

The Month of June During WWII

We recently celebrated D-Day on 6 June. I've written about D-Day in the past and I'm sure all of you remember why we remember D-Day. On the morning of 6 June 1944, Allied forces staged a huge assault on the Germany's positions on the beaches of Normandy. It started the invasion of Europe and was a major battle leading to the end of the War. Normandy is named after the Vikings or Northmen who invaded and settled there. Rollo was the Viking leader and there is a statue of Rollo just north of the Sons of Norway in Fargo.

The month of June saw other major battles of WWII. As everyone knows, the Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, destroying some of the US Pacific fleet. The Japanese Navy dominated the Pacific following the attack until the Battle of Midway which started 4 June 1942. Admiral Yamamoto believed he could score a decisive victory of the US because of his superior number of ships. However, the US had broken the Japanese military code earlier in 1942 and was able to determine when and where the Midway attacks would take place. By intercepting Japanese radio traffic, the US was able to determine the battle plan and prepare for it. Aircraft from both Japanese carriers attacked Midway and US carriers. Aircraft from US carriers attacked Japanese carriers. Eventually all four Japanese carriers were lost while the US lost two carriers. On 6 June Yamamoto ordered a retreat, ending the battle and ending Japan's invasion of the Pacific. An interesting side-note, the islands of Midway were attacked by the Japanese only hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Two years later, on 15 June 1944, US forces attacked the Japanese-held Mariana Islands. Known as the Battle of the Philippine Sea the US and Japanese carriers fought a two-day sea and air battle off the coast of Saipan. It would be one of the largest carrier battles of WWII. Japan lost three aircraft carriers and more than 300 aircraft. OF the 30,000 Japanese troops defending Saipan, less than 1,000 remained alive when the battle ended. Death before surrender had become the code of Japanese soldiers, it also was honored by Japanese civilians on the islands, with large numbers committing suicide before being captured by the US. The major significance of the Battle of the Philippine Sea was that it gave the US access to territory within striking distance of Japan by US B-29 bombers. The bombers could make bombing runs against Japan's mainland and return without running out of fuel.

Over the 14 months of fighting in the Pacific, Japan eventually announced its surrender on 14 August 1945, 75 years ago this August. President Harry Truman would go on to officially name September 2, 1945, V-J Day, the day the Japanese signed the official surrender aboard the USS Missouri.