

World War II



Clockwise from top: [Allied](#) landing on Normandy beaches on [D-Day](#), the gate of a [Nazi concentration camp](#) at [Auschwitz](#), [Red Army](#) soldiers raising the [Soviet flag](#) over the [Reichstag](#) in [Berlin](#), the [Nagasaki atom bomb](#), and German police entering Austria.

Date [September 1, 1939](#) – [September 2, 1945](#)
Location [Europe](#), [Pacific](#), [South-East Asia](#), [Middle East](#), [Mediterranean](#) and [Africa](#)
Result [Allied](#) victory. Creation of the [United Nations](#). Emergence of the [United States](#) and the [Soviet Union](#) as [superpowers](#). Creation of [First World](#) and [Second World spheres of influence](#) in [Europe](#) leading to the [Cold War](#). ([more...](#))

Combatants

[Allied powers:](#)



 [Soviet Union](#)
 [United States](#)
 [United Kingdom](#)
 [China](#)
 [France](#)
...[et al.](#)

[Axis powers:](#)

 [Germany](#)
 [Japan](#)
 [Italy](#)
...[et al.](#)

Commanders

 [Joseph Stalin](#)
 [Franklin Roosevelt](#)
 [Winston Churchill](#)

 [Adolf Hitler](#)
 [Hirohito](#)
 [Benito Mussolini](#)

 Chiang Kai-shek	...et al.
 Charles de Gaulle	
...et al.	
Casualties	
Military dead: Over 14,000,000	Military dead: Over 8,000,000
Civilian dead: Over 36,000,000	Civilian dead: Over 4,000,000
Total dead: Over 50,000,000	Total dead: Over 12,000,000
Campaigns and theatres of World War II	
<u>Europe</u>	
Poland – Phony War – Denmark & Norway – France & Benelux – Britain – Eastern Front – North West Europe (1944–45)	
<u>Asian and Pacific</u>	
China – Pacific Ocean – South-East Asia – South West Pacific – Japan – Manchuria	
<u>Middle East, Mediterranean and Africa</u>	
Mediterranean Sea – East Africa – North Africa – West Africa – Balkans (1939-41) – Middle East – Yugoslavia – Madagascar – Italy	
<u>Other</u>	
Atlantic – Strategic bombing – North America – Arctic	
<u>Contemporary wars</u>	
Chinese Civil – Soviet-Japanese Border – Finland – French-Thai – Anglo-Iraqi – Invasion of Iran – Greek Civil – Sino-Japanese – Ecuadorian-Peruvian	

World War II (abbreviated **WWII** or **WW2**), or the **Second World War**, was a [worldwide](#) military [conflict](#) which lasted from the late [1930s](#) to [1945](#). World War II was the [amalgamation](#) of two conflicts, one starting in [Asia](#), [1937](#), as the [Second Sino-Japanese War](#) and the other beginning in [Europe](#), [1939](#), with the [invasion of Poland](#).

This global conflict split a [majority of the world's nations](#) into two opposing camps: the [Allies](#) and the [Axis](#). Spanning much of the globe, World War II resulted in the deaths of over [60 million people](#), making it the deadliest conflict in [human history](#).^[1]

World War II was the most widespread war in history, and countries involved mobilized more than 100 million military personnel. [Total war](#) erased the distinction between civil and military resources and saw the complete mobilization of a nation's economic, industrial, and scientific capabilities for the purposes of the war effort; nearly two-thirds of those killed in the war were civilians. For example, nearly 11 million of the civilian casualties were victims of the [Holocaust](#), which was largely conducted in Eastern Europe.

The conflict ended in an Allied victory. As a result, the [United States](#) and [Soviet Union](#) emerged as the world's two leading [superpowers](#), setting the stage for the [Cold War](#) for the next 45 years. [Self determination](#) gave rise to [decolonization/independence](#) movements in Asia and Africa, while Europe itself began traveling the [road leading to integration](#).

Overview

In Europe, [Germany](#), and to a lesser extent [Italy](#), had engaged in increasingly hostile activities, which the [United Kingdom](#) and [France](#) initially attempted to diffuse through diplomacy.

In September 1939, Germany invaded [Poland](#), thus beginning war in Europe. The United Kingdom and France declared war. During the winter of 1939/1940 there was little indication of hostilities since neither side was willing to engage the other directly.

In 1940, Germany, utilizing its new [blitzkrieg](#) method of warfare, captured [Denmark](#) and [Norway](#) in the spring, and then in the summer conquered France and the [Low Countries](#). The United Kingdom was then targeted; the Germans attempted to cut the island off from vitally needed supplies and obtain air superiority in order to allow invasion. Invasion was never attained, but the Germans continued to attack the British mainland throughout the war. Unable to engage German forces on the continent, the United Kingdom concentrated on combating German and Italian forces in the [Mediterranean Basin](#). It had limited success though; it failed to prevent the Axis [conquest of the Balkans](#) and fought indecisively in the [Western Desert Campaign](#). It had greater [success in the Mediterranean Sea](#) though, dealing severe damage to the [Italian Navy](#).

In 1941, the war expanded dramatically when Germany [invaded the Soviet Union](#) in June, bringing the Soviet Union into alliance with the United Kingdom. The German attack started strong, overrunning great tracts of Soviet territory, but began to stall by the winter. In December 1941, the war again expanded when [Japan](#), already into its fifth year of war with [China](#), launched near simultaneous attacks against the United States and British assets in [Southeast Asia](#); four days later, Germany declared war on the United States. This brought the United States and Japan into the greater conflict and turned previously separate Asian and European wars into a single global one.

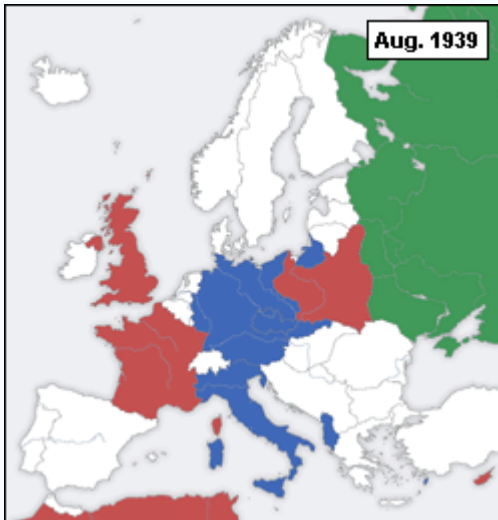
In 1942, though Axis forces continued to make gains, the tide began to turn. Japan suffered its first major defeat against American forces in the [Battle of Midway](#), German forces in [Africa](#) were being [pushed back by Anglo-American forces](#), and Germany's renewed summer offensive in the Soviet Union had ground to a halt.

In 1943, Germany first suffered devastating losses against the Soviets at [Stalingrad](#), and then again at [Kursk](#). Their forces were completely expelled from Africa, and Allied forces had [chased them up into Italy](#). The Japanese continued to lose ground as the American forces seized island after island in the Pacific Ocean.

In 1944, the outcome of the war was becoming clearly unfavorable for the Axis. Germany became boxed in as the Soviet offensive became a juggernaut in the east, pushing the Germans out of Russia and pressing into Poland and [Romania](#); in the west, the Western Allies [invaded mainland Europe](#), liberating France and the Low Countries and reached Germany's western borders. While Japan launched a [successful major offensive in China](#), in the Pacific, their navy suffered continued heavy losses as American forces captured airfields within bombing range of [Tokyo](#).

In 1945, the war ended. In Europe, a final [German counter-attack in the west](#) failed, and Soviet forces [overran Berlin](#) by May, forcing the Germans to surrender. In Asia, American forces fought hard earned victories in the Japanese islands of [Iwo Jima](#) and [Okinawa](#) while British forces in Southeast Asia finally managed to expel Japanese forces. Initially unwilling to surrender, the Japanese finally capitulated after the [Soviet Union invaded Manchukuo](#), a Japanese [puppet state](#), and the [United States dropped atomic bombs on the mainland of Japan](#).

European Theatre



WW II Europe. Red countries are Allied or Allied-controlled, Blue denotes Axis or Axis controlled countries, and the Soviet Union is colored Green prior to joining the Allies in 1941

Main article: [European Theatre of World War II](#)

Events leading up to the war in Europe

Germany and France had been struggling for dominance in Continental Europe for 80 years and had fought two previous wars, the [Franco-Prussian War](#) and [World War I](#). Meanwhile the power of the Soviet Union threatened to eclipse them both as industrialization spread through its lands. World War I had been a preemptive war by Germany against the precursor to the Soviet Union, the [Russian Empire](#),^[2] but it ended in catastrophe for the Germans, with millions dead, the loss of some territory, and economic hardships.



[Benito Mussolini](#) of [Fascist Italy](#) (left) and [Adolf Hitler](#) of [Nazi Germany](#).

During the [Interwar period](#), [Benito Mussolini](#) and his [fascist](#) party took control of the [Kingdom of Italy](#) and set the model for [Adolf Hitler's](#) [Nazi Party](#), which, aided by the civil unrest caused by the [Great Depression](#), took power in Germany and eliminated its democratic government, the [Weimar Republic](#). Because of their expansionist views, they began to re-militarize and become increasingly hostile.

Mussolini first [conquered the African nation of Abyssinia](#), followed soon after by his seizure of [Albania](#), while both Italy and Germany actively supported the [Francisco Franco's fascist Falange party](#) in the [Spanish Civil War](#) against the [Second Spanish Republic](#), which was supported by the Soviet Union. Hitler then broke the [Treaty of Versailles](#) by increasing the size of the Germany's military, and [re-militarized the Rhineland](#). He started his own expansion by [annexing Austria](#) and sought the same against the [German-speaking regions](#) (Sudetenland) of [Czechoslovakia](#).

The British and French governments followed a policy of [appeasement](#) in order to avoid military confrontation after the high cost of the First World War. This policy culminated in the [Munich Agreement](#) in 1938, which would give the Sudetenland to Germany in exchange for Germany making no further territorial claims in Europe.^{[3][4]} In March 1939, Germany disregarded the agreement and annexed the remainder of Czechoslovakia. Mussolini, following suite, then annexed [Albania](#) in April.

The failure of the Munich Agreement showed that negotiations with Hitler could not be trusted, and that his aspirations for dominance in Europe went beyond anything that the United Kingdom and France would tolerate. France and [Poland](#) pledged on [May 19, 1939](#), to [provide each other with military assistance](#) in the event either was attacked. The following August, the British [guaranteed the same](#).

On [August 23, 1939](#), Germany and the Soviet Union signed the [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact](#) which provided for sales of oil and food from the Soviets to Germany, thus reducing the danger of a British blockade such as the one that had nearly starved Germany in World War I. Also included was a secret agreement that would divide [Central Europe](#) into German and Soviet areas of interest, including a provision to partition Poland. Each country agreed to allow the other a free hand in its area of influence, including [military occupation](#).

Germany's war against the Western Allies

Blitzkrieg on Europe



Soviet (left) and German officers meet after the Soviets' invasion of Poland

On [September 1, 1939](#), Germany [invaded Poland](#), using the false pretext of a faked "[Polish attack](#)" on a German border post. On [September 3](#), the United Kingdom issued an ultimatum to Germany. No reply was received, and Britain, Australia and New Zealand declared war on Germany, followed later that day by France. Soon afterwards, South Africa, Canada and Nepal also declared war on Germany. Immediately, Great Britain began seizing German ships and implementing a blockade.

Despite the French and British treaty obligations and promises to the Polish government, both France and Great Britain were [unwilling to launch a land invasion of Germany](#). The French mobilized slowly and then mounted only a short [token offensive](#) in the [Saar](#); neither did the British send land forces in time to support the Poles. Meanwhile, on [September 8](#), the Germans [reached Warsaw](#), having slashed through the Polish defenses. On [September 17](#), the Soviet Union, pursuant to its prior

agreement with Germany, [invaded Poland from the east](#). Poland was soon overwhelmed, and the [last Polish units surrendered](#) on [October 6](#).



[Adolf Hitler](#) posing in German-occupied Paris

After Poland fell, Germany paused to regroup during the winter while the British and French stayed on the defensive. The period was referred to by journalists as "the [Phoney War](#)" because of the inaction on both sides. In Eastern Europe, the Soviets began [occupying Baltic states](#) leading to a [confrontation with Finland](#), a conflict which ended with [land concessions](#) to the Soviets on [March 12, 1940](#). In early April 1940, both German and Allied forces launched nearly simultaneous operations around [Norway](#) over [access to Swedish iron ore](#). It was a short [campaign](#) which resulted in German control of [Denmark](#) and Norway, though at a heavy cost to their surface navy. The fall of Norway led to the [Norway Debate](#) in London, which resulted in the resignation of [Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain](#), who was replaced by [Winston Churchill](#).

On [May 10, 1940](#), the Germans [invaded France and the Low Countries](#). The [British Expeditionary Force](#) (BEF) and the [French Army](#) advanced into [Flanders](#) and planned to fight a mobile war in the north, while maintaining a static continuous front along the [Maginot Line](#) further south. This was foiled by an unexpected German thrust through the [Ardennes](#), splitting the Allies in two. The BEF and [French forces](#), encircled in the north, were evacuated from [Dunkirk](#) in [Operation Dynamo](#). France, overwhelmed by the [blitzkrieg](#), was soon forced to sign an [armistice](#) with Germany on [June 22, 1940](#), leading to the direct German occupation of [Paris](#) and two-thirds of France, and the establishment of a German [puppet state](#) headquartered in [southeastern France](#) known as [Vichy France](#).



Bombed buildings in London

With only the United Kingdom remaining as an opposing force in Europe, Germany began to prepare [Operation Sealion](#), the invasion of Britain. Most of the British Army's heavy weapons and supplies had been lost at Dunkirk, but the [Royal Navy](#) was still considerably more powerful than the

Kriegsmarine and held tight control of the [English Channel](#). The Germans therefore attempted to gain [air superiority](#) by destroying the [Royal Air Force](#) (RAF) using the [Luftwaffe](#). The ensuing contest in the late summer of 1940 between the two air forces became known as the [Battle of Britain](#). The [Luftwaffe](#) initially targeted [RAF Fighter Command](#) aerodromes and radar stations, but Hitler, angered by retaliatory bombing raids on [Berlin](#), switched his attentions towards the bombing of London, in an operation known as [The Blitz](#). This diversion of German resources allowed the RAF to remain active and rebuild their losses, eventually causing the invasion plans to be postponed indefinitely.

With Germany and her allies having total control of the continent, the United Kingdom and its allies would have to settle for [strategic bombing](#) and [special forces operations](#) in mainland Europe. Many of the conquered nations formed [governments in exile](#) and military units within the United Kingdom as well as domestic [resistance movements](#). Germany, meanwhile, fortified its position by the construction of the [Atlantic Wall](#).

Battle of the Atlantic

Main article: [Battle of the Atlantic \(1939-1945\)](#)



An aerial view of a convoy escorted by a battleship

The Battle of the Atlantic, a nautical campaign which lasted the duration of the war, started after the German invasion of Poland with the [torpedoing](#) of the British liner [SS Athenia](#) by a [German submarine](#) (U-boat). Having faced [raids on shipping during the First World War](#), the British quickly implemented a [convoy](#) solution to protect merchant vessels; they were short of [escort](#) ships though, so many merchant ships had to sail without protection. At first, U-boats primarily operated within British waters while the Atlantic Ocean was covered by German surface vessels. The British attempted to counter the U-boat threat by forming anti-submarine hunting groups, which were ultimately ineffective because the U-boats proved too elusive.

With the German conquest of Norway and France by June 1940, U-boats enjoyed decreased resistance. The [French Navy](#) was removed as an Allied force, and additional ports in France on the Atlantic Ocean became available to the [German Navy](#) (*Kriegsmarine*), allowing them to increase the range of their vessels. The [Royal Navy](#) became severely stretched, having to remain stationed in the [English Channel](#) to protect against a German invasion, send forces to the [Mediterranean Sea](#) to make up for the loss of the French fleet, and provide escort for merchant vessels. This was somewhat mitigated by the [Destroyers for Bases Agreement](#) with the [United States Navy](#) in September 1940, in which the British exchanged several of their oversea bases for fifty [destroyers](#) which were then used for escort duties. The success of U-boats in this period led to an increase of their production and the development of the [wolf pack](#) technique.

The German surface navy, which had suffered substantial losses in the capture of Norway, had mixed results. While there were several successful merchant raids, such as [Operation Berlin](#), they also suffered several losses, such as the [battleships Graf Spee](#) and [Bismarck](#). The [loss of the Bismarck](#) had deeper ramifications on naval policy though, because as a result Hitler ordered all heavy surface vessels to Norwegian waters^[2], shifting them from raiding operations to protection from a potential Allied invasion of [Scandinavia](#). While the Royal Navy also suffered the loss of [capital ships](#), such as

the [aircraft carrier HMS Courageous](#), the battleship [HMS Royal Oak](#) and the [battlecruiser HMS Hood](#), their larger surface navy was better able to absorb the losses.



An Allied tanker torpedeed in the Atlantic in 1942

In May 1941, the British captured an intact [Enigma machine](#), which greatly assisted in [breaking German codes](#) and allowed for plotting convoy routes which evaded U-boat positions. In the summer of 1941, the Soviet Union entered the war on the side of the Allies, but they lost much of their equipment and manufacturing base in the first few weeks following the German invasion. The Western Allies attempted to remedy this by sending [Arctic convoys](#), which faced constant harassment from German forces. In September, many of the U-boats operating in the Atlantic were [ordered to the Mediterranean](#) to block British supply routes. When the United States entered the war that December, they did not take precautionary anti-submarine measures; this resulted in shipping losses so great that the Germans referred to it as a [second happy time](#).



A U-boat under attack by Allied aircraft in 1943

In February 1942, several German capital ships which had been stationed in the port of [Brest, France](#), managed to comply with Hitler's earlier order and [slipped through the English Channel](#) to their home bases in German waters, dealing a significant blow to the Royal Navy's reputation. In June, the [Leigh light](#) allowed Allied aircraft to illuminate U-boats that had been detected by the airplanes [radar](#), but this was soon negated by the Germans with [Metox](#), a radar detection system that gave them advance notice of such an aircraft's approach. In American waters, the institution of shore [blackouts](#) and an interlocking convoy system resulted in a drop in attacks, and the U-boats shifted their operations back to the mid-Atlantic by August. In December, a strong German surface navy force [engaged an Arctic convoy destined for the Soviet Union](#) and failed to destroy a single merchant ship; this resulted in the resignation of [Grand Admiral](#) (Großadmiral) [Erich Raeder](#), supreme commander of the Kriegsmarine. He was replaced by Commander of Submarines [Karl Dönitz](#), and all naval building priorities turned to the U-boats.

In January, 1943, the British developed a the [H2S radar](#) system which was undetectable by Metox. As before, this was followed by a counter-invention on the German side, the [Naxos radar detector](#), which allowed German fighters to hone in on Allied aircraft utilizing the H2S. In the spring, the Battle of the Atlantic began to turn in favour of the Allies with the pivotal point being [Black May](#), a period where the Allies had fewer ships sunk and the Kriegsmarine lost 25% of their active U-boats. That

December, the German surface fleet lost their last active battlecruiser in the [Battle of North Cape](#). By this time, the Kriegsmarine was unable to regain the initiative; Allied production, such as the [mass-produced Liberty ships](#), and ever-improving technology led to increasing U-boat losses and more supplies getting through. This allowed for the massive supply build up in the United Kingdom needed for the eventual invasion of Western Europe in mid-1944.

Mediterranean, Africa, and the Middle East

Control of [Southern Europe](#), the [Mediterranean Sea](#) and [North Africa](#) was important because the British Empire depended on shipping through the [Suez Canal](#). If the canal fell into Axis hands or if the Royal Navy lost control of the Mediterranean, then transport between the United Kingdom, India, and Australia would have to go around the [Cape of Good Hope](#), an increase of several thousand miles.

Almost immediately after declaring war on France and the United Kingdom in June 1940, Italy initiated the [siege of Malta](#), an island under British control located in the Mediterranean between mainland Italy and its [colony in Libya](#). Minimal resources were initially placed by both sides though, the Italians needing to reserve their strength for other planned invasions and the British not believing they could effectively defend it. As the importance of the [campaigns in North Africa](#) increased though, so did that of Malta and the disruptions of Axis supply lines that Allied forces stationed there could provide.



[Italian battleship Giulio Cesare](#) firing during the Battle of Calabria

Following the French surrender, the British [attacked the French Navy](#) anchored in North Africa in July 1940, out of fear that it might fall into German hands; this contributed to a souring of British-French relations for the next few years. Soon following this action was the [Battle of Calabria](#), the first large conflict between the Royal Navy and the [Italian Navy](#) (Regia Marina).

With France no longer a threat, Italy was able to relax its guard on its western possessions in Africa which bordered French territory and focus on the British forces in the east. In August, Italy [invaded British Somaliland](#), located in the [Horn of Africa](#), expelling British forces and creating [Italian East Africa](#). The following month, the Italians then made a small incursion into British-held Egypt, starting the [Western Desert Campaign](#).

The United Kingdom, along with the [Free French Forces](#), a collection of resistance fighters under [Charles de Gaulle](#), then attempted to replace Vichy control over French territories with that of the Free French. In September, 1940, they made a [failed attempt to capture French West Africa](#), though in November, they later [succeeded in French Equatorial Africa](#). Between these attempts, the Italians launched their own offensive from Albania and [attacked Greece](#).

Starting in November of 1940, the British had a string of successful operations against Italian forces. On [November 12](#) they launched the first all-aircraft naval attack [against the Italian fleet at Taranto](#).

Then, in December, the British [Commander-in-Chief](#) of the [Middle East](#), [General Archibald Wavell](#), launched [Operation Compass](#), expelling Italian forces from Egypt and pushing them all the way west across [Libya](#). Starting in January, 1941, he started another offensive into Italian East Africa, conquering the short-lived state. Italy was also facing problems in the Balkans, where the [Greek Army](#) had pushed the Italians out of Greece and were now stalemated in southern Albania.



German [paratroopers](#) (fallschirmjäger) landing on Crete

Alarmed by the Italian setbacks, Hitler authorized reinforcements, and [sent German forces to Africa](#) in February. The British also started redeploying their forces, [sending soldiers from North Africa to Greece](#) starting in early March; in an effort to secure their transportation lines, the Royal Navy managed to engage the Regia Marina in the [Battle of Cape Matapan](#), doing significant damage to the Italian fleet. The German forces in Africa, led by German General [Erwin Rommel](#), however, launched an offensive against the now depleted British forces near the end of March. During this offense, the British also feared having their oil supply cut due to a Nazi-friendly [coup d'état in Iraq](#) in early April. They were further pressed when the [Germans invaded Greece and Yugoslavia](#). By the middle of April, Rommel's forces had pushed the British forces back into Egypt with the exception of the port of [Tobruk](#), which he [encircled and besieged](#). Shortly after, the British responded to the coup in Iraq by [invading and occupying the country](#). By the end of May, German forces had conquered Yugoslavia, mainland Greece and further [captured the island of Crete](#), forcing a withdraw of all British forces from the Balkans.

In [June 8](#), the British and Free French [invaded Vichy controlled Syria and Lebanon](#) due to the Vichy allowance of Axis forces to pass through the area and utilize military bases. A week later, Wavell launched [Operation Battleaxe](#), which was intended to be a major offensive in the Western Desert, but resulted in the loss of nearly half of the British tanks in the region. Frustrated by the lack of success, Churchill had Wavell replaced with [Claude Auchinleck](#) in early July. In late August, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the British and the Soviets launched a [joint invasion of Iran](#) to secure its oilfields and the [Persian Corridor](#) supply route for Soviet use.



A British [Crusader tank](#) passes a burning German [Panzer IV](#) in the desert

There was then a lull in activity. The Soviet-German war had significantly reduced the importance of the Mediterranean theatre to the Germans and the British spent their time building up their forces. On [November 18](#), they launched [Operation Crusader](#), an offensive in the Western Desert which pushed

Rommel back to his original starting point at [El Agheila](#) in Libya. The British suffered a significant blow in the sea though, losing several ships shortly after the [First Battle of Sirte](#).

With the entry of Japan into the war in December 1941, the British were again forced to withdraw units from the Western Desert, this time transferring them to [Burma](#). Once again Rommel took advantage of the situation, and on [January 21st](#), launched an offensive which pushed the British back to [Gazala](#), just west of Tobruk. There was another lull in activity as both sides built up their forces. In May, after the Japanese [Indian Ocean raid](#), the British [invaded Vichy controlled Madagascar](#) to prevent the [Imperial Japanese Navy](#) from using as launch point for further such attacks. Rommel then [launched his own attack](#) in late May, overrunning the British position in the Western Desert and chasing them well into Egypt, [being halted at El Alamein](#). Shortly after, the Royal Navy [suffered significant damage getting much needed supplies to Malta](#).

Like Wavell before him, Auchinleck's perceived failures led to his replacement by Churchill, this time by [Harold Alexander](#) with [Bernard Montgomery](#) taking over the [ground forces in Egypt](#).



Allied forces land on the beaches during Operation Torch

In late October, after building up his forces, Montgomery [launched his offensive](#), pushing the Axis forces back and pursuing them across the desert. In November, Anglo-American forces [landed in Vichy-controlled Northwest Africa](#) with minimal resistance; in retaliation, the Germans [seized the remainder of mainland France](#), though they [failed to capture the remainder of the French Navy](#). Soon, Rommel's forces were [pincerred in Tunisia](#) and by May of 1943, were forced to evacuate Africa entirely.

In July, the [Italian Campaign](#) began with the [Allied invasion of Sicily](#). The continued series of Italian defeats led to Mussolini being dismissed by the [King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III](#) and subsequently arrested. His successor, [Pietro Badoglio](#), then began negotiating surrender with the Allies. On [September 3](#) the Allies invaded [Italy itself](#) and the [Italians signed an armistice](#). This was made public on [September 8](#), the same day the Allies launched a subsequent invasion of the Italian held [Dodecanese islands](#). Germany had been planning for such an event though, and executed [Operation Achse](#), the seizure of northern and central Italy. A few days later, [Mussolini was rescued by German special forces](#) and before the end of September created the [Italian Social Republic](#), a German [client state](#).



US soldiers combat a German [machine gun](#) nest

From October until mid-1944, the Allies fought through a series of defensive lines and fortifications designed to slow down their progress. On [April 25th](#), a little over a year and half after its creation, the Italian Social Republic was overthrown by [Italian partisans](#); Mussolini, [his mistress](#) and several of his ministers were captured by the partisans while attempting to flee and executed. Shortly after, one of

strongest of the German defensive lines, the [Winter Line](#), was breached nearly simultaneously in May at [Monte Cassino](#) by British-led forces and at [Anzio](#) by the Americans; though the Allies could have encircled and potentially destroyed the [bulk of German forces](#) in Italy, the American forces instead moved towards Rome, capturing the city on [June 4th](#).

In August, Allied forces in Italy were divided, with a significant portion [sent to southern France](#) to assist in the liberation of Western Europe while the remainder pressed north to engage the remaining German forces, notably at the [Gothic Line](#). Fighting in Italy would continue until early May, 1945, only a few days prior to the general German surrender.

Liberation of Western Europe



The landing of the Allies in France as shown in the New York Times

Main articles: [Battle of Normandy](#), [Drive to the Siegfried Line](#), and [Battle of the Bulge](#)

“ You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you. In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world. ”

— [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#)

“ In the East, the vastness of space will... permit a loss of territory... without suffering a mortal blow to Germany's chance for survival. Not so in the West! If the enemy here succeeds... consequences of staggering proportions will follow within a short time.^[5] ”

— Adolf Hitler

By the Spring of 1944, the Allied preparations for the invasion of France and the initial stages for the liberation of western Europe ([Operation Overlord](#)) were complete. They had assembled around 120 Divisions with over 2 million men of which 1.3 million were Americans, 600,000 were British and the rest were Canadians, Free French and Polish units. The invasion, code-named [Operation Neptune](#) but commonly referred to as [D-Day](#), was set for June 5th but bad weather postponed the invasion to June 6, 1944.^[6] Almost 85-90% of all German troops were deployed on the Eastern Front and only 400,000 Germans in two armies, the [German Seventh Army](#) and the newly created [Fifth Panzer Army](#) was all that Germany could spare to defend against the allied invasion. The Germans had also constructed an elaborate series of fortifications along the coast called the [Atlantic Wall](#) to deter the

invasion but in many places the Wall was incomplete. The Allied forces under supreme command of [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#) had launched an elaborate deception campaign to convince the Germans that the landings would occur in the [Calais](#) area which caused the Germans to deploy large parts of their forces in that sector. Only 50,000 Germans were deployed in the Normandy sector on the day of the invasion.



Supplies coming ashore on Normandy.

The invasion began with 17,000 air borne troops being dropped in Normandy to serve as a screening force to prevent the Germans from attacking the beaches. By early morning, a massive Naval flotilla attempted to bombard German defenses on the beaches, but due to lack of visibility most of the shots missed their targets. Additionally, most of the troop transport ships (with personnel, trucks, and equipment) were off course, some as much as thousands of yards from their respective landing zone amongst the 5 beach areas (Utah, Omaha, Sword, Juno and Gold). The Americans in particular suffered heavy losses on Omaha beach due to the German fortifications being left intact. However by the end of the first day, most of the Allied objectives were accomplished even though the British and Canadian objective of capturing [Caen](#) proved too optimistic. The Germans launched no significant counterattack on the beaches as Hitler believed the landings to be a decoy. Only three days later the German High command realized that Normandy was the actual invasion, but by then the Allies had already consolidated their [beachheads](#).

The [bocage](#) terrain of Normandy where the Americans had landed made it ideal ground for defensive warfare. Nevertheless, the Americans made steady progress and captured the deep-water port of [Cherbourg](#) on June 26, one of the primary objectives of the invasion. However, the Germans had [mined](#) the harbor and destroyed most of the port facilities before surrendering, and it would be another month before the port could be brought back into limited use. The British launched another [attack](#) on June 13 to capture Caen but were held back as the Germans had moved in large number of troops to hold the city. The city was to remain in German hands for another 6 weeks. It finally fell to British and Canadian forces on July 9.



British Troops take cover on [Sword Beach](#).

Allied firepower, improved tactics, and numerical superiority eventually resulted in a [breakout](#) of American mechanized forces at the western end of the Normandy pocket in [Operation Cobra](#) on July 23. When Hitler learned of the American breakout, he ordered his forces in Normandy to launch an immediate counter-offensive. However the German forces moving in open countryside were now

easily targeted by Allied aircraft, as they had initially escaped Allied air attacks due to their well camouflaged defensive positions.

The Americans placed strong formations on their flanks which blunted the attack and then began to encircle the [7th Army](#) and large parts of the [5th Panzer Army](#) in the [Falaise Pocket](#). Some 50,000 Germans were captured, but 100,000 managed to escape the pocket. Worse still, the British and Canadians - whose initial strategic objective to draw in enemy reserves and protect the American flanks so as to promote a later turning movement north had been achieved ^[7] - now began to break through the German lines. Any hope the Germans had of containing the Allied thrust into France by forming new defensive lines was now gone. The Allies raced across France, advancing as much as 600 miles in two weeks^[8] The German forces retreated into Northern France, Holland and Belgium. By August 1944, Allied forces stationed in [Corsica](#) launched [Operation Dragoon](#), invading the [French Riviera](#) on [August 15](#) with the [6th Army Group](#), led by [Lieutenant General Jacob Devers](#), and linked up with forces from Normandy. The clandestine [French Resistance](#) in [Paris](#) rose against the Germans on [August 19](#), and the Free French [2nd Armored Division](#) under [General Philippe Leclerc](#), pressing forward from Normandy, received the surrender of the German forces on behalf of [General von Choltiz](#) there and liberated the city on [August 25](#).



[Free French General Leclerc's 2nd Armored Division](#) passes through the [Champs Elysées](#) during the [Liberation of Paris](#).

The Germans launched the [V-1 flying bomb](#), the world's first [cruise missile](#), to attack targets in southern England and Belgium. Later, they would employ the [V-2 rocket](#), a [liquid-fuelled](#) guided [ballistic missile](#). These weapons were very inaccurate and could only target large areas, such as cities. They had little military effect and were rather intended to demoralize Allied civilians.

Logistical problems plagued the Allies as they fanned out across France and the Low Countries, advancing towards the German border. With the supply lines still running back to Normandy, and critical shortages in fuel and other supplies all along the front, the Allies slowed the general advance and focused the available supplies on a narrow front strategy. Allied paratroopers and armor attempted a war-winning advance through the Netherlands and across the Rhine River with [Operation Market Garden](#) in September (the goal was to end the war by [Christmas](#)). The plan was to land [paratroopers](#) near bridges on the Rhine River, hold the position, and wait for the armour to cut through enemy lines to reinforce them and then cross into Germany. The plan was conceived and led by British General Montgomery, and included British, American, Polish, and Canadian forces. Although the plan encountered some initial success, many of the bridges were blown up, and the advancing armored columns ran into delays. As a result, the [British 1st Airborne Division](#), holding the last bridge, was nearly annihilated. The Germans were able to entrench all along the front and the war continued through the winter.

In order to improve the supply situation, the [Canadian First Army](#) was assigned to clear the entrance to the port of [Antwerp](#), the [Scheldt](#) estuary, which they successfully accomplished by late November

1944 Making [Canada](#) the only country to successfully complete all D-Day objectives. In October, the Americans captured [Aachen](#), the first major German city to be occupied.



Allied [paratroopers](#) land during [Operation Market Garden](#).

Hitler had been planning to launch a major counteroffensive against the Allies since mid-September. The objective of the attack was to capture Antwerp. Not only would the capture or destruction of Antwerp prevent supplies from reaching the allied armies, it would also split allied forces in two, demoralizing the alliance and forcing its leaders to negotiate. For the attack, Hitler concentrated the best of his remaining forces, launching the attack through the Ardennes in southern [Belgium](#), a hilly and in places a heavily wooded region, and the site of his victory in 1940. Dense cloud cover denied the Americans the use of their reconnaissance and ground attack aircraft.



[U.S. General Omar Bradley](#) led the advance into Germany.

Parts of the attack managed to break through the thinly-held American lines (about 4 divisions which were either new or refitting to cover about 70 miles of the front-line), and dash headlong for the [Meuse](#). However the northern section of the line held, constricting the advance to a narrow corridor. The German advance was delayed at [St. Vith](#), which American forces defended for several days. At the vital road junction of [Bastogne](#), the American [101st Airborne Division](#) and [Combat Command B](#) of the 10th Armoured Division held out, surrounded, for the duration of the battle. [Patton's 3rd Army](#) to the South made a rapid 90 degree turn and rammed into the German southern flank, relieving Bastogne.

The weather by this time had cleared unleashing allied air power as the German attack ground to a halt at [Dinant](#). In an attempt to keep the offensive going, the Germans launched a [massive air raid](#) on Allied airfields in the Low Countries on January 1, 1945. The Germans destroyed 465 aircraft but lost 277 of their own planes. While the allies recovered their losses in just days, the Luftwaffe was no longer capable of launching a major air attack again.^[9]

Allied forces from the north and south met up at [Houffalize](#) and by the end of January they had pushed the Germans back to their start positions. Many German units were caught in the pocket created by the Bulge and forced to surrender or retreat without their heavy equipment. Months of the Reich's war production had been expended whereas German forces on the Eastern front were virtually



US soldiers hunt a German sniper near a farmhouse, [Vierville-sur-Mer](#), a few days after landing at Omaha beachhead.

starved of resources at the very moment the Red Army was preparing for its massive offensive against Germany. The final obstacle to the Allies was the river [Rhine](#), which was crossed in late March 1945, aided by the fortuitous capture of the [Ludendorff Bridge](#) at [Remagen](#). Also, [Operation Varsity](#), a parachute-assault in late March, got a foothold on the east bank of the [Rhine River](#). Once the Allies had crossed the Rhine, the British fanned out northeast towards Hamburg, crossing the river [Elbe](#) and moving on towards Denmark and the [Baltic Sea](#).

The [U.S. 9th Army](#) went south as the northern pincer of the Ruhr encirclement, and the [U.S. 1st Army](#) went north as the southern pincer of the Ruhr encirclement. These armies were commanded by [General Omar Bradley](#) who had over 1,300,000 men under his control (the 12th Army Group). On [April 4](#), the encirclement was completed, and the German Army Group B which included the 5th Panzer Army, 7th Army and the 15th Army commanded by [Field Marshal Walther Model](#) was trapped in the [Ruhr Pocket](#). Some 300,000 German soldiers became [prisoners of war](#). The 1st and 9th U.S. armies then turned east. They halted their advance at the Elbe river where they met up with Soviet troops in mid-April.

Soviet-German War

The Eastern Front of the European Theatre of World War II lasted from June 22, 1941 to May 8, 1945 and was the largest theatre in the war. The fighting involved millions of German and Soviet troops along a broad front hundreds of miles long. It was by far the deadliest single theatre of World War II, with over 5 million deaths on the Axis Forces; Soviet military deaths were about 10.6 million (out of which 3.6 million Soviets died in German captivity), and civilian deaths were about 14 to 17 million. ^{[[citation needed](#)]} The Eastern Front contained more combat than all the other European fronts combined; the European axis suffered 75% to 85% of all casualties there. The fate of the [Third Reich](#) was decided at [Stalingrad](#) and sealed at [Kursk](#). ^{[[citation needed](#)]} The cost to the Soviet Union was an estimated 27 million dead, about half of all World War II casualties. In all Soviet and the majority of Russian sources, the conflict is referred to as the **Great Patriotic War**.

Invasion of the Soviet Union

Main articles: [Eastern Front \(World War II\)](#), [Operation Barbarossa](#), and [Battle of Moscow](#)

“ We have only to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down. ”

— Adolf Hitler



The eastern front at the time of the Battle of Moscow: Initial Wehrmacht advance - to 9 July 1941
 Subsequent advances - to 1 September 1941 Encirclement and battle of Kiev - to 9 September 1941
 Final Wehrmacht advance - to 5 December 1941

The [battle of Greece](#) and the [invasion of Yugoslavia](#) delayed the German invasion of the Soviet Union by a critical six weeks.

Three German Army Groups along with various other Axis military units who in total numbered over 4.3 million men, 3.3 million Germans and 1 million Axis, launched the invasion of the Soviet Union on [June 22](#), 1941. [Army Group North](#) was deployed in [East Prussia](#). Its main objectives were to secure the Baltic states and seize Leningrad. Opposite Army Group North were 2 Soviet Armies. The Germans threw their 600 tanks at the junction of the two Soviet Armies in that sector. The [4th Panzer Army](#)'s objective was to cross the River Neman and [River Dvina](#) which were the two largest obstacles in route to [Leningrad](#). On the first day, the tanks crossed River Neman and penetrated 50 miles. Near Rasienai, the Panzers were [counterattacked](#) by 300 Soviet tanks. It took 4 days for the Germans to encircle and destroy the Soviet tanks. The Panzers then crossed River Dvina near [Dvinsk](#), and approached Leningrad.

[Army Group Center](#) was deployed in Poland. Its main objective was to capture Moscow. Opposite Army Group Center were 4 Soviet Armies. Soviet forces occupied a salient which jutted into German territory with its center at [Bialystok](#). Beyond, Bialystok was [Minsk](#) which was a key railway junction and guardian of the main highway to Moscow. [3rd Panzer Army](#) punched through the junction of the two Soviet Armies from the North and crossed the [River Neman](#), and [2nd Panzer Army](#) crossed the [River Bug](#) from the south. While the Panzers attacked, the Infantry armies struck at the Salient and encircled Soviet troops at Bialystok. The Panzer Armies' objective was to meet at Minsk and prevent any Soviet withdrawal. On June 27, 2nd and 3rd Panzer Armies met up at Minsk advancing 200 miles into Soviet Territory. In the vast pocket between Minsk and the Polish border, 32 Soviet Infantry and 8 Tank Divisions were encircled and were mercilessly [attacked](#). Soviet soldiers numbering 290,000 were captured, while another 250,000 managed to escape.

[Army Group South](#) was deployed in Southern Poland and Romania and also included two Romanian Armies and several Italian, Slovakian and Hungarian Divisions. Its objective was to secure the oil fields of the Caucasus. In the South, Soviet commanders quickly reacted to the German attack and commanded tank forces vastly outnumbering the Germans. Opposite the Germans in the South were 3 Soviet Armies. The German struck at the junctions of the 3 Soviet Armies but [1st Panzer Army](#) struck right through the Soviet Army with the objective of capturing [Brody](#). On June 26, 5 Soviet Mechanized Corps with over 1,000 Tanks mounted a massive [counterattack](#) on 1st Panzer Army. The

Battle was among the fiercest of the invasion lasting over 4 days. In the end the Germans prevailed but the Soviets inflicted heavy losses on the 1st Panzer Army. With the failure of the Soviet Armored offensive, the last substantial Soviet tank forces in the south were now spent.



The [October Revolution](#) military parade on November 7, 1941, in Red Square was not canceled despite German troops on the outskirts of Moscow.

On July 3, Hitler finally gave the go-ahead for the Panzers to resume their drive east after the infantry armies had caught up. The next objective of Army Group Center was the city of [Smolensk](#) which commanded the road to Moscow. Facing the Germans was an old Russian defensive line where the Soviets had deployed 6 Armies. On July 6, the Soviets launched an attack with 700 Tanks against the 3rd Panzer Army. The Germans, using their overwhelming air superiority, wiped out the Soviet tanks. The 2nd Panzer Army crossed the River Dneiper and closed on Smolensk from the south while 3rd Panzer Army after defeating the Soviet counter attack approached Smolensk from the north. Trapped between their pincers were 3 Soviet Armies. On July 26, the Panzers closed the gap and then began to [eliminate](#) the pocket which yielded over 300,000 Soviet prisoners but 200,000 evaded capture. Hitler by now had lost faith in battles of encirclement and wanted to defeat the Soviets by inflicting severe economic damage which meant seizing the oil fields in the south and Leningrad in the North. Tanks from Army Group Center were diverted to Army Group North and South to aid them. Hitler's generals vehemently opposed this as Moscow was only 200 miles away from Army Group Center and the bulk of the Red Army was deployed in that sector and only an attack there could hope to end the war quickly. But Hitler was adamant and the Tanks from Army Group Center arrived and reinforced the [4th Panzer Army](#) in the north which made it breakthrough the Soviet defenses on August 8 and by the end of August was only 30 miles from Leningrad. Meanwhile the Finns had pushed South East on both sides of [Lake Ladoga](#) reaching the old Finnish Soviet frontier.

In the South by mid-July below the [Pinsk Marshes](#), the Germans had reached to a few miles of [Kiev](#). The 1st Panzer Army then went South while the German 17th Army which was on 1st Panzer Army's southern flank struck east and in between the Germans trapped 3 Soviet Armies near [Uman](#). As the Germans eliminated the pocket, the tanks turned north and crossed the Dneiper meanwhile 2nd Panzer Army which was diverted from Army Group Center on Hitler's orders had crossed the River Desna with [2nd Army](#) on its right flank. The two Panzer armies now trapped 4 Soviet Armies and parts of two others. The encirclement of Soviet forces in Kiev was achieved on September 16. The encircled Soviets did not give up easily, a [savage battle](#) now ensued lasting for 10 days after which the Germans claimed over 600,000 Soviet soldiers captured. Hitler called it the greatest battle in history. After Kiev, the Red Army no longer outnumbered the Germans and there were no more reserves. To defend Moscow, Stalin had only 800,000 men left.

On September 9, Army Group North reached to about 7 miles from Leningrad but Hitler ordered Leningrad to be besieged. The Soviets had mounted an increasing number of attacks against Army Group Center but lacking its tanks, it was in no position to go on the offensive. Hitler had changed his mind and decided that tanks will be send back to Army Group Center for its all out drive on Moscow. [Operation Typhoon](#), the drive on Moscow began on October 2. In front of Army Group Center was a series of elaborate defense lines. The Germans easily penetrated the first defense line as 2nd Panzer

Army returning from the south took [Orel](#) which was 75 miles behind the Soviet first defense line. The Germans then pushed in and the vast pocket yielded 663,000 Soviet prisoners. Soviet forces now had only 90,000 men and 150 tanks left for the defense for Moscow.

Almost from the beginning of Operation Typhoon the weather had deteriorated steadily, slowing the German advance on Moscow to as little as 2 miles a day. On October 31, the Germany Army High Command ordered a halt on Operation Typhoon as the armies were re-organized. The pause gave the Soviets time to build up new armies and bring in the Soviet troops from the east as the [neutrality pact](#) signed by the Soviets and Japanese in April, 1941 assured Stalin that there was no longer a threat from the Japanese.

On November 15, the Germans once again began the attack on Moscow. Facing the Germans were 6 Soviet Armies. The Germans intended to let the 3rd and 4th Panzer Armies cross the [Moscow Canal](#) and envelop Moscow from the North East. The 2nd Panzer Army would attack [Tula](#) and then close in on Moscow from the South and the 4th Army would smash in the center. However, on November 22, Soviet Siberian Troops were unleashed on the 2nd Panzer Army in the South which inflicted a shocking defeat on the Germans. The 4th Panzer Army succeeded in crossing the Moscow canal and on December 2 had penetrated to 15 miles of the Kremlin. But by then the first blizzards of the winter began and the Wehrmacht was not equipped for winter warfare. Frostbite and disease had caused more casualties than combat; dead and wounded had already reached 155,000 in 3 weeks. Strength of divisions were now at 50% and the bitter cold had caused severe problems for guns and equipment. Weather conditions grounded the [Luftwaffe](#). Hitler's plans miscarried before the onset of severe winter weather; he was so confident of a lightning victory that he did not prepare for even the possibility of winter warfare in the Soviet Union. Yet his eastern army suffered more than 734,000 casualties (about 23 percent of its average strength of 3,200,000 troops) during the first five months of the invasion, and on 27 November 1941, General Eduard Wagner, the Quartermaster General of the German Army, reported that "We are at the end of our resources in both personnel and materiel. We are about to be confronted with the dangers of deep winter." Newly built up Soviet troops near Moscow now numbered over 500,000 men and Zhukov on December 5 launched a massive counter attack which pushed the Germans back over 200 miles but no decisive breakthrough was achieved. The invasion of the Soviet Union had so far cost the Germans over 250,000 dead, 500,000 wounded and most of their tanks.

German attack stalls

Main articles: [Second Battle of Kharkov](#), [Operation Blue](#), [Battle of Stalingrad](#), and [Battle of the Caucasus](#)



Operation Blau: German advances from [7 May](#), 1942 to [18 November](#), 1942: to [7 July](#), 1942 to [22 July](#), 1942 to [1 August](#), 1942 to [18 November](#), 1942

On January 6, 1942, Stalin, confident of his earlier victory, ordered a general [counter-offensive](#). Initially the attacks made good ground as Soviet pincers closed around Demyansk and Vyazma and

threatening attacks were made towards Smolensk and Bryansk. But despite these successes the Soviet offensive soon ran out of steam. By March, the Germans had recovered and stabilized their line and secured the neck of the Vyazma Pocket. Only at [Demyansk](#) was there any serious prospect of a major Soviet victory. Here a large part of the [German 16th Army](#) had been surrounded. Hitler ordered no withdrawal and the 92,000 men trapped in the pocket were to hold their ground while they were re-supplied by air. For 10 weeks they held out until April when a land corridor was opened to the west. The German forces retained Demyansk until they were permitted to withdraw in February 1943.

In May, the Soviets attempted to retake the city of Kharkov, in Eastern Ukraine. They opened with concentric attacks on either side of Kharkov and in both sides broke through German lines and a serious threat to the city emerged. In response, the Germans accelerated the plans for their own offensive and launched it 5 days later. The [German 6th Army](#) struck at the salient from the south and encircled the entire Soviet army assaulting Kharkov. In the last days of May, the Germans destroyed the forces inside the pocket. Of the Soviet troops inside the pocket, 70,000 were killed, 200,000 captured and only 22,000 managed to escape.

Hitler had by now realized that his Armies were too weak to carry out an offensive on all sectors of the Eastern Front, but if the Germans could seize the oil and fertile rich area of the Southern Soviet Union this would give the Germans the means to continue with the war. [Operation Blue](#) attempted the destruction of the Red Army's southern front, consolidation of the [Ukraine](#) west of the [River Volga](#), and the capture of the Caucasus oil fields. The Germans reinforced Army Group South by transferring divisions from other sectors and getting divisions from Axis allies. By late June, Hitler had 74 Divisions ready to go on the offensive, 51 of them German. [\[citation needed\]](#)

The Soviets did not know where the main German offensive of 1942 would come. Stalin was convinced that the German objective of 1942 would be Moscow and over 50% of all Red Army troops were deployed in the Moscow region. Only 10% of Soviet troops were deployed in the Southern Soviet Union. [\[citation needed\]](#)

On June 28, 1942, the German offensive began. Everywhere Soviet forces fell back as the Germans sliced through Soviet defenses. By July 5, forward elements of 4th Panzer Army reached the River Don near [Voronezh](#) and got embroiled in a bitter battle to capture the city. The Soviets, by tying down 4th Panzer Army, gained vital time to reinforce their defenses. The Soviets for the first time in the war were not fighting to hold hopelessly exposed positions but were retreating in good order. As German pincers closed in they only found stragglers and rear guards. Angered by the delays, Hitler re-organized Army Group South to two smaller Army Groups, [Army Group A](#) and Army Group B. The bulk of the Armored forces were concentrated with Army Group A which was ordered to attack towards the Caucasus oil fields while Army Group B was ordered to capture Stalingrad and guard against any Soviet counter attacks.

By July 23, the German 6th Army had taken [Rostov](#) but Soviet troops fought a skillful rearguard action which embroiled the Germans in heavy urban fighting to take the city. This also allowed the main Soviet formations to escape encirclements. With the River Don's crossing secured in the south and with the 6th Army's advance flagging, Hitler send the 4th Panzer Army back to join up with 6th Army. In late July, 6th Army resumed its offensive and by August 10, 6th Army cleared the Soviet presence from the west bank of the River Don but Soviet troops held out in some areas further delaying 6th Army's march east. In contrast, Army Group A after crossing the River Don on July 25 had fanned out on a broad front. The German 17th Army swung west towards the Black Sea, the 1st Panzer Army attacked towards the south and east sweeping through country largely abandoned by the Soviet troops. On August 9, 1st Panzer Army reached the foothills of the Caucasus mountains, advancing more than 300 miles.



Soviet soldiers fighting in the ruins of Stalingrad, 1942.

In order to protect their forces in the Caucasus, the Germans attempted to capture [Stalingrad](#), on their northeastern flank, crossing the Don River and advancing on the city. German bombers killed over 40,000 people and turned much of the city into rubble. The Soviet leadership realized that the German plan was the seizure of the oil fields and began sending large number of troops from the Moscow sector to reinforce their troops in the South. [Zhukov](#), one of Stalin's most trusted generals, assumed command of the Stalingrad front in early September and mounted a series of attacks from the North which further delayed the German 6th Army's attempt to seize Stalingrad. On September 13, the Germans advanced through the southern suburbs and by September 23, 1942, the main factory complex was surrounded and the German artillery was within range of the quays on the river, across which the Soviets evacuated wounded and brought in reinforcements. Ferocious [street fighting](#), hand-to-hand conflict of the most savage kind, now ensued in the ruins of the city. Exhaustion and deprivation gradually sapped men's strength. Hitler, who had become obsessed with the battle of Stalingrad, refused to countenance a withdrawal. General Paulus, in desperation, launched yet another attack early in November by which time the Germans had managed to capture 90% of the city. The Soviets, however, had been building up massive forces on the flanks of Stalingrad which were by this time severely undermanned as the bulk of the German forces had been concentrated in capturing the city and Axis satellite troops were left guarding the flanks. The Soviets launched [Operation Uranus](#) on [November 19](#) 1942, with twin attacks that met at the city of Kalach four days, encircling the 6th Army in Stalingrad.



The eastern front at the time of Operation Uranus.

The Germans requested permission to attempt a breakout, which was refused by Hitler, who ordered the [Sixth Army](#) to remain in Stalingrad where he promised they would be supplied by air until rescued. About the same time, the Soviets launched [Operation Mars](#) in a salient near the vicinity of Moscow. Its objective was to tie down [Army Group Center](#) and to prevent it from reinforcing [Army Group South](#) at Stalingrad.

Meanwhile, Army Group A's advance into the Caucasus had stalled as Soviet troops had destroyed the oil production facilities and a year's work was required to bring them back up and the remaining oil fields lay south of the Caucasus Mountains. Throughout August and September, German Mountain troops probed for a way through but by October with the onset of winter, they were no closer to their objective. With German troops encircled in Stalingrad, and Soviet armies threatening their lines of retreat, Army Group A began to fall back.

By December, Field Marshal [von Manstein](#) hastily put together a German relief force of units composed from Army Group A to relieve the trapped Sixth Army. Unable to get reinforcements from Army Group Center, the relief force only managed to get within 50 kilometers (30 mi) before they were turned back by the Soviets. By the end of the year, the Sixth Army was in desperate condition, as the *Luftwaffe* was able to supply only about a sixth of the supplies needed.

Shortly before surrendering to the Red Army on [February 2](#), 1943, [Friedrich Paulus](#) was promoted to [Field Marshal](#). This was a message from Hitler, because no German Field Marshal had ever surrendered his troops or been taken alive. Of the 300,000 strong 6th Army, only 91,000 survived to be taken prisoner, including 22 generals, of which only 5,000 men ever returned to Germany after the war. This was to be the greatest, and most costly, battle in terms of human life in history. Around 2 million men were killed or wounded on both sides, including civilians, with [Axis](#) casualties estimated to be approximately 850,000 and 750,000 for the Soviets.

Germany's second push

Main articles: [Third Battle of Kharkov](#), [Battle of Kursk](#), [Battle of the Lower Dnieper](#), [Operation Bagration](#), and [Lvov-Sandomierz Offensive](#)

“ They want a war of annihilation. We will give them a war of annihilation. ”

— [Joseph Stalin](#)



[Waffen-SS Panzergrenadiers](#) and [Tiger tanks](#) of the [SS Panzergrenadier Division Totenkopf](#) during the start of [Operation Zitadelle](#).

After the surrender of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad on [February 2](#), 1943, the [Red Army](#) launched eight offensives during the winter. Many were concentrated along the [Don basin](#) near Stalingrad. These attacks resulted in initial gains until German forces were able to take advantage of the over extended and weakened condition of the Red Army and launch a counter attack to recapture the city of Kharkov and surrounding areas. This was to be the last major strategic German victory of World War II.

The rains of spring inhibited campaigning in the Soviet Union, but both sides used the interval to build up for the inevitable battle that would come in the summer. The start date for the offensive had been moved repeatedly as delays in preparation had forced the Germans to postpone the attack. By [July 4](#), the Wehrmacht, after assembling their greatest concentration of firepower during the whole of World War II, launched their offensive against the Soviet Union at the [Kursk](#) salient. Their intentions were known by the Soviets, who hastened to defend the salient with an enormous system of earthwork defenses. The Germans attacked from both the north and south of the salient and hoped to meet in the middle, cutting off the salient and trapping 60 Soviet divisions. The German offensive in the Northern sector was ground down as little progress was made through the Soviet defenses but in the Southern Sector there was a danger of a German breakthrough. The Soviets then brought up their reserves to contain the German thrust in the Southern sector, and the ensuing [Battle of Kursk](#) became the largest tank battle of the war, near the city of [Prokhorovka](#). The Germans lacking any sizable reserves had exhausted their [armored forces](#) and could not stop the Soviet counteroffensive that threw them back across their starting positions.

The Soviets captured Kharkov following their victory at Kursk and with the Autumn rains threatening, Hitler agreed to a general withdrawal to the Dnieper line in August. As September proceeded into October, the Germans found the Dnieper line impossible to hold as the Soviet bridgeheads grew. Important Dnieper towns started to fall, with Zaporozhye the first to go, followed by Dnepropetrovsk. Early in November the Soviets broke out of their bridgeheads on either side of Kiev and recaptured the Ukrainian capital. The [1st Ukrainian Front](#) attacked at Korosten on [Christmas Eve](#), and the Soviet advance continued along the [railway line](#) until the 1939 Soviet-Polish border was reached.



Soviet advances from August 1943 to December 1944.

Soviet counter-attack and conquest of Germany

Main articles: [Vistula-Oder Offensive](#) and [Battle of Berlin](#)

The Soviets launched their winter offensive in January 1944 in the Northern sector and relieved the brutal [siege of Leningrad](#). The Germans conducted an orderly retreat from the [Leningrad area](#) to a shorter line based on the lakes to the south. By March the Soviets struck into Romania from Ukraine. The Soviet forces encircled the [First Panzer Army](#) north of the [Dniestr](#) river. The Germans escaped the pocket in April, saving most of their men but losing their heavy equipment. During April, the Red Army launched a series of attacks near the city of [Iasi](#), Romania, aimed at capturing the strategically important sector which they hoped to use as a springboard into Romania for a summer offensive. The Soviets were held back by the German and Romanian forces when they launched the attack through the forest of [Târgul Frumos](#) as Axis forces successfully defended the sector through the month of April.

As Soviet troops neared Hungary, German troops occupied Hungary on [March 20](#). Hitler thought that Hungarian leader Admiral [Miklós Horthy](#) might no longer be a reliable ally. Germany's other Axis ally, Finland had sought a separate peace with Stalin in February 1944, but would not accept the initial terms offered. On [June 9](#), the Soviet Union began the [Fourth strategic offensive](#) on the [Karelian Isthmus](#) that, after three months, forced Finland to accept an armistice.

Before the Soviets could begin their Summer offensive into Belarus they had to clear the Crimea peninsula of Axis forces. Remnants of the German Seventeenth Army of Army Group South and some Romanian forces were cut off and left behind in the peninsula when the Germans retreated from the Ukraine. In early May, the Red Army's [3rd Ukrainian Front](#) attacked the Germans and the ensuing battle was a complete victory of the Soviet forces and a botched evacuation effort across the [Black Sea](#) by Germany failed.



Ruins of the Bank Polski after the [Warsaw Uprising](#).

With the Crimea cleared, the long awaited Soviet summer offensive codenamed, [Operation Bagration](#), began on [June 22](#), 1944 which involved 2.5 million men and 6,000 tanks. Its objective was to clear German troops from Belarus and crush German Army Group Center which was defending that sector. The offensive was timed to coincide with the [Allied landings in Normandy](#) but delays caused the offensive to be postponed for a few weeks. The subsequent battle resulted in the destruction of German Army Group Centre and over 800,000 German casualties, the greatest defeat for the Wehrmacht during the war. The Soviets swept forward, reaching the outskirts of Warsaw on [July 31](#).

The proximity of the Red Army led the Poles in Warsaw to believe they would soon be liberated. On [August 1](#), they revolted as part of the wider [Operation Tempest](#). Nearly 40,000 Polish resistance fighters seized control of the city. The Soviets, however, did not advance any further.^[10] The only assistance given to the Poles was artillery fire, as German army units moved into the city to put down the revolt. The resistance ended on [October 2](#). German units then destroyed most of what was left of the city.

In Yugoslavia, the tide of the civil war was turning to favor the Partisans. On 16 June 1944, [the Treaty of Vis](#) was signed between the Partisans and the Royal Government, officially making the Partisans the regular army of Yugoslavia. By the end of August, Josip Tito was appointed as the Chief-of-Staff of the [Yugoslav Army in the Fatherland](#), although his Royalist rival Mihajlović and many Chetniks continued fighting their own resistance until their final defeat in the [Battle on Lijevo field](#) by a Croatian coalition.



Battles in NE Transylvania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (1944 - 1945)

Following the destruction of German Army Group Center, the Soviets attacked German forces in the south in mid-July 1944, and in a month's time they cleared Ukraine of German presence inflicting heavy losses on the Germans. Once Ukraine had been cleared the Soviet forces struck into Romania. The Red Army's 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts engaged German *Heeresgruppe Süd*, which consisted of German and Romanian formations, in an operation to occupy Romania and destroy the German formations in the sector. The result of the [Battle of Romania](#) was a complete victory for the Red Army, and a switch of Romania from the Axis to the Allied camp. [Bulgaria](#) surrendered to the Red Army in September. Following the German retreat from Romania, the Soviets entered Hungary in October 1944 but the German Sixth Army encircled and destroyed three corps of Marshal Rodion Yakovlevich Malinovsky's Group Pliyev near [Debrecen](#), Hungary. The

rapid assault the Soviets had hoped that would lead to the capture of Budapest was now halted and Hungary would remain Germany's ally until the end of the war in Europe. This battle would be the last German victory in the Eastern Front.

As the [Red Army](#) continued their advance into the Balkans, [Bulgaria](#) left the Axis on [September 9](#), and German troops abandoned [Greece](#) on [October 12](#). Concurrently, Yugoslav Partisans shifted operations into [Serbia](#), freed [Belgrade](#) on [October 20](#) with Soviet help, and assisted the [Albanian Resistance](#) rout the Germans by [November 29](#). By year end, the Partisans controlled the eastern half of Yugoslavia and the [Dalmatian](#) coast, and were ready for a final westward offensive by late March, 1945.

The Soviets recovered from their defeat in Debrecen and advancing columns of the Red Army liberated Belgrade in late December and reached Budapest on [December 29](#), 1944 and en-circled the city where over 188,000 Axis troops were trapped including many German Waffen-SS. The Germans held out till [February 13](#), 1945 and the siege became one of the bloodiest of the war. Meanwhile the Red Army's 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Baltic Fronts engaged the remnants of German Army Group Center and [Army Group North](#) to capture the [Baltic region](#) from the Germans in October 1944. The result of the series of battles was a permanent loss of contact between Army Groups North and Centre, and the creation of the [Courland Pocket](#) in Latvia where the [18th](#) and [16th](#) German Armies, numbering over 250,000 men were trapped and would remain there till the end of the war.



[Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgiy Konstantinovich Zhukov.](#)

With the Balkans and most of Hungary cleared of German troops by late December 1944, the Soviets began a massive re-deployment of their forces to Poland for their upcoming Winter offensive. Soviet preparations were still on-going when Churchill asked Stalin to launch his offensive as soon as possible to ease German pressure in the West. Stalin agreed and the offensive was set for January 12, 1945. [Konev](#)'s armies attacked the Germans in southern Poland and expanded out from their [Vistula River](#) bridgehead near Sandomierz. On [January 14](#), [Rokossovskiy](#)'s armies attacked from the [Narew River](#) north of Warsaw. Zhukov's armies in the center attacked from their bridgeheads near Warsaw. The combined Soviet offensive broke the defenses covering [East Prussia](#), leaving the German front in chaos.

Zhukov took Warsaw by [January 17](#) and by [January 19](#), his tanks took [Łódź](#). That same day, Konev's forces reached the German prewar border. At the end of the first week of the offensive, the Soviets had penetrated 160 kilometers (100 mi) deep on a front that was 650 kilometers (400 mi) wide. The Soviet onslaught finally halted on the [Oder River](#) at the end of January, only 60 kilometers (40 mi) from Berlin.



Berlin and Prague offensive on the Eastern Front, 1945.

The Soviets had hoped to capture Berlin by mid-February but that proved hopelessly optimistic. German resistance which had all but collapsed during the initial phase of the attack had stiffened immeasurably. Soviet supply lines were over-extended. The spring thaw, the lack of air support, and fear of encirclement through flank attacks from [East Prussia](#), [Pommern](#) and [Silesia](#) led to a general halt in the Soviet offensive. The newly created Army Group Vistula, under the command of Heinrich Himmler, attempted a counter-attack on the exposed flank of the Soviet Army but failed by February 24. This made it clear to Zhukov that the flank had to be secure before any attack on Berlin could be mounted. The Soviets then re-organized their forces and then struck north and cleared Pomerania and then attacked the south and cleared Silesia of German troops. In the south, three German attempts to relieve the encircled Budapest garrison failed, and the city fell to the Soviets on February 13. Again the Germans counter-attacked; Hitler insisting on the impossible task of regaining the Danube River. By March 16, the attack had failed, and the Red Army counter-attacked the same day. On March 30, they entered Austria and captured Vienna on April 13.



Red Army soldiers raising the Soviet flag on the roof of the [Reichstag](#) in [Berlin, Germany](#).

Hitler had believed that the main Soviet target for their upcoming offensive would be in the south near [Prague](#) and not Berlin and had sent the last remaining German reserves to defend that sector. The Red Army's main goal was in fact Berlin and by [April 16](#) it was ready to begin its [final assault on Berlin](#). Zhukov's forces struck from the center and crossed the [Oder river](#) but got bogged down under stiff German resistance around [Seelow Heights](#). After three days of very heavy fighting and 33,000 Soviet soldiers dead,^[11] the last defenses of Berlin were breached. Konev crossed the Oder river from the South and was within striking distance of Berlin but Stalin ordered Konev to guard the flanks of Zhukov's forces and not attack Berlin, as Stalin had promised the capture of Berlin to Zhukov [\[citation needed\]](#). Rokossovskiy's forces crossed the Oder from the North and linked up with British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's forces in northern Germany while the forces of Zhukov and Konev captured Berlin.





[Marshals of the Soviet Union Zhukov](#) (on the white horse) and [Rokossovskiy](#) at the [Victory Parade in Red Square](#) on [June 24](#), 1945

By [April 24](#), the Soviet army groups had encircled the [German Ninth Army](#) and part of the [4th Panzer Army](#). These were main forces that were supposed to defend Berlin but Hitler had issued orders for these forces to hold their ground and not retreat. Thus the main German forces which were supposed to defend Berlin were trapped southeast of the city. Berlin was encircled around the same time and as a final resistance effort, Hitler called for civilians, including teenagers and the elderly, to fight in the [Volkssturm](#) militia against the oncoming Red Army. Those marginal forces were augmented by the battered German remnants that had fought the Soviets in [Seelow Heights](#). Hitler ordered the encircled [Ninth Army](#) under General [Theodor Busse](#) to break out and link up with the [German Twelfth Army](#) under General [Walther Wenck](#). After linking up, the armies were to relieve Berlin, an impossible task. The surviving units of the Ninth Army were instead driven into the forests around Berlin near the village of Halbe where they were involved in particularly [fierce fighting](#) trying to break through the Soviet lines and reach the Twelfth Army. A minority managed to join with the Twelfth Army and fight their way west to surrender to the Americans. Meanwhile the fierce urban fighting continued in Berlin. The Germans had stockpiled a very large quantity of [panzerfausts](#) and took a very heavy toll on Soviet tanks in the rubble filled streets of Berlin. However, the Soviets employed the lessons they learned during the urban fighting of Stalingrad and were slowly advancing to the center of the city. German forces in the city resisted tenaciously, in particular the [SS Nordland](#) which was made of foreign SS volunteers, because they were ideologically motivated and they believed that they would not live if captured. The fighting was house-to-house and hand-to-hand. The Soviets sustained 360,000 casualties; the Germans sustained 450,000 including civilians and above that 170,000 captured. Hitler and his staff moved into the [Führerbunker](#), a concrete bunker beneath the Chancellery, where on [April 30](#), 1945, [he committed suicide](#), along with his bride, [Eva Braun](#).

End of the war in Europe

Main articles: [Yalta Conference](#), [End of World War II in Europe](#), and [Prague Offensive](#)



Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin at Yalta in 1945.

[Roosevelt](#), Churchill, and [Stalin](#) made arrangements for post-war Europe at the Yalta Conference in February 1945. Their meeting resulted in many important resolutions such as the formation of the [United Nations](#), democratic elections in Poland, borders of Poland [moved westwards](#) at the [expense of](#) Germany, Soviet nationals were to be [repatriated](#) and it was agreed that Soviet Union would attack Japan within three months of Germany's surrender.

After Hitler's death (on April 30), [Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz](#) became leader of the German government but the German [war effort](#) quickly disintegrated. German forces in Berlin surrendered the city to Soviet troops on [May 2](#), 1945. The German forces in Italy surrendered on [May 2](#), 1945, at General Alexander's headquarters, and German forces in [northern Germany](#), Denmark, and the Netherlands surrendered on [May 4](#). The German High Command under Generaloberst [Alfred Jodl](#)

surrendered unconditionally all remaining German forces on [May 7](#) in [Rheims](#), France. The western Allies celebrated "[V-E Day](#)" on [May 8](#), since the final German surrender was signed in Berlin on that day. The Soviet Union celebrated "[Victory Day](#)" on [May 9](#) due to time zone differences; the final cessation of German military activity happened at one minute past midnight by their clock. Some remnants of German Army Group Center continued resistance until [May 11](#) or [May 12](#) (see [Prague Offensive](#)).^[12]

Asia-Pacific Theatre

Events leading up to the war in Asia

Main articles: [Japanese expansionism](#), [Events preceding World War II in Asia](#), [Second Sino-Japanese war](#), [Battle of Lake Khasan](#), and [Battle of Khalkhin Gol](#)



[Hideki Tojo](#), Prime Minister of [Imperial Japan](#).

Following the policies adopted after the [Treaty of Versailles](#) by occidental powers toward the recognition of Japan as a colonial power, many politicians and militarist leaders such as [Fumimaro Konoe](#) and [Sadao Araki](#) promoted the idea that Japan had a [right to conquer Asia and unify it](#), under the rule of Emperor [Hirohito](#).

Japan [invaded Manchuria](#) in 1931 and [China](#) in 1937 to bolster its meager stock of natural resources, to relieve Japan from [population pressures](#) and to extend its colonial realm to a wider area. The [Japanese](#) made initial advances but were stalled in the [Battle of Shanghai](#). The city eventually fell to the Japanese in December 1937, with the capital city [Nanjing](#). As a result, the Chinese Nationalist government moved its seat to [Wuhan](#) and then to [Chongqing](#) for the remainder of the war. Conquered areas of China became subject to a harsh occupation, with many [atrocities against civilians](#), most notably the [Rape of Nanking](#) and frequently used [chemical weapons](#). Neither Japan or China officially declared war, for a similar reason—fearing declaration of war would alienate Europe and the United States.

In Spring 1939, Soviet and Japanese forces clashed in [Mongolia](#). The growing Japanese presence in the Far East was seen as a major strategic threat by the Soviet Union, and Soviet fear of having to fight a [two front war](#) was a primary reason for the [Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact](#) with the Nazis (other

historians mention [Munich Agreement](#) as a supposition to this pact). The Japanese invasion of Mongolia was repulsed by Soviet units under [General Georgiy Zhukov](#). Following this battle, the Soviet Union and Japan were at peace until 1945. Japan looked south to expand its empire, leading to conflict with the United States over the [Philippines](#) and control of shipping lanes to the [Dutch East Indies](#). The Soviet Union focused on the west, leaving only minimal troops to guard the frontier with Japan.

Japanese forces invaded [French Indochina](#) on [September 22](#), 1940. The [United States](#) (after having renounced the U.S.-Japanese [trade treaty](#) of 1911), [United Kingdom](#), [Australia](#) and the [Netherlands](#) (which controlled the [oil](#) of the [Dutch East Indies](#)), reacted in 1941 by instituting embargoes on exports of natural resources to Japan. The western powers also began making loans to [China](#) and providing [covert military assistance](#).

Japan was faced with the choice of withdrawing from China and Indochina, negotiating some compromise, buying what they needed somewhere else, or going to war to conquer territories that contained oil, [iron ore](#), [bauxite](#) and other resources. Japan's leaders believed that the existing Allies were preoccupied with the war against Germany, and that the United States would not be war-ready for years and would compromise before waging full-scale war. Japan thus proceeded with its plans for the [war in the Pacific](#) by launching nearly simultaneous attacks on [Malaya](#), [Thailand](#), [Hong Kong](#), [Hawaii](#), [the Philippines](#), and [Wake Island](#).

For propaganda purposes, Japan's leaders stated that the goal of its military campaigns was to create the [Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere](#). This, they claimed, would be a co-operative league of Asian nations, freed by Japan from European imperialist domination, and liberated to achieve autonomy and self-determination. In practice, occupied countries and peoples were completely subordinate to Japanese authority.

China

Main articles: [Pacific War](#), [Battle of Singapore](#), [Battle of Changde](#), [Battle of Henan-Hunan-Guangxi](#), and [Battle of Imphal](#)

Territory of the Empire of Japan at its peak.

“ I praise the Army for cutting down like weeds large numbers of the enemy. ”

— [Hirohito](#)

On December 3, 1941, the [Imperial General Headquarters](#) authorized general [Yasuji Okamura](#) to implement the [sanko sakusen](#) in North China ^[13]. Four days later, the [Imperial General Headquarters](#) launched the [Greater East Asia War](#). Less than 24 hours after the Attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan invaded [Hong Kong](#). The Philippines and the [British colonies](#) of [Malaya](#), [Borneo](#), and [Burma](#) soon followed, with Japan's intention of seizing the oilfields of the Dutch East Indies. Despite fierce resistance by Philippine, Australian, New Zealand, [British](#), [Canadian](#), [Indian](#), and [American forces](#), all these territories capitulated to the Japanese in a matter of months. [Singapore fell to the Japanese](#) on February 15. Approximately 80,000 British Commonwealth personnel (along with 50,000 taken in Malaya), went into Japanese POW camps, representing the largest-ever surrender of British-led personnel. Churchill considered the British defeat at Singapore as one of the most humiliating British defeats of all time.



Chinese troops in the [Battle of Changde](#), called the Stalingrad of the East. China and Japan lost a combined total of 100,000 men in this battle.

Japan launched a major offensive in China following the attack on Pearl Harbor. The aim of the offensive was to take the strategically important city of [Changsha](#), which the Japanese had failed to capture on two previous occasions. For the attack, the Japanese massed 120,000 soldiers under four divisions. The Chinese responded with 300,000 men, and soon the Japanese army was encircled and had to retreat.

The Chinese Nationalist [Kuomintang](#) Army, under [Chiang Kai-shek](#), and the [Communist Chinese Army](#), under [Mao Zedong](#), both opposed the Japanese occupation of China, but never truly allied against the Japanese. Conflict between Nationalist and Communist forces emerged long before the war; it continued after and, to an extent, even during the war, though less openly.

In April 1944, the Japanese launched [Operation Ichigo](#), to secure the railway route from Peking to Nanking, and to clear southern China of American airfields under the command of General [Chennault](#)^[14]. The operation was successful in that it opened a continuous corridor from Peking to Indochina, and the airfields were forced to relocate inland. However it failed to destroy the army of [Chiang Kai-shek](#), and the Americans soon acquired the [Marianas](#), from which they could bomb the [Japanese Home Islands](#).

South-East Asia

Main article: [South-East Asian theatre of World War II](#)

The Japanese had captured most of [Burma](#), severing the [Burma Road](#) by which the Western Allies had been supplying the Chinese Nationalists. This loss forced the Allies to create a large sustained airlift from India, known as "flying [the Hump](#)". Under the American General [Joseph Stilwell](#), [Chinese forces in India](#) were retrained and re-equipped, while preparations were made to drive the [Ledo Road](#) from India to replace the Burma Road. This effort was to prove an enormous engineering task.



[Netaji Subash Chandra Bose](#) — one of the most prominent leaders of the [Indian Independence Movement](#), sought alliance with the [Nazis](#) and led the [Indian National Army](#) against the allies in [Imphal](#) & [Burma](#) during World War II.

While the Americans steadily built the [Ledo Road](#) from [India](#) to China, in March 1944, the Japanese began their own offensive into India. This "Delhi Chalo" ('March to [Delhi](#)') was initiated by [Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose](#),^[15] the commander of [Indian National Army](#) (a force comprising POWs from the [British Indian Army](#) who had been captured by the Japanese and had decided to join the war in an attempt to rid India of their colonial rulers, and thereby attain independence).^[16]



The [Indian Army's Gurkha Rifles](#) crossing the [Irrawaddy River](#) on [27 January](#), 1945. The Gurkhas were involved in hard fought actions with the Japanese during the early months of 1945.

The Japanese attempted to destroy the main British and Indian forces at [Imphal](#), resulting in ferocious fighting. While the encircled allied troops were reinforced and resupplied by [transport aircraft](#) until fresh troops broke the siege, the Japanese, in part due to torrential rains, ran out of supplies and starved. The surviving forces eventually retreated losing 85,000 men, one of the largest Japanese defeats of the war.

During the monsoon from August to November 1944, the Japanese were pursued to the [Chindwin River](#) in Burma. With the onset of the [dry season](#) in early 1945, while the [American and Chinese forces](#) finally completed the Ledo Road, although too late to have any decisive effect, the [British Fourteenth Army](#), consisting of Indian, British, and African units, launched an offensive into Central Burma. The Japanese forces were heavily defeated, and the Allies pursued them southward, taking Rangoon on May 2 (see [Operation Dracula](#)).

Pacific Ocean

Main articles: [Pacific Ocean theater of World War II](#), [South West Pacific theatre of World War II](#), [Solomon Islands campaign](#), [Gilbert and Marshall Islands campaign](#), [Battle of Iwo Jima](#), and [Battle of Okinawa](#)

“ I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve. ”

— [Isoroku Yamamoto](#) *When and where are you ever going to put up a good fight and a decisive battle?*, [Hirohito](#)^[17]



The American battleships [West Virginia](#) and [Tennessee](#) under attack at [Pearl Harbor](#).

Hitler kept his plan to invade the USSR secret from the Japanese. The USSR, fearing a [two-front war](#), decided to make peace with Japan. On [April 13](#), 1941, the USSR and Japan signed the [Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact](#), thus allowing the Japanese to concentrate their attention to the upcoming war in Asia-Pacific.

In the summer of 1941, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands began an oil embargo against Japan, threatening its ability to fight a major war at sea or in the air. However, Japanese forces continued to advance into China. Japan planned an attack on [Pearl Harbor](#) to cripple the [U.S. Pacific Fleet](#), then seize [oil fields](#) in the [Dutch East Indies](#).

On [December 7](#), Japan launched almost simultaneous surprise attacks against Pearl Harbor, [Thailand](#) and on the British territories of [Malaya](#) and [Hong Kong](#). A [Japanese carrier fleet](#) launched an unexpected air attack on Pearl Harbor. The raid destroyed most of the American aircraft on the island and knocked the main American [battle fleet](#) out of action (three battleships were sunk, and five more were heavily damaged, though only [USS Arizona](#) and [USS Oklahoma](#) were permanently lost, the other six battleships were repaired and eventually returned to service). However, the four American aircraft carriers that had been the intended main target of the Japanese attack were off at sea. At Pearl Harbor, the main dock, supply, and repair facilities were quickly repaired. Furthermore, the base's fuel storage facilities, whose destruction could have crippled the Pacific fleet, were untouched. The attack united American public opinion to demand vengeance against Japan. The following day, [December 8](#), the [United States declared war](#) on Japan as did the [United Kingdom](#).



Admiral [Isoroku Yamamoto](#), [Commander-in-Chief](#) of the [Imperial Japanese Navy](#), 1939–43.

Simultaneously with the attack on Hawaii, the Japanese attacked [Wake Island](#), an American territory in the central Pacific. The initial landing attempt was repulsed by the garrison of [Marines](#), and fierce resistance continued until December 23. The Japanese sent heavy reinforcements, and the garrison surrendered when it became clear that no American relief force was coming.

Disaster struck the British on December 10, as they lost two major battleships, [HMS Prince of Wales](#) and [HMS Repulse](#). Both ships had been attacked by 85 Japanese bombers and torpedo planes based in [Saigon](#), and 840 UK sailors perished. Churchill was to say of the event, "In all of the war I have never received a more direct shock."

Germany declared war on the United States on [December 11](#), even though it was not obliged to do so under the [Tripartite Pact](#). Hitler hoped that Japan would support Germany by attacking the Soviet Union. Japan did not do so because it had signed a non-aggression treaty, preferring instead to focus

on expanding its empire in China, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Rather than opening a second front on the USSR, the effect of Germany's declaration of war was to remove any significant opposition within the United States to joining the fight in the European Theater.

The Allies were officially formed in the [Declaration by United Nations](#) on [January 1](#), 1942. Soon afterwards, the [American-British-Dutch-Australian Command](#) (ABDACOM) was formed to unite Allied forces in South East Asia. It was the first Allied supreme command of the war.

In April, the [Doolittle Raid](#), the first Allied air raid on Tokyo, boosted morale in the United States and caused Japan to shift resources to homeland defense, but did little physical damage.

In the six months after Pearl Harbor the Japanese had achieved nearly all of their naval objectives. Their fleet of eleven battleships, ten carriers, eighteen heavy and twenty light cruisers remained relatively intact. They had seriously damaged or sunk all U.S. battleships in the Pacific. The British and Dutch Far Eastern fleets had been destroyed, and the Royal Australian Navy had been driven back to port.^[18] Their ring of conquests settled on a defensive perimeter of their choosing, extending from the Central Pacific to New Guinea to Burma.

Opposing this, the only significant strategic force remaining to the Allies was the naval base at Pearl Harbor, including the U.S. Pacific Fleet's three aircraft carriers. Both sides viewed a decisive battle between aircraft carriers as inevitable, and the Japanese were confident in that they held a numerical advantage in heavy carriers of 10:3.^[19] They also had an excellent carrier-based aircraft in the [Zero](#). The Japanese sent a task force towards Midway Island, an outlier of the Hawaiian Islands, with the goal of drawing the remainder of the American fleet to battle.



[Akagi](#) Japanese flagship of the 6 carrier strikeforce, which [attacked Pearl Harbor](#), sunk at [Midway](#)

On [June 5](#), American carrier-based dive-bombers sighted the Japanese force and sank four of Japan's best aircraft carriers in the [Battle of Midway](#), at the cost of the carrier *Yorktown*. This was a major victory for the United States, and marked the turning point of the war in the Pacific. American shipbuilding and aircraft production vastly outpaced the Japanese, and the Japanese fleet would never again enjoy such numerical superiority.

U.S., New Zealand, Australian and Pacific Island forces undertook the prolonged campaign to retake the occupied parts of the [Solomon Islands](#), New Guinea, and the Dutch East Indies, experiencing some of the toughest resistance of the war. The rest of the Solomon Islands were retaken in 1943.

In November 1943, [U.S. Marines](#) won the [Battle of Tarawa](#). This was the first heavily opposed [amphibious assault](#) in the [Pacific theater](#). The high casualties taken by the Marines sparked off a

storm of protest in the United States, where the large losses could not be understood for such a tiny and seemingly unimportant island. The Allies adopted a policy of bypassing some Japanese island strongholds and letting them "wither on the vine", cut off from supplies and troop reinforcements.

The Allied advance continued in the Pacific with the capture of the [Marshall Islands](#) before the end of February. Some 42,000 [U.S. Army](#) soldiers and U.S. Marines landed on [Kwajalein atoll](#) on [January 31](#). [Fierce fighting](#) occurred, and the island was taken on [February 6](#). U.S. Marines next defeated the Japanese in the [Battle of Eniwetok](#).

Throughout 1944, Allied submarines and aircraft attacked Japanese merchant shipping and deprived Japan's industry of the raw materials it had gone to war to obtain. The main target was oil, and Japan ran almost dry by late 1944. In 1944, submarines sank over two million tons of cargo,^[20] while the Japanese were only able to replace less than one million tons.^[21]



[USS Franklin](#) badly damaged after sustained kamikaze attacks in March 1945 just before the [Battle of Okinawa](#).

The United States captured [Iwo Jima](#) in February. The island was psychologically important because it was traditional Japanese territory, administered by the Tokyo prefecture. It was heavily defended with many underground entrenchments, but was eventually taken by Marines after they captured Mount Suribachi, a keystone of the defense. Iwo Jima proved invaluable because of its two airfields that were used for emergency landings for B29's, and because it was close enough to provide fighter escort that could reach the [Japanese Home Islands](#).^[22]

With the subsequent capture of [Okinawa](#) (April through June), the U.S. brought the Japanese homeland within easier range of naval and air attack. The Japanese defended the island with ground forces, kamikazes, and with the one-way suicide mission of the battleship [Yamato](#), which was sunk by American dive-bombers. Amongst dozens of other Japanese cities, [Tokyo was firebombed](#), and about 90,000 people died from the initial attack. The dense [living conditions](#) around production centres and the wooden residential constructions contributed to the large loss of life. In addition, the ports and major waterways of Japan were extensively mined by air in [Operation Starvation](#), which seriously disrupted the logistics of the [island nation](#).

South West Pacific

Main article: [South West Pacific theatre of World War II](#)

Philippines

Main articles: [Philippines campaign \(1944-45\)](#) and [Mariana and Palau Islands campaign](#)

Japan also [invaded the Philippines](#), a U.S. Commonwealth, on [December 8, 1941](#). American and Filipino forces, under [General Douglas MacArthur](#), were forced to retreat to the [Bataan Peninsula](#). Dogged resistance continued until April, buying precious time for the Allies. Following their surrender,

the survivors were led on the [Bataan Death March](#). Allied resistance continued for an additional month on the island fortress of [Corregidor](#), until it too surrendered. General MacArthur, who had been ordered to retreat to Australia, vowed, "I shall return."

The U.S. strategic objective was to gain airbases within bombing range of the new [B-29s](#) on the [Mariana Islands](#), especially [Saipan](#), [Tinian](#) and [Guam](#). On [June 11](#), the U.S. Naval fleet bombarded Saipan, defended by 32,000 Japanese troops; 77,000 Marines landed starting the 15th, and the island was secure by July 9. The Japanese committed much of their declining naval strength in the [Battle of the Philippine Sea](#), but suffered severe losses in both ships and aircraft. After the battle, the Japanese aircraft carrier force was no longer militarily effective. With the capture of Saipan, Japan was finally within range of B-29 bombers.



"*I have returned.*" — A famous photo of [Gen. MacArthur](#) coming ashore back to the Philippines.

Guam was invaded on [July 21](#) and taken on [August 10](#), but the Japanese fought fanatically. Mopping-up operations continued long after the [Battle of Guam](#) was officially over. The island of [Tinian](#) was invaded on [July 24](#) and was conquered on [August 1](#). This operation saw the first use of [napalm](#) in the war.^[23]

General MacArthur's troops liberated the Philippines, landing on the island of [Leyte](#) on [October 20](#). The Japanese had prepared a rigorous defense and used the last of their naval forces in a failed attempt to destroy the invasion force in the [Battle of Leyte Gulf](#), [October 23](#) through [October 26](#), 1944, arguably the [largest naval battle in history](#). This was the first battle that employed Japanese [kamikaze](#) attacks. The Japanese battleship [Musashi](#), one of the two largest battleships ever built, was sunk by 19 American torpedoes and 17 bombs.

In January 1945, the [U.S. Sixth Army](#) landed on [Luzon](#), the main island of the Philippines. Manila was recaptured by March.

Dutch East Indies

ABDACOM naval forces were all but destroyed in the [Battle of the Java Sea](#)—the largest naval battle of the war up that point—on February 28 through March 1. The joint command was wound up shortly afterwards, to be replaced by three Allied supreme commands in southern Asia and the Pacific.

The last major offensive in the [South West Pacific Area](#) was the [Borneo campaign](#) of mid-1945, which was aimed at further isolating the remaining Japanese forces in Southeast Asia and securing the release of Allied prisoners of war.

New Guinea

Main article: [New Guinea campaign](#)

In early May 1942, the Japanese implemented [Mo Sakusen](#) (Operation Mo), a plan to take [Port Moresby](#), [New Guinea](#). The first stage was thwarted by the [U.S.](#) and [Australian navies](#) in the [Battle of the Coral Sea](#). This was both the first battle fought between aircraft carriers, and the first battle where the opposing fleets never made direct visual contact. The American aircraft carrier [Lexington](#) was sunk and the [Yorktown](#) was severely damaged, while the Japanese lost the light carrier [Shōhō](#) and the large carrier [Shōkaku](#) suffered moderate damage. [Zuikaku](#) lost half of her air complement, and along with [Shōkaku](#), was unable to participate in the upcoming battle at Midway. The battle was a tactical victory for the Japanese, as they inflicted heavier losses on the American fleet, but it was a strategic American victory, as the Japanese attack on Port Moresby was deflected.

In July, the Japanese attempted to take Port Moresby by land, [along the Kokoda Track](#), a rugged, single-file path through the jungle and mountains. An outnumbered, untrained and ill-equipped Australian [reserve](#) battalion — awaiting the return of regular units from North Africa and the U.S. Army — waged a fighting retreat against a 5,000-strong Japanese force.



U.S. Marines rest in the field on Guadalcanal, August-December 1942.

On [August 7](#), [U.S. Marines](#) began the [Battle of Guadalcanal](#). For the next six months, U.S. forces fought Japanese forces for control of the island. Meanwhile, several naval encounters raged in the nearby waters, including the [Battle of Savo Island](#), [Battle of Cape Esperance](#), [Naval Battle of Guadalcanal](#), and [Battle of Tassafaronga](#).

In late August and early September, while battle raged on the Kokoda Track and Guadalcanal, an attack by [Japanese marines](#) at the eastern tip of New Guinea was defeated by Australian forces, in the [Battle of Milne Bay](#). This was the first defeat for Japanese land forces during the Pacific War.

On [January 22](#), after [a bitter battle at Gona and Buna](#), Australian and U.S. forces took back the major Japanese beachheads in eastern New Guinea, before American authorities declared Guadalcanal secure on February 9.



U.S. Air force attacked Japan by using massive incendiary bombs against Japanese cities during the war with hundreds of planes flying at low altitudes.

On June 30, the Allies launched [Operation Cartwheel](#), a grand strategy for the South and South West Pacific, aimed at isolating the major Japanese base at [Rabaul](#), before proceeding on an "[island-hopping](#)" campaign towards Japan. Three main objectives were identified: recapturing [Tulagi](#) and the [Santa Cruz Islands](#); recapturing the north coast of [New Guinea](#), and the central [Solomon Islands](#) and; the reduction of Rabaul and related bases.

By September, Australian and U.S. forces in New Guinea had [captured the major Japanese bases at Salamaua and Lae](#). Soon afterwards they launched the [Huon Peninsula](#), the [Finisterre Range](#), [Bougainville](#), and [New Britain campaigns](#).

End of the war in Asia

Main articles: [Potsdam Conference](#), [Battle of Okinawa](#), [Atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#), and [Operation August Storm](#)



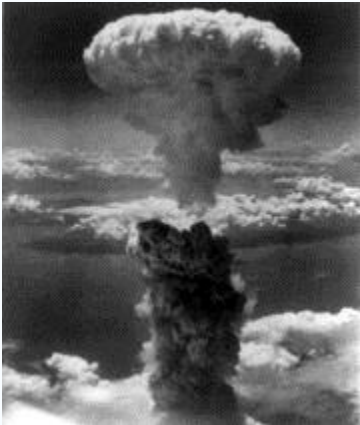
[Chiang Kai-shek](#) and [Mao Zedong](#) met in the [wartime](#) capital of [Chongqing](#), to toast to the [Chinese victory over Japan](#).

The last Allied conference of World War II was held at the suburb of [Potsdam](#), outside Berlin, from [July 17](#) to [August 2](#). During the [Potsdam Conference](#), agreements were reached among the Allies on policies for occupied Germany. An ultimatum was issued calling for the [unconditional surrender](#) of Japan.

U.S. president [Harry Truman](#) decided to use the new [atomic weapon](#) to bring the war to a swifter end. The battle for Okinawa had shown that an [invasion](#) of the Japanese mainland (planned for

November) would result in large numbers of American casualties. The official estimate given to the Secretary of War was 1.4 to four million Allied casualties, though some historians dispute whether this would have been the case. Invasion would have meant the death of millions of Japanese soldiers and civilians, who were being trained as militia.

On [August 6, 1945](#), a [B-29 Superfortress](#), the [Enola Gay](#), dropped a [nuclear weapon](#) dubbed [Little Boy](#) on [Hiroshima](#), destroying the city. On [August 9](#), a B-29 named [Bockscar](#) dropped the second atomic bomb, dubbed [Fat Man](#), on the port city of [Nagasaki](#).



The [mushroom cloud](#) resulting from the [nuclear weapon](#) known as [Fat Man](#) rises 18 km (11 mi, 60,000 ft) over [Nagasaki](#) from the [nuclear explosion hypocenter](#).

On [August 8](#), two days after the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, the Soviet Union, having renounced its [nonaggression pact](#) with Japan in April, attacked the Japanese in Manchuria, fulfilling its Yalta pledge to attack the Japanese within three months after the [end of the war in Europe](#). The attack was made by three Soviet army groups. In less than two weeks, the Japanese army in Manchuria, consisting of over a million men, had been destroyed by the Soviets. The Red Army moved into [North Korea](#) on [August 18](#). Korea was subsequently divided at the [38th parallel](#) into Soviet and U.S. zones.

The American use of atomic weapons against Japan and the Soviet invasion of Manchukuo prompted [Hirohito](#) to bypass the existing government and intervene to end the war. In his radio address to the nation, the Emperor did not mention the entry of the Soviet Union into the war, but in his "Rescript to the soldiers and sailors" of August 17, ordering them to [cease fire](#) and lay down arms, he stressed the relationship between Soviet entrance into the war and his decision to surrender, omitting any mention of the atomic bombs.

The [Japanese surrendered](#) on [August 15](#), 1945, or [V-J day](#), signing the [Japanese Instrument of Surrender](#) on September 2. The Japanese troops in China formally surrendered to the Chinese on [September 9](#), 1945. [See image](#)

Aftermath of the war

Main articles: [Aftermath of World War II](#), [Effects of World War II](#), and [Consequences of German Nazism](#)



German occupation zones in 1946 after [Allied territorial annexations](#) in the eastern part. The [Saarland](#) (in the French zone) is shown with stripes as it was removed from Germany by France in 1947 as a [protectorate](#), and was not incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany until 1957.

The end of the war hastened the independence of many [British crown colonies](#) (such as India) and [Dutch territories](#) (such as Indonesia) and the formation of new nations and alliances throughout Asia and Africa. The [Philippines](#) were granted their independence in 1946 as previously promised by the United States. France attempted and failed to regain control of its colonies in [Indochina](#).

Poland's boundaries were re-drawn to include portions of [pre-war Germany](#), including [East Prussia](#) and [Upper Silesia](#), while ceding most of the areas taken by the Soviet Union in the [Molotov-Ribbentrop](#) partition of 1939, effectively moving Poland to the west. Germany was split into four zones of occupation, and the three zones under the Western Allies was reconstituted as a [constitutional democracy](#). The Soviet Union's influence increased as they, with the tacit approval of the West, established hegemony over most of eastern Europe and incorporated parts of Finland and Poland into their new boundaries. This appeasement of Stalin by the West became known as the [Western betrayal](#) among the Soviet-dominated countries. Europe was informally split into Western and Soviet [spheres of influence](#), which heightened existing tensions between the two camps and helped establish the [Cold War](#).

To prevent (or at least minimize) future conflicts, the allied nations, led by the [United States](#), formed the [United Nations](#) in [San Francisco, California](#) in 1945. One of the first actions of the United Nations was the creation of the State of [Israel](#), partly in response to the Holocaust.

In 1947, [U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall](#) devised the "European Recovery Program", better known as the [Marshall Plan](#). Effective from 1948 to 1952, it allocated 13 billion dollars for the reconstruction of Western Europe. Of Germany's four zones of occupation, coordinated by the [Allied Control Council](#), the American, British, and French zones joined in 1949 as the [Federal Republic of Germany](#), and the Soviet zone became the [German Democratic Republic](#). In Germany, [economic suppression](#) and [denazification](#) took place for several years. Millions of Germans and Poles were expelled from their homelands as a result of the territorial annexations in Eastern Europe agreed upon at the [Yalta](#) and [Potsdam](#) conferences. Mainstream estimates of [German casualties](#) from this process range between 1-2 millions. In the West, [Alsace-Lorraine](#) was returned to France, and the [Saar area](#) was separated from Germany and put in economic union with France. [Austria](#) was divided

into four zones of occupation, which were united in 1955 to become the Republic of Austria. The Soviet Union occupied much of [Central](#) and [Eastern Europe](#) and the [Balkans](#). In all the USSR-occupied countries, with the exception of Austria, the Soviet Union helped Communist regimes to power. It also annexed the Baltic countries [Estonia](#), [Latvia](#), and [Lithuania](#).

In Asia, [Japan](#) was occupied by the U.S, aided by Commonwealth troops, until the peace treaty took effect in 1952. The Japanese Empire's government was dismantled under General [Douglas MacArthur](#) and replaced by a [constitutional monarchy](#) with the emperor as a figurehead. The defeat of Japan also led to the establishment of the Far Eastern commission which set out policies for Japan to fulfill under the terms of surrender. In accordance with the Yalta Conference agreements, the Soviet Union occupied and subsequently annexed [Sakhalin](#) and the [Kuril islands](#). Japanese occupation of [Korea](#) also ended, but the peninsula was divided between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, along 38th parallel. The U.S.-backed [South Korea](#) would fight the communist [North Korea](#) in the [Korean War](#), with Korea remaining divided.

World War II was a pivotal point in China's history. Before the war against Japan, China had suffered nearly a century of humiliation at the hands of various imperialist powers and was relegated to a semi-colonial status. However, the war greatly enhanced China's international status. The central government under [Chiang Kai-shek](#) was able to abrogate most of the unequal treaties China had signed in the past century, and China became a founding member of the [United Nations](#) and a permanent member of the [Security Council](#). China also reclaimed Manchuria and Taiwan. Nevertheless, eight years of war greatly taxed the central government, and many of its nation-building measures adopted since it came to power in 1928 were disrupted by the war. Communist activities also expanded greatly in occupied areas, making post-war administration of these areas difficult. Vast war damages and hyperinflation thereafter demoralized the populace, along with the continuation of the [Chinese Civil War](#) between the [Kuomintang](#) and the Communists. Partly because of the severe blow his army and government had suffered during the war against Japan, the Kuomintang, along with state apparatus of the [Republic of China](#), retreated to Taiwan in 1949 and in its place the Chinese communists established the [People's Republic of China](#) on the mainland.

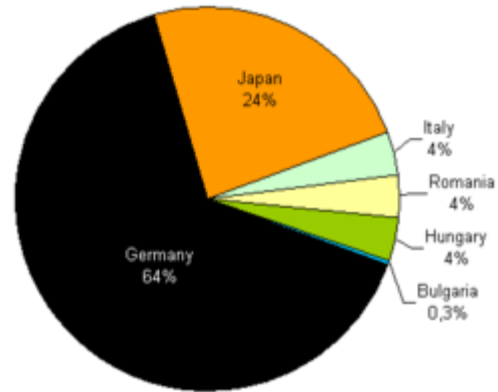
Casualties, civilian impact, and atrocities

See also: [World War II casualties](#), [War crimes during World War II](#), [Consequences of German Nazism](#), and [Population transfer in the Soviet Union](#)



German soldier killed near end of war in April 1945.

World War II Military Deaths (Axis)

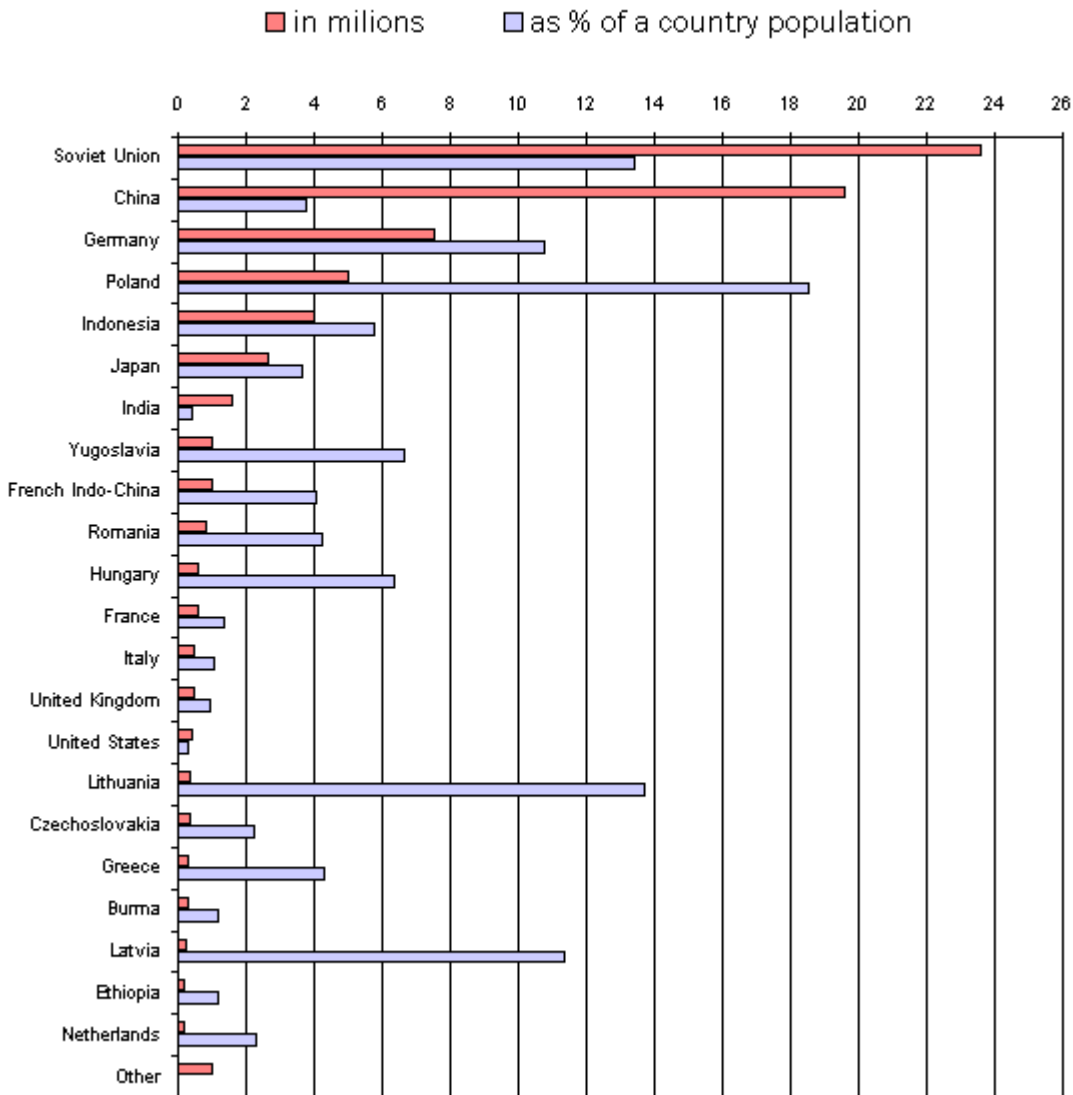


Allied Military personnel killed, percentage by country.

Axis Military personnel killed, percentage by country.

Estimates for the total casualties of the war vary, but most suggest that some 60 million people died in the war, including about 20 million soldiers and 40 million civilians.^{[24][25][26]} Many civilians died as a result of disease, starvation, massacres, [genocide](#). Of the total deaths in World War II, approximately 85% were on the Allied side (mostly Soviet and Chinese) and 15% on the Axis side. One estimate is that 12 million civilians died in Holocaust camps, 1.5 million by bombs, 7 million in Europe from other causes, and 7.5 million in China from other causes.^[27] Figures on the amount of total casualties varies to a wide extent because the majority of deaths were not documented.

Human Losses of World War Two by Country



[War II casualties#Casualties by country Casualties by country.](#)

Concentration camps and slave work

The [Holocaust](#) was the killing of approximately six million [European Jews](#), as well as another 6 million others who were deemed "unworthy of life", as part of a program of deliberate extermination planned and executed by the National Socialist government in Germany led by [Adolf Hitler](#).



Major [deportation](#) routes to [Nazi extermination camps](#) during [The Holocaust](#), Aktion T-4 and alike.

In addition to the Nazi [concentration camps](#), the Soviet [Gulag](#), or [labor camps](#), led to the death of citizens of occupied countries such as Poland, [Lithuania](#), [Latvia](#), and [Estonia](#), as well as German [prisoners of war](#) (POW) and even Soviet citizens themselves who had been supporters of the Nazis or were thought to be the ones. Sixty percent (1,238,000 ref. Krivosheev) of Soviet POWs died during the war. Vadim Erlikman puts it at 2.6 million Soviet POWs that died in German Captivity.^[28] [Richard Overy](#)^[29] gives the number of 5.7 million Soviet POW and out of those 57% died or were killed.

Japanese [POW camps](#) also had high death rates, many were used as labour camp. According to the findings of the [Tokyo tribunal](#), the death rate of occidental prisoners was 27.1%, seven times that of POW's under the Germans and Italians^[30] The death rate of Chinese was much larger as, according to the directive ratified on 5 August 1937 by [Hirohito](#), the constraints of international law were removed on those prisoners^[31]. Thus, if 37 583 prisoners from Great Britain and 28 500 from Netherlands were released after the [surrender of Japan](#), the number for the Chinese was only 56.^[32]

According to a joint study of historians featuring Zhifen Ju, Mark Peattie, Toru Kubo, and Mitsuyoshi Himeta, more than 10 million Chinese were mobilized by the Japanese army and enslaved by the [Kôa-in](#) for [slave labor](#) in [Manchukuo](#) and north [China](#).^[33] According to Mitsuyoshi Himeta, at least 2.7 million died during the [Sankō Sakusen](#) operation implemented in [Heipei](#) and [Shantung](#) by General [Yasuji Okamura](#).

On [February 19](#), 1942, Roosevelt signed [Executive Order 9066](#), leading to the internment of thousands of [Japanese](#), [Italians](#), [German Americans](#), and some emigrants from Hawaii who fled after the bombing of [Pearl Harbor](#) for the duration of the war. 150,000 [Japanese-Americans were interned](#) by the U.S. and Canadian governments, as well as nearly 11,000 German and Italian residents of the U.S.

Mistreated, starved prisoners in the [Ebensee concentration camp](#), [Austria](#).

Chemical and bacteriological weapons

Despite the [international treaties](#) and a resolution adopted by the [League of Nations](#) on 14 May 1938 condemning the use of toxic gas by [Japan](#), the [Imperial Japanese Army](#) frequently used [chemical weapons](#). Because of fears of retaliation, however, those weapons were never used against Westerners but only against other Asians judged "inferior" by the imperial propaganda. According to historians [Yoshiaki Yoshimi](#) and Seiya Matsuno, the authorization for the use of chemical weapons was given by specific orders (*rinsanmei*) issued by [Hirohito](#) himself. For example, the Emperor authorized the use of toxic gas on 375 separate occasions during the [invasion of Wuhan](#), from August to October 1938.



A survivor of German aerial bombardment, [Siege of Warsaw](#).

The [bacteriological weapons](#) were experimented on human beings by many units incorporated in the Japanese army, such as the infamous [Unit 731](#), integrated by [Imperial decree](#) in the [Kwantung](#) army in 1936. Those weapons were mainly used in China and, according to some Japanese veterans, against Mongolians and Soviet soldiers in 1939 during the [Nomonhan incident](#).^[34] According to documents found in the Australian national archives in 2004 by [Yoshimi](#) and Yuki Tanaka, cyanide gas was tested on Australian and Dutch prisoners in November 1944 in the Kai islands.^[35]

Bombings

Massive [aerial bombing](#) by both Axis and Allied air forces took the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians. For the first and so far only time, [nuclear weapons](#) were used in combat: two atomic bombs released by the United States over Japan devastated [Hiroshima](#) and, three days later, [Nagasaki](#).

War trials

From 1945 to 1951, German and Japanese officials and personnel were prosecuted for war crimes. The most senior German officials were tried at the [Nuremberg Trials](#), and many Japanese officials at the [Tokyo War Crime Trial](#) and [other war crimes trials in the Asia-Pacific region](#).

See also

- [Commanders of World War II](#)
- [Resistance during World War II](#)
- [Collaboration during World War II](#)
- [Home front during World War II](#)
- [Technology during World War II](#)
- [World War II in contemporary culture](#)
- [World War I](#)

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External links

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- [Yahoo – "World War II"](#)
- [Directory of Online World War II Indexes & Records](#)
- [WWW-VL: History: WWII](#)

General

- [World War II Database](#)
- [The Second World War - Spartacus Educational](#)
- [BBC History: World War Two - BBC](#)
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- [Timeline of events in World War 2](#) on WikiTimeScale.org
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- [Halford Mackinder's Necessary War An essay describing the geopolitical aspects of World War II](#)

Media

- [U.S. National Archives Photos](#)
- [World War II Poster Collection](#) hosted by the University of North Texas Libraries' [*Digital Collections](#)
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- [World War 2 Pictures In Colour](#)
- [Thousands of World War II Photographs & Movies](#)
- [Multimedia map](#) — Presentation that covers the war from the invasion of the Soviet Union to the fall of Berlin

On-line documents

- [World War II Military Situation Maps. Library of Congress](#)
- [Maps from the Pacific and Italian theaters](#)
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- [Daily German action reports](#)

Stories

- [WW2 People's War](#) — A project by the [BBC](#) to gather the stories of ordinary people from World War II

Documentaries

- [The World at War](#) (1974) is a 26-part [Thames Television](#) series that covers most aspects of World War II from many points of view. It includes interviews with many key figures ([Karl Dönitz](#), [Albert Speer](#), [Anthony Eden](#) etc.) ([Imdb link](#))
- [The Second World War in Colour](#) (1999) is a three episode documentary showing unique footage in color ([Imdb link](#))
- [Battlefield \(documentary series\)](#) is a World War 2 television documentary series initially issued in 1994-5 that explores many of the most important battles fought during the Second World War.

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*To 1945 unless otherwise indicated.
Principal co-belligerents in italics.*

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