada was in order and attacked Spain the following year. That sea assault also resulted in massive losses of life and naval vessels.

### Kublai Khan and the Kamikaze



The sea is unpredictable and entire fleets have been lost because of poorly designed boats and sudden storms. Another example of weather people think of as divine occurred in Japan in 1274 and 1281. Kublai Khan was a Mongol conqueror who had cut a path through most of central and Eastern Asia by the time he set his sights on Japan. He hastily built a fleet of ships to carry his army from mainland China to the Japanese coast and launched his first attack in 1274. Sudden sea storms (known as typhoons)

blew up, causing the destruction of Khan's fleets. This also happened when he tried again in 1281. The Japanese saw the typhoons as a form of divine intervention and they began to call them kamikaze or 'divine wind'. These are the earliest events for which this word is recorded. It was later used by the Japanese as a term of respect for Japanese fighter pilots who flew their planes directly into the Allied forces during the Second World War.

### You'll Never Win a Land War in Asia!

One of the most common mistakes made by army general and military leaders throughout history is the decision to invade Russia. Both Napoleon and Hitler figuratively fell on this sword.



Napoleon's Russian Campaign began in June of 1812, when his massive army crossed the Nemen. Napoleon expected an easy victory in Russia, but the Russians were not giving up. An army marches on its stomach, as they say. Through a process of scorched earth tactics (burning everything before the invading army entered a town), the Russians reduced the effectiveness of the French forces. Soon, there was nothing for the invading army to eat, no fuel to burn and the weather began to grow worse, quickly.

Having reached Moscow, Napoleon spent the month of October trying to negotiate peace with the Russians. When this didn't work, he tried to engage the Russians in battle. The Russians retreated, forcing Napoleon to reassess his situation. His troops were exhausted, they had no winter clothing and supplies were low. Napoleon began a retreat but, with hypothermia, attacks from local Cossacks and desertions, there were only 27,000 able bodied men (out of 685,000) left to fight by the time the Grande Armée reached the Berezina River. Around 400,000 men of the French army are estimated to have died in the conflict. Napoleon's reputation as a great military leader never recovered.

It was a similar situation for Hitler when his troops arrived in Russia in 1941. They were hampered by autumn rains and didn't reach the outskirts of Moscow until early December. Then, the cruel Russian winter set in. Temperatures plummeted to -50 Celsius and the German army had no suitable winter clothing. Panzer tanks were not designed to operate at such low temperatures and so, by 5th December, the Russian forces were already chasing the Germans out of Russia.



**What's the lesson to be learned from all this? We may have technology on our side, we may have the best armies in the world, but in the end, nothing is as powerful as Mother Nature in determining the course of history.**