

ADMIRAL HAROLD STARK

Commander of Naval Operations WWII

WHEN?
1880-1972

WHERE? Starts in
Wilkes-Barre, PA.



EVENT
Naval Operations
Commander World War II

VOCABULARY
Admiral infamy
D-Day seaplane

Pam was a little girl when she watched the navy sea-plane land on her beloved Lake Carey near Tunkhannock, Pa. She looked forward to seeing the man who was in it as he had become a good friend of her family. Though she had little idea of what he did, she knew he served in the

Admiral Stark Trophy Race on Lake Carey, Tunkhannock, Pa.



Navy. Harold Raynsford Stark was indeed in the Navy and during World War II he was the CNO—Commander of Naval Operations—until 1942.

Stark was born in Wilkes-Barre in 1880. His early education was at the Harry Hillman Academy in the city (the Academy later became part of Wyoming Seminary.) He so distinguished himself that he won an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, in 1899 (Kashatus, 42).

Kashatus also notes that after graduating in 1903, Stark served on the USS *Minnesota* during the Atlantic Fleet's world cruise between 1907-1909. (Kashatus, 42). He met Franklin D. Roosevelt the future president when Roosevelt was the Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1914. That began a lifelong friendship that would be of great benefit to both men.

When World War I broke out, the German U-boats (Unterseeboots) were a real menace to Allied shipping. Stark was assigned to torpedo boats during the conflict working on anti-submarine strategies. The experience would serve him well as he rose through the ranks eventually becoming an aide to the Secretary of the Navy (Kashatus 43). Roosevelt who had become president in 1933 appointed Stark as the Chief of Naval Operations in 1939. Due to the Nazi threat in Europe especially after the invasion of Poland in September 1939, Stark immediately set about expanding the Navy during 1940 and 1941. His vision of a navy that could handle conflict in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans was at first downplayed in Congress when they granted only an 11 percent increase in the budget (Kashatus 43). That changed within 48 hours after Paris was taken by the Nazis and Stark's Two-Ocean Navy Bill was swiftly passed calling for a 70% budget increase. According to Kashatus, "without such a vast and immediate buildup of naval force, it is unlikely that the Allied forces would have been able to sustain the huge losses to German submarine attacks (43).

The "date that will live in infamy" December 7, 1941, came to haunt Stark when Pearl Harbor was attacked. The huge losses of life, the emotional blow to the entire country, and the

devastation to the fleet at Pearl Harbor were blamed on Stark. He was criticized for unpreparedness as he had advised Roosevelt to concentrate on defeating the Nazis first as they were the greater immediate danger. Stark, however, had warned all commanders in the Pacific to be on the alert for Japanese attacks including Admiral Kimmel who had direct command at Pearl Harbor. There had been many intelligence reports coming into the commanders, but nothing was definitive. There had been no break in diplomatic relations with Japan at that time either. He had also warned F.D.R. not to use an oil embargo on Japan as that might push them into aggression. The president ignored that advice though Stark's advice proved correct (Kashatus 44). His reputation was damaged for sure though he was later cleared of any lapse in judgement. He had done all he could do given the information he had at the time. Admiral Kimmel had not fully followed the defensive maneuvers or else the ships would not have been located as they were at Pearl Harbor.

Eventually Stark's position was moved to Commander, U.S. Forces in Europe. He had deep experience with the British Royal Navy and coupled with his knowledge of training he now worked diligently to prepare the U.S. naval operations on the Atlantic side of the conflict. On June 6, 1944, it was his planning and cooperation with General Eisenhower that resulted in the greatest amphibious force ever witnessed by the world--D-Day--the Allied invasion of Europe.

Stark's forty-year career ended when he retired in 1946 from active duty though he still served as a naval advisor in Washington, D.C. (Kashatus 44). His service was marked with three U.S. Navy and one U.S. Army distinguished service medals and the commissioning of the guided missile frigate *USS Stark* in 1982. He died at age 91 on August 21, 1972, and was buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.



Residents of Wilkes-Barre might also recognize his contributions to what was known as Bucknell University Junior College, now Wilkes University. His financial contributions and involvement in the growth of the college helped to provide the institutional foundation which now stands proudly in the city. A hall was named in his honor.

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Times Leader Stark](#)

PRINT RESOURCES

Kashatus, William. *Valley With A Heart*. Luzerne County, PA: Luzerne County Historical Society and Luzerne County Community College, 2012.