LESSON 3: WORLD WAR II (WWII) (1939–1945)

INTRODUCTION

World War II was the most devastating war ever fought. It killed more persons (over 16 million servicemen died), cost more money (over $1,150,000,000,000), affected more people (over 50 countries took part in the war), and caused more far-reaching effects than any other war in history. Military forces fought in many parts of the world: Asia, Europe, North Africa, three oceans, and the Mediterranean Sea.

The war introduced tactics such as the use of aerial bombing, giant tanks, and pinpoint artillery to “soften” enemy positions. Paratroops were dropped from airplanes or landed in gliders; airplanes, warships, and ground troops worked together with split-second timing in amphibious attacks; and atomic bombs and ballistic missiles rained death and destruction.

By the time the U.S. entered the war, Europe had already been at war for over two years. The U.S. commitment in terms of manpower, materiel, and strategic planning was massive in scope and has been unequaled.

EUROPE DRIFTS TOWARD WAR

THE RISE OF DICTATORSHIPS

After World War I, Europe suffered an economic depression that was even greater than the depression the United States experienced in the 1930s. The people of Europe found themselves trying to rebuild their countries as well as their confidence. They were troubled by their economic hardships, and dissatisfied with their governments’ handling of economic and social issues.

The dictators that emerged in Germany and Italy took advantage of those troubled times. They were able to easily win the confidence and support of the people by promising their broken nations a strong, powerful future. The people believed them, and the feeling of nationalism and pride in those countries grew during the 1930s.

Communism in Russia

Communism came to power in Russia during the revolution of 1917. The Communists under Lenin promised a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” or of the working people. But, the Communists set up a one-party dictatorship instead. First Lenin and then Joseph Stalin ruled Russia. The government
seized all types of private property. It also outlawed all political parties other than its own — the Communist Party.

Fascism in Italy

Italy came out of World War I on the side of the victors, but the costs were extremely high. Italy suffered over two million total casualties, a shattered economy, an unstable government, and a feeling that they were cheated out of much of the land promised to them when they entered that war.

Out of the labor strikes, riots, and political unrest in Italy emerged Benito Mussolini. In 1922, Mussolini became Prime Minister of Italy and his Fascist Party took over the government. Italy became a one-party (totalitarian) state. Despite political oppression, the economy and living conditions in Italy improved until the depression began in 1929. To divert attention away from Italy’s problems at home, Mussolini turned his attention to foreign conquests.

Nazism in Germany

Germany tried democracy from the end of World War I to 1933, but its republican government had to accept the blame for all of Germany’s ills. The republic was burdened by starvation and disease brought on by the war, staggering war debts, and a soaring inflation rate. Finally, in 1929, the German economy collapsed and unemployment rose.

Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist, or Nazi Party took advantage of the situation and began their rise to power. In 1925, Hitler clearly revealed his plans in his book Mein Kampf (which means “My Battle”), in which he urged the use of armed force to remove the restrictions of the Versailles treaty. Hitler called for rearmament and a union of all German-speaking peoples into a “Greater Germany.”

The Nazis placed the blame for Germany’s problems on the western powers (especially France), the capitalists, the communists, and the Jews. In the 1930 elections, the Nazis became even more powerful. Then, in 1933, Hitler (a one-time unemployed artist and ex-corporal in World War I) became the Chancellor of Germany.

During the next few years, Hitler strengthened his power by taking such steps as declaring the Nazi Party the only legal party in the state, passing racial laws against Jews, and eliminating members of any party he viewed as a threat. Additionally, German schools — from kindergarten up — began teaching children the glories of military might, and the state required all children to join Hitler Youth groups, which stressed military discipline.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hitler originally joined the Nazi Party in 1920 as a paid informer for the German army that wanted to keep an eye on potentially dangerous political groups.

AGGRESSION ON THE MARCH

The time was right for Italy and Germany to regain their rightful position in Europe — which they undertook for the next six years.

- In late 1933, Hitler withdrew Germany from the League of Nations.
- In March 1935, Germany violated the terms of the Treaty of Versailles by bringing back the draft for its army. As
the German military stepped up its training, Hitler created the German air force (called the Luftwaffe), and the German navy began a massive construction program. The treaty limited Germany to a 100,000-man army, but Hitler soon had 600,000 men under arms.

- In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia (northeast Africa). The Italians slaughtered the crudely equipped and poorly trained Ethiopian forces. Although the League of Nations voted economic sanctions against Italy, it later withdrew them.

- In 1936, Italy and Germany contributed troops to the rebel forces of Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War. Franco overthrew the Spanish government and in 1939 organized an absolute dictatorship similar to the ones in Germany and Italy. Historians often call the war in Spain a testing ground for World War II because the Germans, Italians, and Russians tested some weapons and military tactics there.

- In March 1936, German troops moved back into the Rhineland, an area in western Germany that had been demilitarized since World War I. This act once again put German soldiers close to the French border. French leaders wanted to send troops to force the Germans back, but it was felt that such an act might lead to war.

- In March 1938, Germany annexed Austria in a non-violent takeover — another act that was forbidden by the Versailles treaty.

- In September 1938, Germany achieved a non-violent takeover of the Sudetenland, an area of Czechoslovakia where nearly three and one-half million Germans lived.

- Although Hitler “promised” at a 29 September 1938 conference that Sudetenland was the “last territorial claim I have to make in Europe,” in March 1939, German troops took the rest of Czechoslovakia by force. Next he seized Memel (German for Klaipeda) from Lithuania (a republic of Russia). In April, Italy conquered Albania.

- In the west, the Germans worked at frantic
speed to complete the Siegfried Line opposite the French Maginot Line.

- In the spring of 1939, Hitler demanded the area of Danzig, Poland, and a pathway across the Polish Corridor to East Prussia, Germany’s largest state. His high command also began making plans to attack Poland in September. Assuming that Great Britain and France would not go to war to support Poland, Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. On 3 September, France and Great Britain declared war on Germany.

**APPEASEMENT**

After reviewing the list above, you may wonder why European leaders allowed Germany to bully its way over Central Europe. The answer can be found in one word — appeasement. The French and British decided that none of these actions were aggressive enough to justify going to war.

Britain and France did no more than protest Germany’s annexation of Austria, perhaps because they felt that most Austrians favored union with Germany. The most well-known example of appeasement was the Munich conference between Hitler, Mussolini, the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, and Premier Edouard Daladier of France in September 1938. To avoid war with Germany, Chamberlain and Daladier persuaded Czechoslovakia to give up the Sudetenland to Germany. They justified their decision by insisting that they sought to maintain “peace for our time.”

Hitler’s broken promises finally convinced Great Britain and France that he intended to conquer all of eastern Europe. The policy of appeasement (giving in) had proved to be a complete failure.

**EUROPE AT WAR**

**POLAND CRUSHED**

On 1 September 1939, the German war machine, using a new method of warfare called the blitzkrieg — or lightning war — unleashed its might on Poland. German Stuka dive-bombers attacked Polish air and ground forces, and heavier bombers struck at fortifications and industrial plants. On the ground, tanks and motorized infantry raced across the Polish frontier. The British and French forces could not give any direct help to the Poles. At times, the Poles fought stubbornly, even charging German tanks on horseback.

![German Dive-Bomber](image)

By 27 September, the last pockets of Polish resistance surrendered. Poland was divided between Germany and Russia in accordance with a 23 August 1939 non-aggression pact signed between those two countries, in which Russia also agreed to remain neutral if Germany went to war.

For six months after the Polish campaign, the Germans and the Allies fought no important land battles. The French defended the Maginot Line (a line of fortifications along their eastern border) and the Germans stayed behind their Siegfried Line, awaiting the next order to attack. Both sides conducted small raids, took aerial photographs, and dropped propaganda leaflets.
Newspapers began calling the war in the west the “phony war.”

**THE COUNTRIES AT WAR**

Throughout the course of World War II, 49 nations joined the Allies against Germany, Italy, Japan, and six other Axis nations. Very few countries remained neutral.

**The Allies (date entered war):**
- Argentia (27 Mar 1945)
- Belgium (10 May 1940)
- Bolivia (7 Apr 1943)
- Brazil (22 Aug 1942)
- Canada (10 Sep 1939)
- Chile (11 Apr 1945)
- China (8 Dec 1941)
- Columbia (26 Nov 1943)
- Costa Rica (8 Dec 1941)
- Cuba (9 Dec 1941)
- Czechoslovakia (16 Dec 1941)
- Dominican Republic (8 Dec 1941)
- Ecuador (2 Feb 1945)
- Egypt (24 Feb 1945)
- El Salvador (8 Dec 1941)
- Ethiopia (14 Dec 1942)
- France (3 Sep 1939)
- Great Britain (3 Sep 1939)
- Greece (28 Oct 1940)
- Guatemala (9 Dec 1941)
- Haiti (8 Dec 1941)
- Honduras (8 Dec 1941)
- India (3 Sep 1939)
- Iran (25 Aug 1941)
- Iraq (17 Jan 1943)
- Lebanon (27 Feb 1945)
- Liberia (27 Jan 1944)
- Luxembourg (10 May 1940)
- Mexico (22 May 1942)
- Mongolia (9 Aug 1945)
- Netherlands (10 May 1940)
- New Zealand (3 Sep 1939)
- Nicaragua (11 Dec 1941)
- Norway (9 Apr 1940)
- Panama (7 Dec 1941)
- Paraguay (7 Feb 1945)
- Peru (12 Feb 1945)
- Poland (1 Sep 1939)
- Russia (22 Jun 1941)
- San Marino (21 Sep 1944)
- Saudi Arabia (1 Mar 1945)
- South Africa (6 Sep 1939)
- Syria (8 Jun 1941)
- Turkey (23 Feb 1945)
- U.S. (8 Dec 1941)
- Uruguay (15 Feb 1945)
- Venezuela (15 Feb 1945)
- Yugoslavia (6 Apr 1941)

**The Axis Powers (date entered war):**
- Albania (15 Jun 1940)
- Bulgaria (1 Mar 1941)
- Finland (25 Jun 1941)
- Germany (1 Sep 1939)
- Hungary (10 Apr 1941)
- Italy (11 Jun 1940)
- Japan (7 Dec 1941)
- Rumania (23 Nov 1940)
- Thailand (25 Jan 1942)

**THE WAR RESUMES**

**The Fall of Denmark and Norway**

After a successful test of the *blitzkrieg* methods in Poland, the Germans crushed six countries — Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, and France — in three months, after beginning its invasion of Denmark on 9 April 1940. Denmark surrendered almost immediately. In Norway, although Great Britain and France sent troops to aid the Norwegian resistance, they could not furnish adequate air support. As the Germans gained strength, especially in air power, they were able to drive the Allies from Norway in June. The British navy, however, was able to inflict heavy losses on German warships.

**The Fall of Belgium, Luxembourg, and The Netherlands**
Next, on 10 May 1940, German troops plunged into Belgium, Luxembourg, and The Netherlands. Armored units, paratroops, and dive bombers struck at Luxembourg and the heavily wooded Ardennes Forest. The Germans raced to the coast and isolated the Allied forces in Belgium from the main body in France. Luxembourg fell in one day; The Netherlands in five days, and Belgium surrendered on 28 May.

Belgium’s surrender left the remaining Allied forces in a desperate situation. They retreated to Dunkerque — the only escape port on the northern French coast. German armored units were close to the port, but they halted about 20 miles away. As the tiny Royal Air Force formed an aerial umbrella to repel German bombers, more than 336,000 French, British, and Belgium troops boarded British rescue ships, including fishing boats and motorboats.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Some historians believe that Hitler allowed the Allies to escape at Dunkerque because he felt it would be easier to negotiate a peace with Britain if he spared them.

*The Fall of France*

On 5 June 1940, Germany launched a new offensive against France. By attacking France from Belgium, Germany was able to initially by-pass the *Maginot Line*. In just four days, the French were in hopeless retreat. Plus, on 11 June, Italy entered the war on Germany’s side. It immediately attacked the coast of southern France, tying down some of France’s best troops who were guarding the Italian border against such an attack.

The Germans entered Paris on 14 June and France signed an armistice with Germany on 22 June. Hitler forced the French to surrender in the historic railway car in the Campagne Forest where Germany had surrendered to the Allies in 1918.

Thousands of Frenchman fled to North Africa and Britain, and continued to fight the Germans. Brigadier General Charles de Gaulle became the leader of a Free France movement with its headquarters in London.

*The Battle of Britain*

France’s surrender left Great Britain with no allies in western Europe, and Hitler boasted that he would march into London in two more months. But, Hitler hoped he could force Britain to surrender without an invasion.

Rather than attempt an invasion of Britain (called *Operation Sea Lion*) which would require going up against Britain’s navy (that controlled the seas around the islands and especially in the English Channel), Hitler decided to use the Luftwaffe and bomb Britain into submission. In July, the Luftwaffe began to blast British airfields and ports. The Royal Air Force (RAF), outnumbered but with better planes and pilots, shot down so many aircraft it forced the Germans to give up their daylight attacks.

In September, Germany switched to night raids. But, the British used radar, a carefully guarded secret development, to track the attacking planes. From 7 September 1940 to 10 May 1941, German planes blasted London nearly every night. These raids became known as the “London Blitz.” Despite the devastation the Luftwaffe caused to London and other cities, the RAF had saved Britain. By the middle of 1941, Germany gave up its attempts to conquer Britain by the air, although it continued the raids into 1944.
Historians consider the Battle of Britain as one of the turning points of the war. It showed that the Luftwaffe, which lost more than 2,600 planes, could be defeated.

Meanwhile, German and British naval and air forces began the Battle of the Atlantic, which was to last for five years before the Allies, with help from the U.S., would defeat Germany. Also, Mussolini finally decided to take the offensive in the summer of 1940 by attacking British possessions in North Africa and by unsuccessfully attacking Greece in October.

*Fighting in Eastern Europe*

**The Balkans**

When Germany and Italy failed to defeat the Allies in Britain and Greece, they quickly changed their strategy. In October 1940, German troops marched into Rumania to protect its oil fields and reorganize its army. One month later, Rumania joined the Axis powers.

Bulgaria was next to side with the Axis in March 1941, followed by Yugoslavia and Hungary. However, the Yugoslavian people revolted against their pro-German government and entered the war with the Allies. On 6 April, German troops poured into Yugoslavia and destroyed its army in 12 days. Despite this defeat, guerilla forces in the mountains continued to resist the Germans and Italians.

Then, using Yugoslavia as a base, Hitler helped the Italians in their Greek campaign. German troops entered Athens on 27 April 1941 and handed the country over to Mussolini. The British forces that were in Athens escaped to Egypt and Crete before Athens surrendered. But, German paratroops and men in air transports made the first air assault invasion in history by landing on Crete and defeating the British forces there. With this victory, Germany and Italy controlled the Balkan nations.

**The Invasion of Russia**

In December 1940, with Germany controlling crucial areas (especially oil fields and grain) in the Balkans, Hitler decided to invade Russia. On 22 June 1941, over 150 German and other Axis divisions swept across the Russian border in *Operation Barbarossa* — the campaign that would, in the end, contribute the most to Hitler’s defeat. Germany’s three million-man force faced about two million Russian troops, and the battle line stretched 2,000 miles — from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea.

Hitler announced that he had ordered the attack into Russia “to save the entire world from the dangers of Bolshevism (or Soviet Communism).” Actually, Germany wanted Russia’s vast supplies of food, petroleum, and other raw materials. Confidently expecting another blitzkrieg, the Germans made no preparations for a long struggle. They did not even issue winter uniforms to their troops.

For almost five weeks, the Germans drove the Red Army back, capturing thousands of prisoners. Most of the world expected Russia to collapse. However, as the Germans advanced, the Russians burned or destroyed factories, dams, railroads, food supplies, and everything else they could not move, and they relocated factories to safety east of the Ural Mountains.

Bands of Russians fought behind the German lines in an effort to disrupt their flow
of supplies and to slow down their advance, while the Russian government hurried troops westward from Siberia. Great Britain and the U.S. shipped supplies to Russia through the Arctic Ocean and the Persian Gulf. Both countries lost many ships in the Arctic to German planes and submarines operating from Norway.

During Germany’s advance through Russia, Nazi troops rounded up Jews, Slavs, and other so-called “undesirables” and sent them to concentration camps where they were oftentimes slaughtered.

By 6 December 1941, the Germans were within 254 miles of Moscow. Hitler was at the peak of his power. However, two events would occur that would change things:

- Instead of appealing to Russians to fight to save the Communist state, Premier Joseph Stalin urged Russians to rise to the defense of the Motherland — a call they answered
- The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 — bringing the U.S. into the war.

THE U.S. MILITARY BETWEEN WORLD WARS

TROOP REDUCTIONS AFTER W.W.I

Within nine months after World War I, the Army discharged 3.25 million officers and enlisted men. By 1920, the Regular Army had a strength of about 220,000 personnel. The War Department assigned most of them to perform the following types of duties in the first few years after the war:

- Handling labor disputes, public disorders, and racial conflicts because of the lack of National Guard forces.
- Serving as occupation forces in Germany until January 1923.
- Serving as an Allied Expeditionary Force (with 15,000 troops) in Russia and Siberia to protect war supplies and communication lines from the communist Bolshevik forces. This force suffered as many combat casualties as the U.S. military had in Cuba during the Spanish-American War.

After the troop withdrawals from Germany and Russia, the only Army forces stationed on foreign soil until 1941 were a small garrison in China and troops in the Philippines. The U.S. Marine Corps, rather than the Army, provided the majority of America’s troops in these overseas garrisons after World War I, mostly in the Caribbean.

REORGANIZATION OF THE U.S. ARMY

National Defense Act of 1920

After the war, Congress swiftly passed legislation to improve America’s military readiness. The National Defense Act of 1920 reorganized the Army under a system that would exist until the late 1940s. This act did the following:

- Established the Army of the United States as an organization with three components: the Regular Army, the civilian National Guard, and the civilian Organized Reserves. During peacetime, Congress and the War Department would regulate the Regular Army and the Organized Reserves while each state regulated its own National Guard so that all components could contribute the necessary troops in the event of a war.
(Note: The National Defense Act of 1916 changed the organizational structure of the various National Guard units to conform to the structure of the Regular Army and it provided increased federal assistance to the National Guard.)

- Required the Regular Army to oversee the training of the other two components.

- Authorized the Regular Army’s strength at a maximum level of just less than 300,000. The actual strength would depend on the annual funding allocation from Congress.

- Added three new branches to the Army: Air Service, Chemical Warfare Service, and Finance Department. The Tank Corps became part of the Infantry.

The Army’s education programs received a great deal of attention between the world wars. The U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the Reserve Officers’ Training Program furnished most of the basic schooling for new officers; both systems benefited from improvements. By 1928, there were Reserve Officers’ Training Programs in about 225 colleges and universities and JROTC units in about 100 high schools. These educational programs paid rich dividends when the nation mobilized to face the threat of war in 1941.

(Note: The National Defense Act of 1916 established the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps, provided for an Officers’ Reserve Corps through direct commissioning up to the grade of major, and formulated a Reserve Officers’ Training Program at civilian colleges and universities.)

Reorganization of the Army’s General Staff

When General Pershing became Army Chief of Staff in 1921, he reorganized the General Staff using the model of his wartime staff in France. Below is a comparison of his wartime staff to the reorganized General Staff.

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* The new War Plans Division dealt with strategic planning and related preparations in the event of war.

EARLY AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT

Although the American public was determined to stay out of Hitler’s war in Europe, President Franklin Roosevelt, his cabinet, and Congress took the following steps that brought this country closer to involvement in the war.

- In late 1939, Roosevelt proclaimed that any country could buy American war materials on a “cash and carry” basis. Although “cash and carry” supposedly applied to all combatants, only France and Britain could actually purchase U.S. war materials because of the British blockade on Germany.

- Under the leadership of Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall and the Secretary of War, the Army began to expand in the summer of 1940. The
Army’s expansion was combined with a Navy program designed to protect the western hemisphere against any potential threat and to defend U.S. interests against the Japanese in the Pacific. Both programs had the overwhelming support of the American people, although the public still opposed entering the war in Europe.

- The Army’s expansion effort was aided by the President’s executive order to bring the National Guard into federal service and the Reserves Corps to active duty.

- In September 1940, Roosevelt traded 50 old American destroyers for leases on British bases in the Atlantic. Also that month, the President and Congress started the first peacetime draft in the country’s history (recall the Selective Service Act of 1917).

- Early in 1941, the War Department established officer candidate schools to train men selected from the enlisted ranks for officer leadership positions.

- In March 1941, America virtually ended its neutrality when Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act. This act allowed President Roosevelt to lease war materials to any nation whose defense he thought vital to the defense of the United States.

- By the fall of 1941, U.S. Navy ships were escorting British supply ships in the Atlantic and were coming under attack by German submarines.

- Throughout this period, Roosevelt mobilized American industry to begin producing planes, ships, weapons, and equipment to maintain a force of 1.2 million. War seemed inevitable!

**WAR COMES TO THE UNITED STATES**

**JAPANESE EXPANSION IN THE PACIFIC**

Like Germany and Italy during the 1930s, Japan had also begun an aggressive expansion campaign of its own — in Asia.

- In 1931, Japanese forces invaded Manchuria, conquered the region in a few months, and established a puppet government.

- After numerous armed clashes with Chinese troops during the next few years, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China in July 1937. Not only did the Japanese administer crushing defeats on the Chinese army, but Japanese forces killed thousands of civilians as well.

- In 1940 and 1941, Japanese troops moved into French Indochina with the intent of conquering the oil and resource rich British possessions to the south. With Great Britain deeply involved in the war in Europe, the Japanese realized that the only nation who could stand in their way was the United States.

**JAPANESE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR**

On 7 December 1941, a beautiful Sunday morning on the Hawaiian Islands was shattered by the Japanese attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbor. This attack was one of the most brilliant tactical moves in military history. Six Japanese aircraft carriers sailed undetected to a position 200 miles north of Hawaii and launched over 350 aircraft for the strike. The U.S. Pacific Fleet and the Army air fields were caught completely by surprise.
When the attack ended, the Japanese had damaged or destroyed over 170 American aircraft; sunk or damaged all eight battleships, three light cruisers, and three destroyers; and killed 2,400 Americans. Fortunately, the three American aircraft carriers were out to sea.

The attack was the greatest military disaster in U.S. history. The Japanese minister in Washington was supposed to have delivered an ultimatum before the attack, but the coded message from Japan arrived late and he delivered it after the attack had already begun. Admiral Yamamato, who led the attack, learned of this development, when an aide said, “Sir, we have won a great victory” Yamamato was reported to have replied, “I’m afraid all we have done is awaken a sleeping giant.” The next day, the United States declared war on Japan. On 11 December, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States, and Congress then declared war on Germany and Italy.

ALLIED STRATEGY WITH THE U.S. IN THE WAR

The U.S. military entered World War II with President Roosevelt firmly committed to supporting the American public’s demand that Japan be attacked first and punished for its attack on Pearl Harbor. However, Great Britain’s Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, convinced Roosevelt that the Allies should concentrate on defeating “Germany first.” Roosevelt agreed, but that is where the agreements ended.

General Marshall wanted to conduct an invasion of Europe across the English Channel and hit directly at Germany. The British, on the other hand, believed the Allies could not build a strong enough force to defeat Germany in a direct confrontation by the end of 1942, or even by the summer of 1943. Stalin demanded that Britain and the U.S. open a second front in Europe in order to take some pressure off Russia. After weighing these options, Roosevelt decided to postpone the Allied cross-channel invasion.

In May 1942, the Germans and Italians in North Africa launched a massive counterattack against the British forces in Libya. The Axis forces, led by Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, broke down the tough British resistance and captured key British positions. Since the buildup of men, supplies, and landing craft for the cross-channel invasion (called Operation ROUNDUP) was already behind schedule, these developments, combined with the British losses in North Africa, resulted in its cancellation. Instead, the British proposed landings in French North Africa for an offensive against Rommel. President Roosevelt backed the British proposal and committed U.S. forces to join Operation TORCH in North Africa.

In January 1943, toward the end of the North Africa campaign, President Roosevelt met with Churchill at Casablanca, Morocco. Churchill not only persuaded Roosevelt to put off the invasion of Europe another year, he convinced Roosevelt that the Allies should mount an invasion of Sicily as a first step for an invasion of Italy. These leaders made two other important decisions at Casablanca:

- To mount a massive around-the-clock bombing campaign against Germany to reduce its war industries in preparation for Operation ROUNDUP.
- To select General Dwight D. Eisenhower as Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean.

In November 1943, the leaders of the three major Allied powers met for the first time at Tehran, Iran. At this conference, Stalin strongly asserted that Russia — as a major power and an equal member of the
alliance — demanded a second front in Europe. Churchill still called for further operations in the Mediterranean and in the Balkans to strike at the “soft underbelly” of the Germans.

However Britain’s declining military and industrial power, combined with Stalin’s demand and Roosevelt’s persistence for a cross-channel invasion, led these leaders to decide to launch the cross-channel invasion on northern France (now code-named Operation OVERLORD) in May 1944. They also decided to give the command of Operation OVERLORD to General Eisenhower.

The leaders of the three major Allied powers met again two more times before the end of the war — at Yalta in the Soviet Union and at Potsdam, Germany. But, these meetings dealt mostly with political decisions on how to divide Europe between the victors.

A BITTER RUSSIAN WINTER (1941-42)

Snow, mud, cold, and darkness stalled the German armies on the eastern front in Russia. Although German troops almost advanced to the city of Moscow, Russian defenders in the surrounding forests threw them back. Then, a counteroffensive on 16 December 1941 by the Russian troops in Moscow forced the Germans into winter defensive positions. The Russian counteroffensive continued into the spring of 1942.

In May, the Germans resumed their attack and captured Sevastopol after besieging the city for eight months. In late August, the German Sixth Army drove south toward the important oil-distribution center of Stalingrad. But, Russian troops firmly held on to that city and finally broke the assault after two months. Then, two Russian armies surrounded the German Sixth Army and destroyed it. Its commander surrendered on 31 January 1943.

NORTH AFRICA AND THE SOUTHERN EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN

THE NORTH AFRICA CAMPAIGN

Operation TORCH, the Allied landings in North Africa, had four major purposes:

- To defeat the Axis forces in North Africa.
- To regain French-controlled sections of North Africa in order to get France back into the war on the Allied side.
- To open the Mediterranean Sea to Allied shipping for further operations.
- To relieve pressure on the hard-pressed Russian forces, which were reeling under a new German offensive.

The Allies made elaborate plans to capture French North Africa with as little fighting as possible. As Allied diplomats plotted with French patriotic groups, Major General Mark Clark (U.S.) secretly slipped ashore via submarine to meet with the French. Clark asked them not to resist the Allied landings.

Shortly after midnight on 8 November 1942, U.S. troops landed on the beaches at Casablanca (Morocco) while U.S. and British troops landed on the beaches at Oran and Algiers (Algeria). A battalion of U.S. paratroopers, flown in from Britain, helped capture airfields. Initially, the French did not resist the landings until a senior French leader ordered them to stop fighting. This Allied invasion caught the German high command completely by surprise.
Within a few days, the Allied landing forces had won all of their immediate objectives (including getting the French back in the war on the Allied side). The Allied landing forces had completed the biggest amphibious invasion to date and had learned valuable lessons for future amphibious operations. Meanwhile, the British Eighth Army under General Bernard Montgomery had defeated the Axis forces at El Alamein and was advancing west.

The U.S., British, and French forces advanced east into Tunisia to trap the Axis forces between them and Montgomery’s Eighth Army. However, the Germans met the U.S. forces at Kasserine Pass, broke through their thin lines, and dealt them a crushing defeat in their first direct battle against the Germans. American artillery and British tanks finally halted the German advance, so Rommel withdrew to his original position to await Montgomery.

The U.S. forces, under the command of General George Patton, attacked the Axis forces from one side while Montgomery hit them from the other. The Allies soon captured the ports of Bizerte and Tunis and had the Axis forces trapped at the northeastern tip of Tunisia, where over 250,000 Germans and Italians surrendered to the Allies on 10 May 1943.

**INVASION OF SICILY**

According to the Casablanca Conference, the Allies next turned their attention to Sicily. On 10 July 1943, a U.S.-led force landed on the southwest side of Sicily and a British-led force landed on the southeast side. These troops were the same ones used in North Africa. General Eisenhower commanded the operation with Generals Patton and Montgomery assisting him.

As in North Africa, the poor performance by the Italian forces meant that the better trained Germans did most of the fighting. At the onset of the Sicily campaign, German Panzer (armored) units kept the Allies from advancing and even broke through Allied lines in the U.S. 1st Infantry Division sector. But, the leadership of Generals Patton and Omar Bradley (II Corps
Commander) and the support of naval gunfire enabled the Allies to capture all of Sicily by 17 August, after just a 39-day campaign.

During the fighting on Sicily, Mussolini fell from power. Although the Italian government imprisoned him, a daring band of German paratroopers later rescued him.

**INVASION OF ITALY**

The Allies next turned to Italy to knock it out of the war. Although the Italians were tired of being second-hand partners in Hitler’s war and had signed a secret armistice with the Allies (officially taking Italy out of the war), their country was not spared the devastation of battle. The Germans quickly disarmed the Italian army and defended Italy against the Allied invasion.

On 3 September, British and Canadian forces of the Eighth Army crossed the Strait of Messina from Sicily and landed in Southern Italy. Meanwhile, the U.S. Fifth Army and British troops under General Clark sailed from Africa and landed at Salerno, near Naples, on 9 September. Initially, a German counterattack almost succeeded in defeating the Fifth Army’s landing operation. But, it was not until after the Allies achieved **air superiority** and after an extensive naval gunfire bombardment, were Clark’s troops able with intense fighting to secure the **beachhead** and link up with Eighth Army.

The Allies then split with the U.S. Fifth Army taking the west side of the peninsula. Their advance northward proved to be a slow struggle against the 400,000-man German army. The Allies also faced floods, mud, mountains, and winter cold.

After taking Naples, the U.S. Fifth Army had reached a German defensive line that was about 75 miles south of Rome by early November 1943. Not being able to pierce those defenses, General Eisenhower decided to outflank the Germans by making an amphibious landing on 22 January 1944 at Anzio, a beach town 33 miles south of Rome. German forces held the high ground at Anzio and were initially successful in pinning the Allies down on the beach. Finally, Allied air superiority and artillery fire helped to dislodge the Germans.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Actor James Arness (Matt Dillon on the TV show “Gunsmoke”) participated in the landings at Anzio. He was the first man off his landing craft because he was the tallest man in the company and the commander wanted to see how deep the water was where the troops were being unloaded.

In another attempt to break the German defenses, the Allies bombed the town of Cassino, and the famous monastery on top of Monte Cassino — thinking that the Germans were using it. Later, however, the Germans claimed they had not used it until after the Allied bombing. After capturing Cassino, the U.S. Fifth Army advanced northward toward Rome. The Italians declared Rome an “open city” and announced that they would not defend it. On 4 June 1944, U.S. troops entered Rome and it became the first Axis capital to fall.

Two months later, the Allies captured Florence and pursued the German withdrawal northward to the **Gothic Line** (a line of trenches and defensive emplacements four miles deep) in the Apennine Mountains. For the next 10 months, both sides became locked
in intense combat. The Allied advance was slowed by the mountainous terrain, the tough German defenses, and the deep mud caused by heavy winter rains. In the spring of 1945, the German forces in Italy surrendered. The long, difficult Italian campaign was over; however, it had achieved its most important objective — to draw German divisions away from France and Germany for the invasion of Europe.

THE NORTHERN EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN

THE MILITARY BUILD-UP AND D-DAY

By the first week of May 1944, the often-postponed Allied invasion of France had still not happened. The landings were then scheduled for the Normandy beaches in the first week of June. However, before this campaign could begin from the British Isles, three other campaigns had to achieve success:

- Defeat of German submarines by the U.S. and Royal navies
- A U.S.-British strategic bombing campaign against Germany
- The largest military build-up of men and equipment in history. (The Allies assembled almost three million men and stored 16 million short tons of supplies in Britain for the invasion. They had also assembled 5,000 large ships, 4,000 smaller landing crafts, and more than 11,000 aircraft.)

Finally, on 6 June 1944, the largest invasion fleet ever assembled left the docks in Britain headed for the Normandy coast. General Eisenhower was the supreme commander of the invasion; the two principal Allied commanders on the ground were General Montgomery, who commanded Eighth Army, and General Bradley, who commanded the First U.S. Army.

The German high command knew an invasion was coming, but they did not know where it would happen. Across the English Channel from the French port of Calais, General Patton had created a fictitious army, complete with inflatable tanks. Therefore, because of Patton’s reputation (his expertise at warfare and his effectiveness as a stern and demanding leader), the Germans thought the Allied invasion would be at Calais.

Despite a weather forecast of high winds and a rough sea, the invasion went as scheduled on the morning of 6 June. American, British and Canadian forces came ashore at five beach landing sites. Earlier, one British and two U.S. airborne divisions (the 82nd and 101st) dropped behind the beaches to cut railroad lines, blow up bridges, and seize landing fields and other key areas to facilitate the advance of the landing forces. This was the largest airborne operation up to that time.

Montgomery’s forces waded ashore first along a 50-mile front at 6:30 a.m. on D-Day. There was not any air opposition because the Allied air forces had subdued Germany’s air power. The First U.S. Army then landed to the west of Montgomery while British and Canadian forces of the British Second Army landed to the east of Montgomery.
The landings went well at all of the beaches except one of the two U.S. beaches, OMAHA Beach. There, an elite German division occupied **pillboxes** and the high ground around the beach. The American casualties mounted as the Germans pinned the two U.S. divisions down on the beach. Army Rangers scaled up a cliff under heavy fire to knock out a German artillery battery, but found that it had already been destroyed. Therefore, the Rangers pressed inland, knocking out the German positions as they advanced. Soon, the Americans were advancing from OMAHA beach to link up with the Americans from UTAH Beach and the paratroopers farther inland.

While Germany’s forces bitterly resisted the Allied landings, Hitler opened a new age in air warfare. On 13 June, he sent the first “flying bombs” over London. The Germans called their new secret weapon the **Vergeltungswaffe** (Vengeance Weapon) or V-1. The British called it the “buzz bomb.”

**THE ALLIED BREAKTHROUGH**

The Battles for St. Lo and Caen

On 27 June, U.S. troops succeeded in capturing the port facilities at Cherbourg, but in three weeks, the Allies had advanced only 20 miles inland and were still trapped in a beachhead stretching from St. Lo in the American sector to Caen in the British sector. Until St. Lo — with its heavy concentration of German defenses — could be taken, Bradley’s First U.S. Army would not have the space to mount an all-out drive.

Hedgerows (banks of dirt two to four feet thick and three to six feet high with trees or bushes growing on top) crisscrossed the countryside around St. Lo. These hedgerows enclosed small fields or grazing lands and sunken roads often ran between the hedgerows in all directions. The Germans used this ground to their fullest advantage. They put machine guns and bazookas in the corners of the hedgerows and riflemen along the hedges.

In the trees, snipers and artillery observers watched for the attacking
Americans. Each hedgerow became a small battlefield. Allied forces had to stay behind their own hedgerows and spray the one to their front with machine gun and rifle fire while tanks and artillery blasted the Germans out of their hedgerows. Finally, on 18 July, the Americans broke through and captured St. Lo. Meanwhile at Caen, Montgomery tried to break into open country, but German tanks halted his offensive.

After taking St. Lo, Bradley’s First U.S. Army advanced 25 miles to the south in two days, then turned eastward. General Patton’s Third U.S. Army advanced west into Brittany. In an effort to stop the German retreat, Hitler ordered a counterattack. But, after advancing only a few miles, the Germans found themselves trapped by Allied forces. Although most of the Germans escaped, U.S. and Canadian forces (who had captured Caen and were advancing toward Falaise) killed or captured over 60,000 men—many guns, tanks, and supplies also fell into Allied hands.

*Liberation of Paris*

As the Allies moved eastward across France, the Seventh U.S. Army, under Lieutenant General Alexander Patch, and the Free French (or French First) Army landed in Cannes, France, on 15 August. After forcing the Germans to withdraw from Paris, French troops and soldiers from the First U.S. Army entered Paris to the throngs of cheering crowds on 25 August 1944. Meanwhile, Seventh U.S. Army linked up with Patton’s Third Army at Dijon in September.

*Allies Race Across Europe*

The Allies began their race across Europe, liberating cities and towns as they went with Montgomery’s forces in the north, the First U.S. Army, now under General Courtney Hodges in the center, and Patton’s Third U.S. Army which was advancing the fastest—to the south.

Montgomery’s forces smashed forward from the Seine River to cross the Somme and Marne Rivers and the Belgian border. Brussels fell to the British and Canadian forces in early September. Eisenhower hoped that Montgomery’s forces would next capture Antwerp and knock out the rocket launching sites. Following Belgium, Montgomery’s forces pushed into the Netherlands. In the largest airborne operation ever attempted, the Allies dropped three divisions from 4,500 planes and gliders into the Netherlands to seize bridges in advance of the ground forces; however, they achieved only part of their objectives.

Because of logistical problems, Montgomery wanted Eisenhower to halt Patton’s advance and to allocate all supplies to him for a final drive into Germany. Eisenhower refused this request and decided that all three main Allied thrusts would advance together to the Rhine River.

Meanwhile, the First U.S. Army advanced into Luxembourg and crossed the German border on 12 September. It managed to break through the German defenses and laid siege to the city of Aachen, Germany. After two weeks of violent house-to-house fighting, the German forces in Aachen surrendered on 21 October 1944. It was the first major German city to fall to the Allies.

Farther south, Patton’s Third U.S. Army continued its advance east, liberating Dijon and Metz in September 1944 and dozens of other French cities and towns as it went. However, upon reaching the German-held Siegfried Line, the Germans halted the American advance.
As the winter weather began to set in, the Allies took the time to rest and consolidate their forces.

THE LAST GERMAN GASP — THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

On 16 December 1944, under the cover of fog and in the hilly forests of the Ardennes, 38 German divisions attacked along a 50 mile front. Hitler personally planned this operation, designed to cut the Allied forces in half by recapturing Belgium and Luxembourg. Mechanized units overran several First U.S. Army positions. Two American divisions withstood the attacks of superior German forces for 36 hours until reinforcements arrived.

Despite pockets of resistance, the Germans drove the Allies back almost to the Meuse River, and surrounded Bastogne in the southern Ardennes. The offensive created such a bulge in the Allied lines, the name given to this action was the Battle of the Bulge.

In Bastogne, German troops surrounded the U.S. 101st Airborne Division and asked for it to surrender. Instead, the Division Commander, Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe, sent the famous one-word reply: “Nuts.” The 101st continued to resist, in bad weather, with many casualties, and with short supplies. Several days later, the 4th U.S. Armored Division secured a small corridor to Bastogne and soon the 101st was relieved in place.

To keep the U.S. forces in the south occupied during the Ardennes offensive, Germany launched a supporting attack in the Alsace. Second Lieutenant Audie Murphy was commanding a company in one of the infantry regiments that was in a defensive position when the attack occurred.

Although Patton’s Third U.S. Army was located 125 miles south of the Ardennes when the German breakthrough occurred and the attack in the Alsace was taking place, Eisenhower ordered Patton to reinforce the U.S. forces in the bulge. Within two days after receiving those orders, Patton’s forces pierced the German lines from the south and relieved Bastogne. Elsewhere, at St. Vith, American troops held out for a week to block a vital road center.

On 3 January 1945, the First U.S. Army counterattacked in the north. After 12 days of intense combat in the snow-covered hills and woods, the First and Third U.S. Armies linked up. Turning eastward, they drove the Germans out of the Bulge. The last German gasp for victory was over.

DID YOU KNOW?

Second Lieutenant Murphy had entered the Army as a private, earned a “battlefield commission,” and received the Distinguished Service Cross and Silver Star. One day in January, six German tanks and waves of infantrymen attacked his company. Murphy ordered his men to withdraw to the woods, but he remained at his command post to direct artillery fire.

An armored tank destroyer behind him was hit and started to burn while the Germans kept coming. Murphy ran to the burning vehicle, climbed on the deck, and opened fire with its .50 caliber machine gun. Murphy was successful in halting their advance. Then, he returned to his company and organized a counterattack that drove the Germans back. His actions won him the Medal of Honor. The 5 foot, 6 inch tall Murphy became America’s most decorated hero of World War II, and went on to become a Hollywood movie star after the war.
THE ALLIED DRIVE TO VICTORY

THE WESTERN FRONT

With this victory at the Battle of the Bulge, the Allies concentrated on their last remaining obstacle to defeat Germany — crossing the Rhine River. After capturing Cologne, First U.S. Army troops advanced toward Remagen. The Germans planned to destroy all the bridges across the Rhine in order to slow the Allied advance while they regrouped. However, on 7 March 1945, an infantry company of the 9th Armored Division found the Ludendorf railroad bridge at Remagen damaged, but passable. The infantrymen raced across the bridge, cut the lines of emplaced explosive charges, and threw the explosives into the river. Soon, the division sent in reinforcements and secured the bridge.

First U.S. Army crossed the Rhine River on that bridge at Remagen. A few days later, Third U.S. Army made a surprise crossing in assault boats farther south. In the north, the British advanced across the Rhine River and the North German Plain against little resistance. By 1 April, the Allies advanced into the industrial heartland of Germany, destroying nearly all of the organized resistance in western Germany.

THE EASTERN FRONT

After stopping the Germans on the outskirts of Moscow and Stalingrad (in 1943), the Russians concentrated on driving the Germans back. From July 1943 to June 1944, the Russians recaptured most of their lost territories.

Russian troops then drove into Rumania, Bulgaria, and the Baltic states. In October 1944, Finland also surrendered to the Russians. After advancing into eastern Hungary and Yugoslavia, Russian armies then swung north and captured Vienna and eastern Austria. In five months, Russia took four Axis nations (Rumania, Bulgaria, Finland, and Hungary) out of the war.

Early in January 1945, as U.S. troops were winning the Battle of the Bulge, the Russians crashed into Warsaw. For the final assault on Germany, the Russians assembled more than four million men.

THE COLLAPSE OF GERMANY

The Allies closed in on Germany from all directions. Canadians liberated The Netherlands. The British headed for Bremen, Hamburg, and the Elbe River in northern Germany. Bradley’s four U.S. armies raced to Leipzig and the Elbe River to link up with Russian forces. In the south, Allied armies raced past Frankfurt and Munich into Czechoslovakia and Austria to cut off Berlin from the Bavarian Mountains.

Since Germany still deployed most of its remaining troops on the eastern front, the Russians found the going tough all the way to Berlin. On 16 April, the Russians began their final drive to Berlin and soon had the city surrounded. On 25 April, U.S. and Russian troops met for the first time at the Elbe River.

With Berlin almost in Allied hands, Hitler committed suicide on 30 April. Berlin finally fell to the invading Russian armies on 2 May. On 7 May, members of the German high command entered the Allied headquarters at Reims, France, and signed the terms of an unconditional surrender. The free world celebrated May 8 as “V-E (Victory in Europe) Day.” After five years, eight months, and seven days, the European phase of World War II was over.
JAPAN’S EARLY STRATEGY

War had raged in Asia since Japan’s attack on Manchuria in 1931 and China in 1937. Then, the war in Europe opened the way for Japan to turn south. In September 1940, its troops marched into French Indochina as part of its plan for a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere similar to Hitler’s New Order in Europe.

Despite the wide range of its military operations, Japan entered World War II with a simple strategy — it wished to fight a limited war. Japan’s two major objectives were:

- To gain control of the resources of Southeast Asia and much of China.
- To establish a sphere of influence over the islands and countries of Asia and the Pacific.

In order to accomplish these objectives, the Japanese sought to strike quickly, then follow their victories with a negotiated peace. Although the Japanese military was successful in all phases of its first offensive, they misjudged the effect of their attack on Pearl Harbor. Pearl Harbor united a divided American people about the issue of war, and aroused the U.S. to wage total war rather than a limited war.

Within a few hours after attacking Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, Japanese bombers struck at bases on the islands of Guam, Midway, and Wake. They also bombed Manila and Singapore. As a result of Japan’s first offensive:

- Guam surrendered on 10 December
- Wake Island surrendered on 23 December
- British troops at Hong Kong surrendered on 25 December
- Manila (the Philippines) fell on 2 January 1942
- Singapore surrendered on 15 February
- Japan occupied the Netherlands East Indies on 7 March
• Bataan (the Philippines) surrendered on 9 April
• Corregidor (the Philippines) surrendered on 6 May.

**THE BATTLE FOR THE PHILIPPINES**

Japanese ground forces landed on Luzon in the Philippines between 10 and 22 December 1941. Neither the poorly equipped Philippine Army or the 31,000 U.S. troops under the command of General Douglas MacArthur opposed their landings. Consequently, Japanese infantry, artillery, and tanks easily advanced south along jungle roads toward Manila, the capital city.

The Japanese quickly destroyed the outclassed U.S. naval and air forces on the islands. With control of the air and sea around the Philippines, Japanese troops poured ashore in large numbers. General MacArthur declared Manila an “open city” and withdrew his forces to defensive positions on the Bataan peninsula. Although Manila fell to the advancing Japanese on 2 January, an 11,000-man garrison on Corregidor, a rocky fortress in Manila Bay, held out until 6 May.

On Bataan, the U.S. forces and Filipinos beat back repeated Japanese assaults through January and February 1942. In March, General MacArthur departed the Philippines — on President Roosevelt’s order, placed Lieutenant General Jonathan Wainwright in command, and promised the Filipinos: “I shall return.” Despite their bravery, the Americans and Filipinos were running out of food and ammunition, and disease began to take its toll. The exhausted soldiers held out for another month living on rice, monkeys, lizard meat, water buffaloes, and finally their horses and mules. But, the shortage of food and medical supplies forced the Allies to surrender Bataan on 9 April.

Then, in what became known as the “Bataan Death March,” the Japanese forced about 60,000 prisoners to march for five days to prison camps that were 70 miles away. These prisoners marched for long hours under the broiling hot sun, many of them suffering from exhaustion, starvation, and tropical diseases. The route became strewn with the bodies of about 10,000 prisoners who died from starvation or maltreatment. Of those who survived, many more died in the forced-labor of the prison camps.

**THE BATTLE FOR BURMA**

Japanese forces invaded Burma on 18 January 1942. Japan wanted to conquer Burma in order to close the Burma Road — the last land route open to China — and to gain its rich resources of oil and tin. However, as in the Philippines, the Japanese also met strong resistance in Burma. Although the British finally evacuated Rangoon on 7 March, Chinese troops under Lieutenant General Joseph Stilwell tried to hold Mandalay and protect the Burma Road. But, the Japanese were too strong. Stilwell and a handful of men traveled 140 miles through
mountains and jungles to India to escape the Japanese. Burma fell to Japan on 13 May.

THE ALLIES BATTLE BACK

Looking at the situation realistically, President Roosevelt and General Marshall knew that the U.S. had to go on the defensive in the Pacific until it could reinforce the naval, air, and ground forces there. However, the American public clamored for offensive action against Japan.

RAID ON TOKYO

On 18 April 1942, the U.S. military answered those demands when 16 Army bombers, flying from the naval carrier *Hornet*, conducted the “Halsey-Doolittle” hit-and-run raid on Tokyo and other cities in Japan. The raid astounded the Japanese who had believed that Allied planes could never reach their homeland. Fifteen of the planes crashed when they ran out of fuel and could not reach bases in China. Meanwhile, the Americans continued to build up men and equipment at bases in Australia, Alaska, and Hawaii for future offensive operations.

Sensing the danger to their first defensive perimeter, the Japanese launched a second phase offensive designed to cut Allied shipping lanes to Australia, to perhaps even invade Australia, and to expand their perimeter in the Pacific. The Japanese seized some of the Solomon Islands in the south Pacific and three of the Aleutian Islands (Kiska, Attu, and Agattu) in the north Pacific west of Alaska — although Japan did not have any plans to attack Alaska. However, the Japanese failed in their main effort to take Midway Island in the central Pacific. The naval battles of Coral Sea and Midway were the first major military battles involving aircraft carriers.

THE BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA

In order to expand their boundaries, the Japanese planned to seize Port Moresby in southeastern New Guinea. However, Rear Admiral Frank Fletcher’s task force intercepted a Japanese fleet in the Coral Sea headed for Port Moresby. The two forces fought a four-day battle from 4 to 8 May 1942 in which aircraft did all of the fighting. The battle was an important Allied strategic victory. It blocked Japan’s push south-eastward and prevented Japan from isolating Australia.

THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY

The most important objective of Japan’s resumed offensive was the capture of Midway Island. Japan hoped that by seizing Midway, it could draw the U.S. Pacific Fleet away from Hawaii and win a decisive victory with its larger force.

DID YOU KNOW?

Before Pearl Harbor, the U.S. scored one of its greatest triumphs by cracking Japan’s secret codes. This feat enabled Admiral Chester Nimitz, commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet, to know about the attack plans on Midway in advance.

On 4 June 1942, aircraft from the Japanese fleet attacked Midway. Admiral Nimitz launched aircraft from the carriers *Enterprise*, *Hornet*, and *Yorktown*. At the end of this two-day battle, Japan had lost four carriers and a major part of its aircraft, but its submarines managed to sink the *Yorktown*. The Battle of Midway proved to be one of the most decisive victories of the war. It ended Japanese threats to Hawaii and to the United States.
ALLIED STRATEGY IN THE PACIFIC

To defeat Japan’s empire, which had reached its height in August 1942, the Allies developed a strategy to advance on two axis:

1. Southern Pacific Drive — Start at the Solomon Islands and New Guinea, then advance to Borneo and the southern Philippines.

2. Central Pacific Drive — Start at the Gilbert Islands, then advance to the Marshall, Mariana, and Palau Islands, and on to the northern Philippines, Taiwan, and Okinawa.

The Allies main objectives were to cut Japan’s lines of communication with its bases and to set up bases from which to attack Japan.

Allies began a series of operations to defeat the Japanese strongholds on Guadalcanal, New Guinea, and New Britain.

SOLOMON ISLANDS — GUADALCANAL

The offensive began on 7 August 1942, when the 1st Marine Division landed on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. The fighting was bitter as both sides fought each other in naval, air, and land battles; control of the island seesawed for several months. Finally, in February 1943, after being reinforced by U.S. Army troops, the Allies cleared Guadalcanal, where they constructed air and supply bases.

NEW GUINEA

Meanwhile, on New Guinea in late 1942, MacArthur was involved in a major offensive of his own. Even with the help of Australian and Dutch forces, it took nearly four months and many casualties to dislodge the Japanese — although it actually took most of the war to totally remove them from New Guinea.

By May 1944, MacArthur’s forces had conducted a series of landings up the northern coast of New Guinea, advancing almost to the western tip of that island. This campaign contributed to cutting off a Japanese base at Rabaul, New Britain, with its 100,000-man force, thereby effectively taking it out of the war.
New Britain

In December 1943, Allied troops landed on the nearby island of New Britain (part of the Bismarck Archipelago — a Trust Territory of New Guinea). After brief enemy resistance, New Britain and the Admiralty Islands fell to the Allies in March 1944.

The Allies learned a great deal from these campaigns that would aid them during the remainder of the war against Japan. The most significant lessons included the following:

- How to perfect the technique of amphibious warfare, which involved air, land, and sea forces working as a team.
- How to counter the harsh fighting techniques employed by their skillful Japanese opponents in order to defeat them.
- How to fight in the jungle, with its tropical weather, dense foliage, and diseases.

THE CENTRAL PACIFIC OFFENSIVE

THE ISLAND-HOPPING CAMPAIGN

While Allied forces in the southern Pacific followed one road toward Japan, Allied forces in the central Pacific took another route. In August 1942, the Japanese Empire controlled the Gilbert, Marshall, Mariana, and Palau Islands. These island groups stretched halfway across the Pacific and served as bases for airplanes.

Allied strategists believed that Japan’s central Pacific fortress could be defeated. But, they did not intend to seize each island separately. That would be too costly and take too long. Instead, they decided on a plan of “island hopping,” or seizing key strategic islands (those with large logistical elements and potential for airfields) from which to attack the next target, and bypassing strong isolated enemy defensive positions.

The Gilbert Islands

The Battle for Tarawa

Admiral Nimitz selected the Gilbert Islands as the first major objective of the island-hopping campaign. On 20 November 1943, the Allies landed U.S. Marines on Tarawa and U.S. Army troops at Makin Atoll.

The Marines encountered fierce opposition and an intricate system of fortifications on Tarawa. The Japanese had stubbed the island with barricades, concrete pillboxes, gun emplacements, and bombproof underground shelters. The Japanese government ordered the forces on Tarawa to resist to the bitter end.

During the Marines’ amphibious landing, their landing craft and amphibious vehicles became grounded on a reef, forcing them to off-load into a hail of machine gun and artillery fire. The next three days were a blood bath. The Marines clung to a few yards of beach before they were able to advance inland, suffering heavy casualties as they went. Finally, after beating back a Japanese suicide charge, the Marines secured the island. Of the 4,800 Japanese defenders, the Marines captured only 147. The Americans suffered 3,110 casualties in one of the war’s most savage battles.

The Battle for Makin Atoll

Before landing Army forces on Makin Atoll, the Navy and Air Corps blasted it with more than 4 million pounds of bombs and naval gunfire. Coconut trees along the shore were twisted and shattered. However, the Japanese defending Makin Atoll were
undaunted. They were in deep underground tunnels, pillboxes, blockhouses, and foxholes. If they were not underground, they were overhead, strapped in palm trees with machine guns. Their defensive line was about 2,500 yards long.

Since direct assault was out of the question, the infantry, supported by tanks and engineers, moved in from the beaches. They were met with heavy sniper and machine gun fire. The tanks would blast the enemy pillboxes and bunkers; then engineers would run in with a TNT charge on a pole and poke it into the enemy position. After that, the infantry, using grenades and machine guns, would clean out the Japanese positions. After three days of fighting, Makin Atoll was in American hands. The campaign in the Gilbert Islands was an indication of the intensity of combat against the Japanese.

The Marshall Islands

The Battle for Kwajalein

Next, the U.S. forces turned their attention to the Marshall Islands and assaulted Kwajalein, one of the world’s largest atolls. On 31 January 1944, the troops hit the beach after bombers softened up the island. Once again, the Americans had difficulty getting off the beach.

On the first night of the battle, a large group of Japanese ambushed and trapped Privates Williard Lenz and Edward L. Rice.

Armed with only a carbine each, they could hold off the enemy for perhaps 10 minutes before running out of ammunition. Then, one of them shot the lock off of an abandoned tank, climbed aboard, and grabbed its machine gun. As the Japanese moved closer, both men continued to fire into them. They used rags to change the red-hot barrels, burning their hands in the process as the rags caught fire. In the morning, it was all over and Rice and Lenz were still alive.

By 21 February 1944, the Allies had secured the Marshall Islands.

The Mariana Islands

With the development of B-29 Superfortress bombers by the U.S., the Army needed bases for them in the central Pacific. The Mariana Islands were considered perfect. Since they lay within long-range bomber distance of Japan. The largest and most suitable of these islands for bases — Saipan, Tinian, and Rota — were at the southern end.

The Battle for Saipan

On 15 June 1944, U.S. Army and Marine forces landed on Saipan. By 9 July, after three weeks of hard battle, 16,500 U.S. casualties, and 28,000 enemy casualties, the Americans controlled Saipan. Not being able to face the criticism for this loss, Premier Tojo of Japan resigned on 18 July.

The Battle of the Philippine Sea

For the first time since early 1943, Japanese carriers went into action in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. However, they were soon caught between Nimitz’ and Halsey’s naval and air forces. As a result, the U.S. delivered a crushing defeat to the Japanese fleet. In a battle that became known as the “Great Marianas Turkey Shoot,” the Japanese lost 395 carrier planes in two days of fighting (19 and 20 June 1944), which practically eliminated their carrier-based air power from the war.
The Battle for Guam

After taking Saipan, Army and Marine units landed on Guam on 21 July. Unlike earlier campaigns, Guam was not a small rocky atoll, but a larger island where tanks and artillery played a key role. Guam was a battle of wits and fighting skills as the Japanese fought to the end, avoiding capture. However, on 10 August, U.S. forces retook Guam and turned it into a huge naval base from which U.S. B-29 bombers could strike at the Japanese homeland. During this battle, the island of Tinian also fell to the Allies in late July.

The Palau Islands

The Battle for Peleliu

After securing the Mariana Islands and Guam, Allied forces were within 1,600 miles of Tokyo and Manila. In preparation for attacks on Japan and the Philippines, the central Pacific force landed Marines on Peleliu on 15 September. The amphibious assault that took place on that day had the highest casualty rate in U.S. history — nearly 2,000 men died and 8,000 were wounded. For almost one month, the Japanese resisted the Allied attacks. Finally, on 13 October, the last 400 Japanese (of 14,000) surrendered. Conquest of the Palau Islands put the Allies within 400 miles of the Philippines.

RETURN TO THE PHILIPPINES

THE BATTLE FOR LEYTE ISLAND

Late in 1944, information from the Navy revealed that enemy-held Leyte in the Philippines was ripe for invasion. On 20 October 1944, U.S. Sixth Army secured two beaches on Leyte. About five hours after the first landing, General MacArthur and his staff waded ashore. He had kept his promise to return. By December, the Sixth Army occupied Leyte.

THE BATTLE FOR LEYTE GULF

After Japan’s defeat at the Battle of the Philippine Sea, the Japanese navy decided to muster its remaining strength to try to drive the Allies from Leyte. The Battle for Leyte Gulf was the largest naval engagement in history from the standpoint of naval tonnage involved. It consisted of actions in three areas: the Sibuyan Sea, the Surigao Strait, and off Samar Island. The Japanese plan was to:

- Send their northern force south from Japan to lure the Third U.S. Fleet toward it and away from the Philippines.
- Have their central force sail east from Borneo through the San Bernardino Strait and head for Leyte Gulf.
- Have their southern force sail from Borneo and drive for Surigao Strait, south of Leyte.
- Have an attack force proceed from the Pescadores Islands (Taiwan) and join with the southern force to attack Leyte beachheads.
**Sibuyan Sea**

The Battle for Leyte Gulf began on 23 October 1944 when U.S. submarines torpedoed two cruisers in the central force. The following morning, fliers from Halsey’s Third U.S. Fleet spotted the central force near the Sibuyan Sea and the southern force near the Mindanao Sea. They attacked the central force and sank the giant battleship *Musashi*. They then sighted carriers from the northern force heading south. Halsey decided to attack the northern force. This left the San Bernardino Strait unguarded. He believed that his fleet could dash back to the strait if the central force tried to go through it. The Japanese succeeded in drawing him north.

**Surigao Strait**

The central force then turned eastward, slipped through the San Bernardino Strait, and headed toward Leyte Gulf where Vice Admiral Thomas Kinkaid’s Seventh U.S. Fleet stood guard. However, when Kinkaid learned that the southern force was also approaching the gulf through Surigao Strait to the south, he formed a task force to block the strait. As the southern force sailed up the strait, warships from the U.S. task force sank two enemy battleships and four destroyers.

**Samar**

As the central force moved southward along the Samar coast, it came upon a Seventh U.S. Fleet escort carrier task group. The Japanese force got to within three hours’ sail from Leyte Gulf and sank an Allied escort carrier and two destroyers, but then moved northward.

As the Seventh U.S. Fleet battled off Samar, Halsey’s Third U.S. Fleet pursued the northern force, which had swung north. Although Halsey’s battleships came within 45 miles of the enemy, an appeal for help by Kinkaid resulted in Halsey ordering some fast battleships and carriers to turn south. By doing this, Halsey lost all chances of destroying the northern force. These ships from the Third U.S. Fleet raced back to San Bernardino Strait; however, they arrived too late to destroy the remainder of the central force.

The Battle for Leyte Gulf was a decisive victory for the U.S. At the end of the battle on 26 October, Japan had lost three battleships, four carriers, 10 cruisers, and nine destroyers. The Allies lost one light and two escort carriers, two destroyers, and a destroyer escort. In desperation, the Japanese began on 25 October to strike with *kamikazes*, or suicide planes, by flying their planes directly into Allied warships.

**RETAKING MANILA**

After the U.S. Eighth Army replaced the Sixth Army on Leyte to perform “mop-up” operations, Sixth Army attacked the northern coast of Luzon Island on 9 January 1945. The Japanese army fiercely resisted the Allied advance toward Manila by using mountainous strongholds to wage a long, defensive campaign. In addition, the Japanese positioned naval and marine forces in and around Manila to defend it. This time, the capital city was not spared massive destruction as the Allied forces blasted and burned the Japanese from their defenses in brutal house-to-house fighting.

In the most daring airborne operation in the Pacific, the 503rd Regiment dropped into the island fortress of Corregidor. The paratroopers had to land on the summit of the great fortress, but the drop was a success. The next day, an infantry regiment landed on
the beach and together the troops avenged the 1942 loss of Corregidor.

By the end of February, the Allies had largely cleared Manila and Luzon of enemy forces; however, scattered Japanese resistance continued in the Philippines, especially in the mountains, until the end of the war.

**THE CHINA, BURMA, INDIA EFFORT**

Control of the Philippines gave the Allies another base from which they could invade the Japanese-held Chinese mainland. However, since the occupation of China pinned down thousands of Japanese troops, some Allied strategists favored keeping China in the war.

**BURMA-INDIA**

Burma played a vital role in the Allied plan of keeping China in the war. After Japan seized Burma and cut off the Burma Road in 1942, the Allies had to devise another way to send war materials and restore land communications with China. The Allies hoped to drive through northern Burma and build a road that would connect the railway in northeast India to the Chinese end of the old Burma Road.

British, Chinese, Indian and U.S. troops in northern Burma hacked their way through thick jungles and climbed steep mountains to build this road. Their progress was often halted by heavy rains and tropical diseases. They organized guerilla groups, including Merrill’s Marauders and Wingate’s Raiders, in order to help provide protection for the workers. Finally, in January 1945, the Allies completed the road. Although at first it became known as the Ledo Road, it later became the Stilwell Road.

The Japanese tried on numerous occasions to prevent the road from being built. Early in 1944, they began a drive to capture Allied airfields in northeast India. Once again, heavy rains and diseases, plus a shortage of supplies, hindered the Japanese effort and halted their advances. On 4 February 1945, the first Allied convoy rolled into China over the Stilwell Road. Then, British forces recaptured Mandalay on 20 March and forced the Japanese to evacuate Rangoon on 3 May.

**CHINA**

China had been isolated from most of the world when the Japanese cut the Burma Road in 1943. Supplies could come only through the air. The U.S. Air Transport Command flew the dangerous 500-mile route over the Himalayan Mountains between India and western China.

In the early 1940s, the U.S. began building air bases in southwest China. The American Volunteer Group, known as the “Flying Tigers,” became a full-fledged air force during the war and operated from those bases to strike at Japanese positions. The Japanese, determined to put an end to the raids, began a drive in 1944 to capture those air bases. They initially drove south then turned southwest and seized most of the major airfields in that area, including two bases that were key to Allied operations in China and the Far East.

At one point, the Japanese got to within 200 miles of the Chinese wartime capital of Chungking. But, they pushed ahead faster than their supply lines could move, and they had to retreat. By early 1945, after the opening of the Stilwell Road — which brought in much needed supplies and reinforcements, Chinese and Allied forces regained most of the lost territory.
THE COLLAPSE OF JAPAN

AIR AND SEA ATTACKS ON JAPAN

The Allies began weekly air attacks on Japan on 15 June 1944 using long-range B-29 bombers from bases in China. Then, beginning on 24 November, B-29s from the Marianas Islands joined the bombing missions on Tokyo. In March 1945, the B-29s began incendiary bombing at night from a low altitude of about 7,000 feet. This allowed the bombers to carry a heavier bomb load because they did not need so much gasoline. Three of these incendiary attacks wiped out the heart of Tokyo, and one attack destroyed most of Yokohama. Overall, the Army air forces flew more than 15,000 missions against 66 Japanese cities.

In addition to naval aircraft joining in the raids on Japanese cities and transportation centers, the Third U.S. Fleet and the British Pacific Fleet moved to within a short distance of Japan to bombard its cities. Plus, Allied submarines increased their activity in Japan’s coastal waters, accounting for over half of its losses in merchant ships. Then, in April 1945, carrier planes operating in the East China Sea sank the Japanese battleship Yamoto.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Yamoto and the Musashi, which the Allies sunk in 1944 during the Battle for Leyte Gulf, were the largest battleships ever built.

THE BATTLE FOR IWO JIMA

Iwo Jima lay halfway between Guam and Japan; therefore, its capture would place the Allies within 750 miles of Tokyo. For seven months before the invasion, the Army air forces and Navy bombed or shelled this tiny island almost daily. But, the Japanese built a system of concrete fortifications and underground defenses on it.

On 19 February 1945, the Fifth Marine Amphibious Corps landed on Iwo Jima. The 60,000 Marines met savage opposition from the Japanese. On 23 February, Marines scaled the steep cliffs of Mount Suribachi and hoisted the American flag. The heavy fighting lasted for 26 days before Iwo Jima fell to the Allies on 16 March at a cost of more than 6,000 lives.

THE BATTLE FOR OKINAWA

Okinawa was the next stop on the road to Japan. It was only 350 miles from the southern tip of the Japanese homeland.

On Easter Sunday, 1 April 1945, two Army corps and Marine units under Lieutenant General Simon Buckner, Jr., invaded Okinawa. The 120,000 Japanese on the island fought desperately and defended every inch of ground. During the campaign, kamikazes (suicide planes) and missiles sunk 36 vessels and damaged 332 others.

For almost three months the Americans fought the Japanese on Okinawa. By day, the Americans went forward with flame-throwers, some mounted on tanks. At
night, the artillery hammered the enemy. All attempts to bring back the wounded lying between the lines met Japanese charges and machine gun fire. Skillful infantry tactics, combined with heavy naval, air, and artillery bombardment, turned the tide on Okinawa.

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During the many hard fought battles in the Pacific, “uncommon valor was a common virtue.” In this battle for Okinawa, there was one man who performed almost unbelievable feats of bravery in battle: PFC Clarence Craft of the 96th Division.

The Americans had been trying to take a hill for 12 days. It was honeycombed with enemy trenches from which the Japanese poured fire down on the Americans. Suddenly, PFC Craft stood up in the open and charged the hill alone. Loaded with grenades and firing his carbine from the hip, he ran up the hill with bullets hitting all around him. When he reached the top of the hill, he was there for 30 minutes in the open, throwing grenades and firing into the Japanese trenches.

Then he jumped down into a trench and charged the Japanese, trapping many of them in a cave, which he sealed by throwing an explosive into it. When Craft’s company reached the top of the hill, they found the bodies of 70 Japanese. Later, when they told him he was getting the Medal of Honor, somebody asked why he had done it. He said, “You see guys getting killed all around you. You get mad. So you go ahead.”

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Organized Japanese resistance ended on 21 June. The Allies suffered 49,000 casualties, including Lieutenant General Buckner who was killed during the ground fighting. More than 109,000 Japanese perished in the battle. Hundreds of them staggered back and committed hara-kiri; others threw themselves from cliffs into the sea. The fighting on Okinawa proved to be the last major land battle of the war.

**PLANS TO INVADE JAPAN**

While MacArthur and Nimitz reorganized their forces and received more supplies and men from the States and Europe to prepare for an invasion of Japan, American leaders were preparing for the worst. Even the new president, Harry Truman, realized that the two million Japanese soldiers stationed on Japan would use their planes, submarines, and other weapons to fight to the death. An invasion of Japan would take many months, cost thousands of more American and Japanese lives, and result in the destruction of much of Japan.

At first, the Allies planned to invade the Japanese island of Kyushu in November 1945. The Allies would then follow this invasion with an assault on Tokyo (on the island of Honshu). However, in July 1945, when the heads of government of Britain, Russia, and the U.S. met in Potsdam, Germany, Stalin reported that he had received a message indicating Japan’s willingness to negotiate a peace, but an unwillingness to accept an unconditional surrender. On 26 July, the heads of state of Britain, China, and the U.S. issued an ultimatum calling for an unconditional surrender and a just peace. Japan ignored the ultimatum.

**THE ATOMIC BOMB**

In August 1945, President Truman made a fateful decision. After being briefed on the costs of the conquest of Japan, President Truman decided to use a new weapon that would make an invasion of Japan
unnecessary. On 6 August, a lone B-29 bomber from the Mariana Islands called the “Enola Gay” dropped the first atomic bomb used in warfare on Hiroshima. More than 92,000 persons were killed or missing. Three days later, on 9 August, the U.S. dropped a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki killing at least 40,000 people.

**VICTORY IN THE PACIFIC**

On 10 August, the Japanese government asked the Allies if unconditional surrender meant that Emperor Hirohito would have to give up his throne. The Allies replied that the Japanese people would decide his fate. Then, on 14 August, Japan accepted the Potsdam terms of surrender. On 2 September, aboard the battleship *Missouri*, the Allies and Japan signed the surrender agreement. President Truman proclaimed 2 September as V-J (Victory over Japan) Day. Three years, eight months, and 22 days after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, War World II ended.

**THE AFTERMATH OF WAR**

When the Japanese surrendered, the greatest struggle in the history of mankind was over. The United States had played a major role in the Allied victory. America had provided military power, industrial might, and military and political leadership that helped lead the Allies to victory in both Europe and the Pacific. World War II had the following results for the United States:

- The U.S. emerged as one of the world’s two superpowers; Russia was the other.
- The U.S. was the only nation in the world with atomic power.
- The U.S. could not drift back to isolation. As a superpower and leader of the Western democracies, the U.S. had to assume a position of leadership in world affairs, if for nothing else than to counter Communist expansion.

- 405,399 Americans died and another 670,846 were wounded during the war.
- The U.S. did not reduce its military forces as much as in the aftermath of past wars.
- The U.S. gained the former Japanese islands of the Carolines, Marshalls, Marianas, and Palaus as trust territories.
- The national debt in the U.S. rose from almost $43 billion in 1940 to over $269 billion in 1946 to pay for the war.

Historians find it difficult to measure the cost of World War II. They can only estimate because no one can count the individual cost of personal property lost, or of the cost of human suffering and loss of life.

The war did solve some problems: dictators no longer ruled Germany and Italy, and militarists no longer dominated Japan. But, the war also created as many problems as it solved.

- Russia moved quickly to replace Germany as the most powerful country in Europe and sought to take Japan’s place as the dominant power in Asia.
- Communists took over mainland China.
- Russia and China sought to set up satellite nations.
- The war left millions of people without adequate food, shelter, clothing, fuel, machinery, raw materials, and money. Damage to cities, key industries, and
transportation was far greater and covered much wider areas than in any other war. Some cities as well as farms lay devastated.

- Infant mortality and disease were high.
- The war caused vast population shifts. In some countries, whole groups had been uprooted.
- Many countries would continue to repay loans or repay its citizens for years to come.

**THE UNITED NATIONS (UN)**

Immediately after World War II, the countries fighting against the Axis pledged to continue their joint war effort and not to make peace separately. Thus, they established the UN to maintain world peace and security and to achieve cooperation in solving economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian problems. In 1945, there were 51 member nations who signed the charter that formed the UN, which replaced the League of Nations.

**THE AMERICAN CULTURE**

Although there were two major wars during the first half of the century and America experienced the Great Depression, many exciting things happened in the United States during this period. Life became more modernized and with success in both world wars, American nationalism continued to grow.

**THE GREAT DEPRESSION**

In the 1930s, the Great Depression befell the United States, during which many factories, banks, and businesses closed. By 1932, there were 16 million Americans out of work. The United States was in the worst depression it had ever experienced.

The Great Depression lasted about 10 years. During that time, Americans had no choice but to turn to the federal government for help. Under a plan called the New Deal, created by President Roosevelt, the government offered assistance to many Americans by setting up huge public work projects in an effort to create jobs. The policies of the New Deal relieved the economic situation somewhat, but complete recovery came only with the heavy defense spending of the early 1940s in preparation for World War II. Finally, businesses and industries began to operate effectively again.

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

Radios became commonplace, and although the TV was not an everyday item, Vladimir Zworykin patented it in 1924. It would not be long before the TV would overshadow the radio by becoming America’s favorite pastime.

**CONCLUSION/SUMMARY**

The origins for World War II lay in two different conflicts: Hitler’s desire for European expansion, especially considering his unwillingness to accept the frontiers established by the Treaty of Versailles, and Japan’s struggle against China and its ambitions in the Pacific.

After Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor and other British and U.S. bases on 7 December 1941, the U.S. declared war against Japan the next day. In reply, Japan’s allies — Germany and Italy — declared war on the U.S. on 11 December. Within four months, Japan controlled Southeast Asia and Burma.
The first Allied victories in the Pacific did not come until May and June 1942, with the Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway, where aircraft carriers were used for the first time in naval warfare. From that point on, the Allies used a two axis approach (the south Pacific drive and the central Pacific drive) and an “island hopping” campaign to recapture Japanese-held territory one by one. The Japanese troops defended their positions grimly and the bitter fighting continued until 1945.

With Japan on the retreat, defeated by the British in southeast Asia and the U.S. in the Pacific, and having disregarded Allied demands for unconditional surrender, the U.S. did not want to prolong the war with a costly invasion of Japan. On 6 August 1945, the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and dropped a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki three days later. On 14 August, Japan surrendered unconditionally to the Allies.

Casualty figures are not easy to obtain accurately for World War II, but historians estimate that civilian and military dead totaled 55 million. Eastern Europe and east Asia suffered the heaviest losses. Germany and Russia may have lost as much as a tenth of their populations. The following estimates illustrate the number of casualties for the major countries of the war:

- **Russia** had about three million killed in action, three million died as prisoners of war, eight million died in occupied Russia, and three million died in unoccupied Russia.

- **Germany** lost three and one-fourth million military casualties, around six million total casualties, and one million prisoners of war.

- **Japan** suffered over 2,390,000 total casualties — of which over 2,140,000 died — and just over one-quarter million civilian deaths (mostly from the two atomic bombs).

- **France** lost over one-half million total casualties (with just over 200,000 dead).

- **Great Britain** lost just over 610,000 total casualties (with over 270,000 dead).

- The **U.S.** suffered just over 300,000 total casualties (with about 145,000 dead).

One figure not included above is that during the German occupation of Europe, it is estimated that about six million Jews were murdered in extermination and labor camps.