

# WW2

## Events

*March 13, 1938 Germany annexes Austria*

*October 7–10 Germany takes Czech region of Sudetenland*

*August 23, 1939 German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact*

*September 1 Germany invades Poland*

*September 3 Britain and France declare war on Germany*

*September 17 USSR invades Poland from the east*

*September 19 German and Soviet forces meet in central Poland*

*September 28 Warsaw falls to Germany*

*November 30 Soviet forces invade Finland*

## Key People

*Adolf Hitler - Chancellor of Germany; pursued aggressive territorial expansion in the late 1930s*

*Neville Chamberlain - British prime minister; adhered to policy of appeasement that allowed German territorial annexations in 1938*

*Joachim von Ribbentrop - German foreign minister; signed German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact*

*Vyacheslav Molotov - Soviet foreign minister; signed German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact*

## **Germany Under Hitler**

*In 1938, Germany was a total dictatorship under the Nazi Party and Chancellor Adolf Hitler. Although the 1919 Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I had imposed strict disarmament terms on Germany, by the late 1930s, Hitler had dropped all pretense of observing the terms of the treaty. He began not only to rebuild his military rapidly, but also to speak openly of Germany's need for lebensraum , or "living space."*

## **Anschluss and Appeasement**

*In March 1938, offering little in the way of justification, Nazi troops took control Austria, which put up no resistance. Hitler claimed that the annexation was supported by his doctrine of Anschluss , or natural political unification of Germany and Austria. Though gravely disturbed, Britain and France took no action. Shortly thereafter, Hitler demanded that Czechoslovakia cede to Germany the Sudetenland, a territory along the German-Czech border. Hitler accused the Czechs of repressing the large German population there and asserted that the territory rightly belonged to Germany.*

*The September 1938 Munich Conference (please see separate document on this website regarding the Munich Crisis) was called to address the situation; ironically, Czechoslovakia was not present. After several rounds of negotiation, and despite their own treaties with*

*Czechoslovakia, Britain and France agreed to give in to Hitler's demand, as long as he agreed not to seize any further European territory. Hitler did sign an agreement to that effect, promising no further invasions.*

*After taking the Sudetenland, however, Hitler ignored the agreement and proceeded to occupy most of western Czechoslovakia, along with several other territories in eastern Europe. Britain and France again took no action. This policy of appeasement of Hitler's demands, which was advocated primarily by British prime minister Neville Chamberlain, has been much criticized as paving the road to World War II.*

### ***The Consequences of Appeasement***

*The decisions made by the Allied nations leading up to World War II, as well as those of the first six months or so after the war began, have dumbfounded historians ever since. The appeasement of Hitler, in particular, has been so often held up as an example of how not to deal with a rising dictator that it has become a stereotype.*

*However, although it may be obvious in hindsight that Hitler should not have been appeased, the actions of Prime Minister Chamberlain must be considered within the context of the time. Europe was still recovering from World War I: many of the countries of Europe were adjusting to new parliamentary governments, and the newly created League of Nations was a new force in international affairs. Few European leaders understood the full scope of Hitler's intentions, and a decision to go to war would have been hugely unpopular in countries, such as Britain and France, that had been so devastated in World War I. Indeed, many sincerely believed that the very concept of war had become obsolete.*

### ***The German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact***

*Several months after Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland, on August 23, 1939, a fateful meeting occurred in Moscow between German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov. Afterward, they announced publicly that Germany and the USSR had signed the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact to prevent hostilities between the two countries.*

*However, the ministers kept secret the fact that, in addition to agreeing not to attack each other, Germany and the USSR had also agreed to overrun the countries that lay between them. Specifically, they agreed that Germany and the USSR would each take over one half of Poland, with a further provision that the USSR would take over Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia without German interference.*

### ***The German Invasion of Poland***

*Germany's invasion of Poland came quickly and with overwhelming force. The attack began on September 1, 1939, with heavy air strikes followed by a rapidly advancing ground invasion. Hitler referred to the strategy as blitzkrieg, or "lightning war." The object of the blitzkrieg*

*strategy was to shock the opponent so severely that there would be little resistance, allowing the country to be overrun quickly, with minimal German losses.*

*The primary obstacle to the German invasion force proved to be the Polish capital of Warsaw, which did not surrender until September 27, after a prolonged siege. By this time, all of western Poland was firmly under German control.*

### ***Atrocities Against the Polish People***

*Although Germany's invasion of Poland is often cited as the definitive example of the blitzkrieg tactic, not all historians share this view. Rather than rush straight to Warsaw and topple the government, Germany's forces moved relatively slowly, focusing much of their energy on targets that were neither military nor political in nature. They sought not just to destroy the Polish government but also to obliterate the Polish people. In the first days and weeks of the war, both Jewish and non-Jewish civilians were killed regardless of whether they resisted. Villages and towns were burned, and fleeing survivors were ruthlessly chased down and shot.*

*It was in this invasion that the real nature of Hitler's plan began to reveal itself. Although the regular German army, the Wehrmacht, defeated the Polish military within days of the initial invasion, a more sinister set of squadrons followed—the Totenkopf, or "Death's Head," part of the soon-to-be-infamous S.S. These squadrons immediately began rounding up and killing Polish civilians. Larger groups of Jews were singled out and herded into the central Warsaw ghetto where they were slowly starved for the next two years. Smaller groups encountered along the way were shot on the spot. Although Jews were particularly singled out, the non-Jewish Polish peasantry was treated little better. Though these atrocities would pale in comparison with what was to come, the initial weeks of Hitler's invasion were a gruesome demonstration of the German war machine's capabilities and intentions.*

### ***The Soviet Invasion of Poland***

*Just two weeks after the German invasion began, Soviet troops invaded Poland from the east, on September 17, 1939. It took them only two days to push far enough to meet German troops advancing from the west. By this time, Germany had already taken most of Poland except for Warsaw, which was under siege. Upon meeting the Russian troops, the Germans handed over large numbers of prisoners and promptly pulled back to the line agreed upon in the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact. Retreating Polish armies, unaware that the USSR was part of Germany's occupation plan, fled directly into Russian hands.*

### ***Allied Declarations of War and the "Sitzkrieg"***

*Britain and France—which were soon labeled the Allied Powers, just as they had been in World War I—both declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, just two days after Germany began its invasion of Poland. However, aside from basic defensive preparations, neither country took significant action for several months. Rather, Britain initiated a propaganda effort against Hitler by using its bombers to drop millions of anti-Nazi leaflets over Germany. Among the British public, this effort soon came to be known as the "confetti war."*

Germany likewise took little action after the invasion of Poland was complete, aside from several small naval attacks on Allied shipping vessels. This period of relative calm has been sarcastically labeled the “Sitzkrieg,” or sitting war—a play on blitzkrieg. Rather than make an offensive move of their own, the Allies waited for the expected German attack on Belgium and France. It would not come for many months, until the late spring of 1940.

### ***The Russo-Finnish War***

*The one active hot spot during this “Sitzkrieg” was Finland, which the USSR invaded on November 30, 1939, with the goal of seizing the eastern Finnish territory of Karelia. Though vastly outnumbered and outgunned, the Finns fought back with determination and innovation, even employing troops on bicycles and skis. The invasion, which was expected to end quickly, instead lasted until March 13, 1940, when Finland finally capitulated, ceding Karelia to the Soviet Union, along with the major port of Viipuri (present-day Vyborg). Although Finland lost territory, the victory cost the USSR more than 200,000 lives, more than twice the number that it cost the Finns.*

### ***Denmark and Norway***

*After months of inaction, the first sign that Hitler was again on the move came in early April 1940. On April 9, German troops simultaneously took Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, and landed on the coast of Norway. Denmark gave in almost immediately. In Norway, although the capital at Oslo was quickly taken and a puppet government set up, a strong resistance movement supported by Britain and France continued to fight the Germans for two months. The combat was generally limited to the less densely populated areas in the north of the country.*

## **THE INVASION**

### ***Events***

*May 10, 1940 Germany begins invasions of Belgium, the Netherlands, and France*

*May 13 French and British troops move into Belgium but are trapped between German armies*

*May 14 Luftwaffe bombs central Rotterdam; Netherlands surrenders to Germany*

*May 27 British troops begin mass evacuation from Dunkirk*

*June 3 Luftwaffe initiates air raids on Paris*

*June 12 German forces penetrate France’s final lines of defense*

*June 22 France signs armistice with Germany*

*June 23 Hitler visits Paris*

### ***The Western Front***

*After months of nervous speculation, Germany brought war to western Europe on May 10, 1940, with the primary goal of conquering France. German bombers hit air bases in France, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the Netherlands, destroying large numbers of Allied planes on the ground and crippling Allied air defenses. Elite squads of German paratroopers were dropped*

*onto fortified Allied points along the front, neutralizing a key element of France's defense strategy.*

*On the ground, German forces advanced in two directions: one through the Netherlands and northern Belgium (where Britain and France had expected) and the other, larger force to the south, through Luxembourg and into the Ardennes Forest on a path that led directly into the French heartland. Unaware of the German advance to the south, Britain and France sent the bulk of their troops to Belgium.*

### ***The Fall of the Netherlands***

*During the first days of the attack, the Germans made slower progress toward Brussels and The Hague than expected, as the Dutch forces fought back formidably. In response, on May 14, the German air force, the Luftwaffe, unleashed a massive bombing attack on central Rotterdam, even while surrender negotiations with the Netherlands were under way. Although efforts were made to call off the attack at the last minute, only some of the German pilots got the message, so part of the attack was carried out. Over 800 civilians were killed, and the Netherlands surrendered that day.*

### ***Belgium***

*The British and French plan to defend Belgium was to make a stand at a line of forts between the cities of Antwerp and Liege. Unaware that these forts had already been captured by German paratrooper units on the first night of the invasion, the British and French armies found themselves under assault on May 13. At the same time, the second, unexpected German offensive to the south emerged from the Ardennes Forest. Over the next few days, the main Allied armies were trapped between the two German forces, able neither to protect Paris nor to stop the Germans from advancing to the English Channel. Then, when the German troops to the south moved between the French and British forces, the Allies were divided and thus weakened further still. The Allied defense of Belgium was unequivocally a disaster.*

### ***The Evacuation from Dunkirk***

*While the main French army was trapped between the two German armies, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was being pushed to the coast near the French port of Dunkirk. With the BEF cornered with its back to the sea, and with little hope of reuniting with French forces, the British government decided that the BEF had to be evacuated. The evacuation, called Operation Dynamo, began on May 27, 1940. It took a full week to accomplish, using more than 800 civilian and military sea vessels. In all, more than 300,000 men were brought back across the English Channel to British soil. The feat was heroic—it was done under nearly constant bombardment from the Luftwaffe—but it left France completely on its own.*

### ***The Fall of France***

*With the British out of the way, the Germans began their final push against France. By June 12, German tanks had broken through the main fronts along the Somme River and the fortified*

*Maginot Line, moving ever closer to their goal, Paris. During this time, the British vigorously encouraged France to resist at all costs. The new British prime minister, Winston Churchill, even flew to Paris himself to offer his personal encouragement. At the same time, though, the British government denied French requests for military assistance, wanting to conserve strength for Britain's own defense in the near future.*

*By this time, the size of the French army had been reduced by roughly half, and French leaders became resigned to an inevitable surrender. On June 22, 1940, France signed an armistice with Germany. Hitler insisted that it be done in the same railway car in which Germany had surrendered to France in 1918, at the end of World War I. On June 23, Hitler flew to Paris for a brief sightseeing tour of the occupied city, during which a widely published photo was taken of Hitler standing against the backdrop of the Eiffel Tower.*

### ***Reasons for France's Defeat***

*Although many have attributed Germany's rapid conquest of France to simple weakness of France's armed forces, this conclusion is incorrect. France's military at the time was actually larger and more technologically advanced than Germany's. In fact, before the invasion, a number of senior German military leaders felt strongly that Germany was unprepared to take on France militarily. During the invasion, Hitler himself was highly apprehensive and expressed disbelief at his own victories.*

*Rather, France fell primarily due to mistaken assumptions about how the attack would be carried out. Germany's advance through the Ardennes Forest was not anticipated, and even when French intelligence received word of it, they took little action because they did not believe that German tanks could make their way through a dense forest. Thus, the core of the French forces, reinforced by the British, was sent into Belgium, where the main attack was incorrectly expected to take place*

## **THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN**

### ***Events***

*July 3, 1940 British initiate Operation Catapult to neutralize French navy*

*July 10 First German bombers attack over English Channel*

*July 19 Hitler urges Britain to make peace*

*August 13 Eagle Day; more than 1,400 German planes attack southern England*

*September 7 Beginning of "London Blitz"*

*September 17 Hitler indefinitely postpones plans for ground invasion of England*

### ***Key People***

*Winston Churchill - British prime minister who took office in May 1940; rallied British people and military during Battle of Britain*

### ***Fear in Britain***

*After France fell, the British government was certain that Germany's next move would be against the United Kingdom. These fears were confirmed when British intelligence intercepted coded German radio transmissions that made it clear that an invasion of Britain was imminent. Preparations in Britain had long been under way, and aircraft, guns, and ammunition were arriving by ship from the United States on a regular basis, despite the constant threat of attack by German submarines. The British would rely upon air and naval power as their primary defense, as they knew that they would quickly lose the war if German troops set foot on British soil in large numbers.*

### ***Operation Catapult***

*As Britain braced itself, one of its immediate goals was to prevent the French navy from falling into German hands. As a result, Operation Catapult was put into action on July 3, 1940. A British naval force based in Gibraltar was ordered to Mers-el-Kebir, Algeria, where much of the remaining French navy had fled. The British offered the French crews a choice: they could sail immediately for Britain and join in the fight against Germany, hand their ships over to the British, allow the British to move the ships somewhere safe in the West Indies, or scuttle their fleet. The French crews refused all four options, leaving the British little choice but to fire upon their allies, destroying the ships and killing over 1,200 French sailors. French ships at several other locations, however, were seized without incident.*

### ***The Channel Battle***

*The German code name for its plan to conquer the United Kingdom was Operation Sea Lion. The operation began tentatively, as a series of probing bomber attacks against British ships in the English Channel and ports in southern England in early July 1940. In fact, Hitler was still debating whether to invade Britain or Russia first.*

*The first German bomber attack over the Channel came on July 10, 1940. Yet even as late as July 19, Hitler made a last-minute speech advocating peace with Britain, presumably trying to buy time. Britain ignored the appeal. Skirmishes over the Channel and coastal southern England continued into August, but the Royal Air Force only rarely came out to defend the ships in the channel, preferring to hold off until the German planes got closer to the mainland, nearer to the limit of their range. As a result, British shipping in the Channel suffered heavy damage, but the RAF was able to conserve pilots and planes for the coming battle.*

### ***Eagle Day***

*In early August 1940, Hitler decided to begin massive bombing raids on air bases and military command posts in southern England, hoping to break Britain's will. Germany would withhold any attempt at a ground invasion, however, until it was clear that air superiority could be gained over England. On August 13, which the German high command labeled "Eagle Day," Germany sent more than 1,400 bombers and fighters across the English Channel. The Germans brought down only thirteen British fighters that day but lost more than three times as many of their own aircraft.*

*Over the next several days, the Germans continued to suffer comparatively heavy losses. While this gave British pilots a certain sense of optimism, the sheer numbers of planes the Germans sent meant that many bombers were still reaching their targets. Nevertheless, even after three weeks of incessant attacks, the RAF was still very much intact.*

### ***The London Blitz***

*In early September 1940, Hitler directed the Luftwaffe to shift its focus to the major British cities, including London. The attacks began on September 7 and continued into May of the following year. At times, they continued day and night for weeks at a time without letup. Tens of thousands of Londoners lost their lives during this time, along with thousands of residents of other British cities. In the meantime, however, British bombers were also conducting nightly air raids on central Berlin.*

*Although this London Blitz continued, Hitler decided on September 17, 1940, to put his plan for an invasion of Britain on hold indefinitely. It was clear that air superiority over England would be difficult to attain. Instead, Hitler turned his attention to Russia.*

### ***The First Turning Point***

*The Battle of Britain marked the first turning point in the war, as it was the first time that German forces failed to achieve a major goal. The Royal Air Force's strong and effective resistance caused Hitler to abandon the idea of invading Britain and to turn his attention to Russia. Although the Blitz continued to terrorize London and other cities for months to come, Britain no longer faced the threat of a ground invasion. It demonstrated to the world that with enough stubborn resistance, Hitler could be forced back.*

### ***The Importance of Air Power***

*The Battle of Britain was also the first time in history when air power alone decided the outcome of a major battle. Hitler knew that there was no way he could invade Britain on the ground without first gaining air superiority. Churchill and the British military leadership also knew that stopping the Luftwaffe would be the key to their survival. The German air attacks against Britain were massive, but their initial intensity could not be maintained if the Germans were consistently losing twice as many aircraft as the British. Indeed, by the battle's end, Germany had lost 1,700 planes to 900 British planes.*

*The value of the new technology of radar was also effectively demonstrated for the first time. The British had built a net of radar stations along their coastline prior to the battle, and this system proved invaluable, as British controllers could see the enemy coming and scramble fighters in the right place at the right time. Radar also prevented the loss of large numbers of aircraft on the ground, as happened during the initial days of the invasion of France. Although the Germans made an effort to bomb radar stations early on, by mid-August they gave up this strategy, believing it ineffective. It was a major mistake.*

*Moreover, British pilots had a considerable advantage in fighting over their own turf. Whereas German pilots had limited time over their target areas before having to return home to refuel, British pilots could stay in the air longer and even return to base, refuel, and then resume the fight. Thus, the mere act of engaging the German planes, forcing them to expend fuel by diverting them from their course, meant that fewer bombs would reach intended targets. For both Britain and Germany, this air combat was a new kind of warfare, and each side's strategies were experimental in nature.*

## **ITALY AND THE MEDITERRANEAN**

### **Events**

*June 10, 1940 Italy declares war on Britain*

*June 11 Italian planes attack Malta British skirmish in African desert*

*September 13 Italy launches failed invasion of Egypt*

*October 28 Italy begins invasion of Greece*

*November Greek resistance forces Italians into retreat*

*April 6, 1941 Germany attacks Yugoslavia*

*April 17 Yugoslavia surrenders*

*Late April British forces retreat from Greece*

*May 20 German forces attack British troops on Crete*

*May British forces retreat from Crete*

### **Key People**

*Benito Mussolini - Italian Fascist prime minister whose territorial ambitions drew Italy into the war in June 1940*

*Erwin Rommel - German field marshal and tank specialist; helped Italian forces in Egypt; was also involved in later North African campaigns*

### **Italy's Entrance**

*On June 10, 1940, Italy declared war on France and Britain, largely because its Fascist prime minister, Benito Mussolini, had territorial and imperial ambitions of his own. At this time, Britain had already evacuated from Dunkirk, and German troops were moving steadily toward Paris—which meant it was too late for Italian forces to take a serious part in the battle. Hitler himself observed with annoyance that the Italians were in effect riding on his coattails so as to share in the spoils without having to take part in the dirty work. Nevertheless, Germany and Italy were soon allied together as the Axis Powers, and Italy's entrance into the war set off a chain reaction that brought war to much of the Mediterranean region.*

### **Italian Conquests in Africa**

*Following its war declaration, Italy made its first moves in North Africa and other regions of the southern Mediterranean. On June 11, 1940, the Italian air force attacked Malta, while, on the same day, British planes carried out a small bombing raid on the Italian colony of Eritrea (in*

*Africa) as well as on the Italian cities of Genoa and Turin. Skirmishes continued in Africa throughout the summer, but the war there did not begin in earnest until August 3, when Italian forces invaded British Somaliland. This attack marked the opening of the East Africa campaign and was a total defeat for Britain, which was forced to abandon the area within days.*

*A second Italian offensive into British-occupied Egypt on September 13 was a catastrophic failure. Although heavily outnumbered, the British defenders decimated the Italian forces, taking large numbers of prisoners and advancing well into Italian-held territory. This Italian defeat prompted Germany to get involved by sending its best tank divisions under the command of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, Germany's most celebrated commander of mechanized forces.*

### **Greece**

*The Italian invasion of Greece began on October 28, 1940, using forces based in Albania. Mussolini began the attack without consulting or even informing Hitler, who was incensed upon hearing the news. Greece, a country of difficult, mountainous terrain, also had a respectable army that fought the Italians doggedly. In November, Greek forces broke through the Italian line and over the next few months were able gradually to push the invaders back to the Albanian border. It was not long before Britain began providing air support in Greece's defense. As in Egypt, Mussolini had bitten off more than his military could chew. Germany, however, bided its time and allowed the Italians to flounder.*

### **Germany's Intervention**

*By March 1941, the situation for the Italians had deteriorated so badly that Hitler was finally forced to step in. This decision raised a new problem, however, in that neutral Yugoslavia refused to grant German forces permission to cross its territory. Therefore, on April 6, Germany invaded Yugoslavia using its standard blitzkrieg method. Yugoslavia surrendered on April 17, and the German forces quickly moved onward to Greece.*

*By this time, Britain had forces on the ground in Greece to help the fight against the Germans. The British help was not enough, however, and by the end of April, all British forces had evacuated Greece, and the country fell totally under German control. One more battle broke out when the Luftwaffe struck the British garrison on the island of Crete on May 20. Heavy fighting followed, but by the end of the month, the British again had to evacuate.*

### **Italy's Effect on the War**

*Italy's two early campaigns—North Africa and Greece—were similar in that they both were marked by early success but later became quagmires. In both cases, Germany had to intervene and, as a result, committed forces that were badly needed elsewhere. However, whereas Greece was a relatively short campaign, lasting only a few months, the war in the deserts of North Africa would go on for years. The desert war would become one of the major campaigns of World War II, involving large numbers of forces and dramatic battles. The Italian entrance into the war thus greatly expanded its geographical scope and had significant influence on Germany's decision making.*

# THE INVASION OF RUSSIA

## **Events**

*June 22, 1941 Germany begins invasion of USSR*

*July 1 Germany has Riga, Dvinsk, Minsk, and Lvov under control*

*July 3 Stalin orders scorched-earth policy*

*September Hitler shifts priority of attack to southern Russia*

*September 8 Germans begin siege of Leningrad*

*September 19 Kiev falls to German forces*

*October Thousands of Russian civilians dig trenches around Moscow*

*November 27 German advance on Moscow is halted*

*December 8 Hitler orders all forces in USSR to shift from offensive to defensive operations*

*July 27, 1942 German troops cross Don River*

*August 23 German troops reach Volga River; Luftwaffe bombs Stalingrad*

*November 19–20 USSR launches two offensives against Germans*

*December 12 Germany launches Operation Winter Storm*

*February 2, 1943 German Sixth Army surrenders*

## **Key People**

*Joseph Stalin - Soviet premier; ordered scorched-earth policy to halt German advances in USSR*

*Friedrich Paulus - German field marshal; defied Hitler's orders and surrendered to Soviets at Stalingrad*

## **Operation Barbarossa**

*The initial German invasion of the Soviet Union was known as Operation Barbarossa. It began on June 22, 1941, after months of delay and years of planning. The general goals were to gain more land for Germany, control the oil fields of Azerbaijan, and exterminate Bolshevism—the radical Communism that Vladimir Lenin had installed in Russia during the Russian Revolution. Moreover, Hitler wanted to exterminate the “racially inferior” Russian people from Leningrad, Moscow, and the rest of the western USSR while pushing the rest of the population eastward beyond the Ural Mountains.*

*Despite the fact that the USSR was far larger than Germany both geographically and militarily, Hitler believed that the country would collapse quickly, after a brief show of German force. The German advance was organized into three main thrusts: one through the Baltic region, toward Leningrad; one through central Russia, toward Moscow; and one to the south, toward Kiev and the Black Sea coast. This resulted in a front line nearly 1,000 miles long, which necessitated a gargantuan Axis force of approximately 4 million soldiers, 3 million of whom were German. Although Hitler hoped to complete the operation by the onset of winter in late 1941, Germany's conflict with the Soviet Union would continue for most of the war.*

### ***The German Air Attack***

*Much like Hitler's previous invasions, the attack on the USSR began by air and concentrated on Russian frontline airbases. The Soviet Union had a substantially larger, though less modern, air force than Germany, and destroying it was crucial to Germany's success. The German attack began in the predawn hours of June 22 and continued without letup nearly all day. Though estimates vary significantly, the USSR lost between 1,200 and 2,000 aircraft—approximately one quarter of its entire air force—the first day. Most of these aircraft were destroyed on the ground, parked at their airbases. Over the next week, the Soviets lost an additional 2,000 to 3,000 in battle. The setback was devastating and would take the USSR a long time to overcome.*

### ***The German Advance***

*The German attack caught the Soviet military completely off guard, and its forces were not positioned to respond effectively to the attacks. In its confusion, the Soviet high command issued contradictory orders, and Soviet premier Joseph Stalin hesitated before ordering decisive action. In the meantime, German forces advanced quickly across the Russian countryside. In little more than a week, by July 1, the Germans had pushed 200 to 300 miles into Russia and captured the major cities of Riga and Dvinsk in the north, Minsk in the central region, and Lvov in the south.*

### ***Reasons for the USSR's Vulnerability***

*Even prior to the invasion, Stalin had made several decisions that severely weakened his country's ability to respond to the German threat. First, during his infamous purges of the 1930s, Stalin had most of the Soviet military leadership murdered or sent to labor camps in Siberia. Because this group included many seasoned officers, Russia's military leadership in 1941 was much less experienced than it had been only five or six years before. Second, Stalin had resisted early recommendations by his military leaders to mobilize forces along the western border or to take steps to protect air bases from attack. Stalin's motives in this matter have never been clear.*

### ***The Russian Response***

*Despite these setbacks, the USSR still put up a formidable fight. Unlike most of the enemy forces that the Germans had encountered in western Europe, the Soviet troops tended either to retreat or fight to the last man—not surrender. Within days of the invasion, the Soviets organized small partisan groups and "destruction battalions" and sent them behind enemy lines to interfere with German efforts in numerous ways.*

*On July 3, Stalin ordered the Soviet army to implement a scorched-earth policy and either destroy or remove all useful supplies or facilities before retreating so that these resources would not fall into German hands. The Russians thus destroyed roads and bridges, burned fields of crops, and demolished or emptied many factories. Some major factories were even disassembled*

*and moved eastward out of danger. The scorched-earth policy was effective and hindered the advancing German armies.*

### ***The Western Response***

*Although Britain and the United States were wary of Stalin and Russian Communism in general, the idea that the entire USSR might fall to the Germans was unacceptable. Within days of the invasion, Britain began providing Stalin with intelligence information gleaned directly from secret German transmissions that Allied code breakers had cracked and continued to read on a daily basis. In early July, the British also intensified their bombing of Berlin and other major German cities in an effort to force Hitler to recall some of the Luftwaffe forces back to Germany.*

*By late July, the first allied shipments of military supplies began reaching ports in the northern USSR. These shipments from Britain and the United States continued to grow significantly and included large numbers of aircraft and tanks, as well as food and medical supplies. From August 10–14, Churchill and Roosevelt met onboard a ship off Newfoundland and together laid out an extensive plan for providing large-scale assistance to the USSR.*

### ***Kiev and Leningrad***

*By early September 1941, German forces had moved deep into European Russia, within easy reach of the major cities of Kiev and Leningrad. On September 10, Hitler decided to concentrate on the invasion of southern Russia and the Ukraine, hoping to gain access to the region's economic resources, which included the wheat fields of the Ukraine, the citrus farms of the Black Sea coast, and the oil fields of the Caucasus.*

*On September 12, Hitler ordered the northern forces to cease their advance on Leningrad. Rather than enter the city, they were ordered to hold their current position, encircle the city, and slowly starve it to death. This strategy would allow several German tank divisions in the Leningrad area to be diverted for use in the south. Thus began the famous 900-day siege of Leningrad.*

*With more German troops available for in the south, the Ukraine collapsed quickly. After the Germans captured nearly half a million Soviet troops outside Kiev, the Ukrainian capital fell on September 19.*

### ***The Russian Winter***

*Hitler originally planned for the campaign against the Soviet Union to take six weeks. Although the Germans did initially make very fast progress, the farther into the USSR they traveled, the more things slowed down. In the meantime, summer turned to autumn, bringing a constant, miserable mix of rain and snow. During October, the roads turned to mud, effectively halting the German advance. By November, snow covered the ground, and temperatures were so cold that they interfered with the operation of equipment. German soldiers, still in summer uniforms, succumbed to frostbite and hypothermia in large numbers. Hitler nonetheless ordered them to continue.*

*The winter gave the Soviet armies a new advantage, as they were far better prepared to fight under such conditions. Moreover, reinforcements from the Russian Far East arrived in large numbers, while the tanks and planes sent from Britain and the United States were finally entering combat. German intelligence was unaware of these reinforcements, leaving the German troops in for a nasty surprise.*

### **Moscow**

*As the Germans approached Moscow, they encountered row after row after row of trenches and ditches reinforced by barbed wire. Since late October, thousands of Russian civilians had dug more than 5,000 miles of trenches by hand all the way around the city. On November 27, 1941, these trenches finally brought the German advance on Moscow to a halt, less than twenty miles from the Kremlin.*

*Overwhelmed by a strong Russian defense, frigid temperatures, and constant harassment by Russian partisans behind the lines, the Germans became mired. In just three weeks, they lost 85,000 men—the same number that they had lost over the entire Barbarossa campaign up to that point. During the first week of December, the Germans slowly began losing ground, and the Soviets managed to push them back for several miles. Although the Germans still did not retreat, on December 8, 1941, a directive issued from Hitler himself instructed all German troops in Russia to shift from offensive operations to defensive.*

### **Costs of the Invasion for Germany**

*Most historians would agree that Hitler's decision to invade the USSR was one of the main reasons that Germany lost the war. German forces were tied up in this conflict for years. It drained Germany's resources, hurt morale, and diverted its military presence from western Europe, ultimately making it possible for British and American forces to invade France in 1944.*

*Germany's failure in Russia was the result of several gross miscalculations. Hitler underestimated how long the operation would take, how hard the Russians would fight, how successful Russian partisan actions would be, and how quickly and effectively the Allies would come to the Soviet Union's aid. Hitler also failed to comprehend how difficult it would be to maintain control of such a huge territory or how poorly prepared the German military was for fighting in Russia's climate.*

### **Devastation in the USSR**

*The scope of the devastation that occurred in the Soviet Union during World War II is poorly appreciated in the West and indeed hard even to fathom. Germany carried out the invasion with a brutality rarely seen in human history. Twenty million people died in Russia at the hands of the invaders—a total that includes soldiers fighting on the front, Jews who were singled out and murdered in Russian towns, local government officials, and millions of ordinary Russian citizens who were killed with the same calculating methodology. One of Hitler's specific goals for the invasion was to substantially reduce the overall population of the western Soviet Union to make more room for the Germans whom he intended to move there. The scale of the killing was so*

great that even some members of the German death squads became overwhelmed by the grotesqueness of their orders.

### ***The Push for Stalingrad***

*After the stalemate near Moscow over the winter of 1941–1942, Germany shifted the focus of its invasion force to the south, where it had already captured most of the Ukraine, and sent most of its troops across the southern Russian steppes. On July 27, 1942, these forces crossed the Don River and made for the industrial center of Stalingrad. Yet another prong of the German offensive was heading even farther south, into the region of the Caucasus Mountains. In the meantime, resistance by Soviet partisans behind the German lines continued with increasing success.*

### ***The Volga River***

*The Germans reached the Volga River on August 23, 1942, to the north of Stalingrad, and made ready for an all-out assault on the city. On the same day, hundreds of German bombers struck Stalingrad with enough ordinance to set off a firestorm, and the Volga itself caught fire after the burning contents of local oil reserves spilled into the river. Approximately 40,000 residents of Stalingrad died during the initial assault. Encouraged by the early success, German commanders believed that Stalingrad would be a quick victory. As it turned out, it would become one of the deadliest single battles in history and would last for six months.*

### ***Urban Battle***

*Within days, the German army entered Stalingrad, where Soviet forces were waiting. Both Stalin and Hitler had forbidden their troops from retreating under any circumstances. For months, the fighting moved street by street, block by block, and the city was gutted to a skeleton of its former self as the Germans launched repeated air raids involving up to 1,000 planes at a time. On the ground, troops from both sides took cover in bombed-out buildings, tanks roamed awkwardly through rubble-strewn streets, and Russian and German snipers hid in the ruins and tried to pick off enemy soldiers.*

*Stalin ordered thousands of additional Soviet troops from other regions to be amassed to the north of Stalingrad and sent the majority of Russia's military aircraft to the city's defense. Meanwhile, the Germans surrounded the city from the west, trapping the Russian defenders inside the city. The Germans failed to gain control of the Volga River, however, and the Russians were able to send in food and supplies via that route.*

### ***Another Russian Winter***

*As the autumn of 1942 waned, the German army faced its second winter in Russia. The Germans attempted to bring in supplies for the winter, but powerful Soviet air defenses combined with vicious snowstorms proved too much of an obstacle. On November 19–20, the Russians launched two new offensive actions from the north and the south, which eventually surrounded the entire German Sixth Army. The German commander on the scene, Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus,*

*requested permission to break free and retreat to the Don River. Hitler refused and ordered him to fight on, even as food and supplies were running out.*

*On December 12, Germany launched Operation Winter Storm in an attempt to rescue the trapped army, but the action failed. The Sixth Army struggled on as its soldiers slowly starved. At the end of January 1943, Paulus decided to defy Hitler's orders and surrender. By February 2, all remaining German forces at Stalingrad had given up to the Soviets.*

### ***Costs of the Battle of Stalingrad***

*Historians estimate that approximately 2 million people died in the Battle of Stalingrad, more than 800,000 on the German side and 1.1 million on the Soviet side. After the battle, little of the city itself remained, and it would not be reconstructed fully for decades. Despite the catastrophic losses, the Soviet victory stood as solid proof to the world that the Third Reich was not invincible.*

## **JAPAN AND PEARL HARBOUR**

### ***Events***

*1937 Japan goes to war with China*

*July 1939 Roosevelt announces that Treaty of Commerce and Navigation will not be renewed*

*July 2, 1940 U.S. Congress passes Export Control Act*

*August Japan declares greater East Asia co-prosperity sphere*

*September 27 Japan signs Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy*

*January 1941 Yamamoto prepares plan for attack on Pearl Harbor*

*July Japanese troops occupy Indochina*

*October Hirohito gives general approval for Pearl Harbor attack*

*November 8 Hirohito approves formal battle plan for attack in December*

*November 26 Japanese attack fleet sets sail from Japan*

*December 7 Japan launches surprise attack on Pearl Harbor*

*December 8 United States and Britain declare war on Japan*

*December 11 Germany declares war on United States*

### ***Key People***

*Franklin D. Roosevelt - 32nd U.S. president; implemented economic penalties that angered Japan; requested war declaration after Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941*

*Yamamoto Isoroku - Japanese admiral who planned surprise attack at Pearl Harbor*

*Hirohito - Japanese emperor; approved Pearl Harbor attack plan*

*Richmond K. Turner - U.S. Navy admiral; warned that navy be put on high alert status and security increased at Pearl Harbor, but recommendations were implemented only partly*

### ***Tensions in the Pacific***

*In the years prior to the outbreak of World War II in Europe, tensions were also escalating in the Pacific region. Japan, which had been at war with China since 1937, had declared openly its intent to take over as much of eastern Asia as it could. It also had serious ambitions toward taking territory in the Soviet Union. If Germany, which the Japanese government saw as a potential ally, would attack Russia from the west, Japanese military leaders felt that they stood a good chance of seizing Soviet-controlled territory in the east. The signing of the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact in 1939 therefore caused a huge scandal in Japan, as it directly undermined Japan's plans.*

### ***Japan and the United States***

*In the meantime, the United States was becoming more and more of a problem for Japan. Throughout the 1930s, the United States and many European nations, suffering from the Great Depression, enacted high protective tariffs. These tariffs greatly curbed Japanese exports and heightened the effects of their own economic depression. The poor economic conditions caused strong anti-Western sentiment in Japan and were a strong factor in forcing the Japanese invasion of China.*

*In July 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt decided not to renew the 1911 U.S.-Japan Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, which was due to expire in January 1940. Then, on July 2, 1940, the U.S. Congress passed the Export Control Act. Together, these two actions effectively eliminated Japan's primary source of oil, scrap metal, and other material resources needed for war.*

*These developments dealt not only a severe economic blow to Japan but also a humiliating slap in the face to Japan's leaders, who felt that the United States had no right to pass judgment on them or to interfere in their affairs. Although Japan was still smarting from the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact, the United States' actions were enough to overcome this resentment, and on September 27, 1940, Japan signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. The pact made the three nations official allies.*

### ***The United States Prepares for War***

*Although the United States remained officially neutral during the first two years of World War II, the Roosevelt administration was far from indifferent or oblivious to the conflict. The United States provided material support first to Britain and later to the Soviet Union, secretly at first but then with increasing openness over time. Chief among these measures was the March 1941 Lend-Lease Act, which empowered Roosevelt to give aid to the Allies in exchange for whatever kind of compensation or benefit the president deemed acceptable. The American people also paid close attention to the events developing in the Pacific and, by mid-1941, considered war with both Japan and Germany to be likely possibilities.*

*U.S. intelligence services had direct access to Japanese coded transmissions, so U.S. officials were well aware that the Japanese were planning something against them—they just did not know precisely what. One man in particular, Admiral Richmond K. Turner, strongly urged that U.S. forces be placed on a higher state of alert, as he was particularly concerned about the U.S.*

*Navy base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. During previous U.S. war games and exercises, Pearl Harbor had proven highly vulnerable to surprise attacks. Although Turner's advice was considered, only some of his recommendations were implemented.*

### ***Indochina***

*Indochina was a French-administered colony in Southeast Asia comprising the present-day nations Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. On July 20, 1941, Japanese troops entered the region and quickly occupied the entire area. Japan justified the occupation as necessary in order to deny resources to the Chinese resistance. However, Indochina also provided Japan with a convenient base for launching attacks against other countries and territories in the region, including Singapore and the Dutch East Indies. Both the United States and Britain saw this move as a threat and a clear indication of Japan's intention to continue its expansion throughout the Pacific Rim. The two countries expressed their disapproval by freezing Japanese bank accounts.*

### ***The Japanese Attack Plan***

*As early as January 1941, Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku developed a plan for attacking the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor and carried out training exercises to prepare specifically for such an attack. In October, the Japanese emperor, Hirohito, gave his general approval for action against the United States and, on November 8, approved the specific Pearl Harbor attack plan.*

*On November 25–26, the Japanese fleet set sail from Japan, unseen by U.S. spies. Even then, however, some Japanese officials disapproved of the plan, and it continued to be debated heatedly. By December 1, all discussion had ended, and Hirohito ordered the plan to proceed. Japan's goal was to make a permanent end to Western interference in its affairs by obliterating the U.S. and British military capabilities in the Pacific.*

### ***Pearl Harbor***

*On the morning of December 7, 1941, a fleet of six aircraft carriers, twenty-five submarines, and nearly three dozen additional support ships was sitting 200 miles north of the Hawaiian island of Oahu—in the open sea, far beyond the line of sight of any U.S. forces. The first wave of Japanese planes numbered more than 180. Although U.S. radar operators saw the massive formation nearly a full hour before the attack began, they raised no alarm, because they mistook the planes for a group of U.S. bombers expected to arrive from California around the same time. This mistake happened in spite of the fact that the planes seen on the radar were coming from the wrong direction and were much more numerous than the expected bomber fleet.*

*The first wave arrived at the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor at 7:55 a.m. and achieved complete surprise; only nine Japanese planes were lost. The primary targets were major U.S. warships, most of which were docked close together in neat lines. These included eight of the nine battleships in the U.S. Pacific Fleet, along with several dozen other warships. The Japanese also targeted six nearby military airfields. A second attack wave of more than 160 planes followed just over an hour later. By this time, the Americans were well alerted and managed to bring down twenty Japanese planes.*

*In all, the attack on Pearl Harbor killed 2,402 Americans, destroyed five battleships completely, put three more out of commission, sank or seriously damaged at least eleven other warships, and destroyed nearly more than 180 aircraft on the ground. The only good luck the U.S. Navy had was that none of its aircraft carriers were in port at the time and that the Japanese bombers failed to hit the large fuel reserves in the area.*

*In addition to attacking Pearl Harbor that day, Japan also attacked the U.S. territories of Guam, the Philippines, Wake Island, and Midway Island, as well as British interests in Malaya and Hong Kong.*

### ***Declarations of War***

*The next day, December 8, Roosevelt went before both houses of the U.S. Congress to request a declaration of war against Japan; after a vote, the declaration was formalized just hours later. Britain declared war on Japan on the same day. Three days later, on December 11, Germany declared war on the United States. Thus, the United States was now at war with both Japan and Germany and able to enter fully into its alliance with Britain.*

### ***Reaction in the United States***

*The story of the attack on Pearl Harbor has become a part of American culture. For the American population, the event was a traumatic shock, as few regular Americans knew much about the events in Japan leading up to the war or about the level of hostility that Japan bore toward the United States. Officials in the U.S. government, however, could not claim such obliviousness. Uncomfortable questions were soon raised in Congress and on the streets about why the United States had been so poorly prepared and why the U.S. intelligence services had failed to see the attack coming or raise warnings earlier.*

*Over the years, historical analysis has shown that there were many warning signs in the months before the attack and that some U.S. military leaders, most notably Admiral Turner, had been concerned that the Pearl Harbor base was particularly vulnerable to attack. Furthermore, the United States was able to decode and read Japanese military communications until shortly before the attack, when Japan abruptly changed its military codes. By the evening of December 6, 1941, U.S. military and government officials, including President Roosevelt, were certain that Japan was planning a major action against U.S. interests. A meeting was even scheduled for 3:00 p.m. on December 7 to discuss the matter. Unfortunately, the target of the attack was unknown, and no one at Pearl Harbor was notified to be on alert.*

*To this day, there is avid speculation about how much the United States could and should have done to prevent the attack, and even more speculation over how much the United States and its allies knew about Japanese plans. Britain's prime minister, Winston Churchill, was desperate for active U.S. participation and had long been pressing his old friend Roosevelt to enter the war. Some historians maintain that British intelligence had specific information about the Pearl Harbor attack and that Churchill deliberately kept the information to himself so that the United States would finally go to war. These claims, however, remain unconfirmed.*

# THE NAZI'S FINAL SOLUTION

## **Events**

*December 8, 1941 Concentration camp at Chelmno, Poland, begins gassing Jewish prisoners  
January 20, 1942 Wannsee Conference held*

## ***The Beginning of the Holocaust***

*While the United States was becoming embroiled in the war in the Pacific, back in Europe the true intent of the Nazi armies was becoming increasingly clear. As more and more of eastern Europe fell into German hands, the territory became a sort of backyard for the Nazis, where the ugliest parts of their plan could be carried out far away from prying eyes. By late 1941, the first Jews from Germany and western Europe were gathered and transported, along with many other minorities, to concentration camps in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, and western Russia, where they were first used as slaves and then systematically murdered.*

*At this point, the notorious gas chambers of the later Nazi concentration camps were not yet common. Most victims were taken in groups to secluded areas where they were stripped of clothing, pushed into open pits, machine-gunned, and then quickly covered over, in many cases even before all were dead. Indeed, one of the reasons for creating the gas chambers and extermination camps was that many troops in the German S.S. experienced severe psychological repercussions carrying out the gruesome tasks put before them.*

*The German atrocities were not directed solely at Jews. Precisely the same fate awaited millions of non-Jewish Russian and eastern European civilians, as well as many Soviet prisoners of war. By December 1941, the number of Nazi murders was already in the hundreds of thousands and growing rapidly.*

## ***The Wannsee Conference***

*On January 20, 1942, a group of fifteen Nazi officials met in a villa in the Wannsee district outside Berlin in order to settle the details for resolving the so-called "Jewish question." The meeting was led by Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the Gestapo (the Nazi secret police), and included several members of the S.S. along with representatives of several German government ministries. Neither Hitler nor any heads of government ministries were present.*

*The topics discussed at the Wannsee Conference included the logistics of expelling Jews from Germany by emigration, the possibility of mandatory sterilization, and the best ways to deal with people of mixed blood. The conference devoted considerable attention to the matter of who would be legally considered a Jew; ultimately, it set different conditions for pure Jews and those of mixed blood, in turn classified by first generation and second generation. Delegates also*

*discussed how to handle Jews who would not or could not leave the country; it was decided that these Jews would be sterilized and sent to live in all-Jewish “retirement ghettos.”*

*The official record of the Wannsee Conference made no mention of mass killing of Jews or of extermination camps. However, the meeting did set a secret goal to remove 11 million Jews from Europe by whatever means and expressed concern that the mass emigration process already taking place was becoming expensive and more difficult to negotiate. The terms “final solution” and “absolute final solution” were used, although the specifics were not elaborated.*

### ***The Death Camps***

*Nazi forces had begun the mass killing of Jews as early as 1939, when Germany first invaded Poland. These actions expanded greatly during the invasion of the USSR in 1941. By 1942, the so-called Endlösung, or “final solution,” took shape, as the murders become increasingly systematic and Hitler pressed his underlings to speed up the process. During the previous year, S.S. commanders had experimented with different methods, and gas chambers proved to be the method of choice.*

*Although prisoners died by the thousands from disease, overwork, or starvation in German labor camps throughout Europe, there were only seven designated extermination camps. Six were located in Poland, one in Belorussia. These camps existed purely for the purpose of killing, and most of the prisoners taken to them were dead within hours of arrival. A limited number of prisoners deemed fit enough to work were temporarily forced to labor in these camps, but they were underfed and overworked until they too were unfit for labor and subsequently killed.*

*More than 90 percent of the victims sent to these extermination camps were Jews, brought in from all over Germany and other German-controlled areas of eastern and western Europe. Romany (Gypsies) and homosexuals also lost their lives in the camps in significant numbers, as did some Soviet prisoners of war. The camps continued operation virtually unimpeded until the Allies finally liberated them near the end of the war.*

## **TOTAL WAR IN THE PACIFIC**

### ***Events***

*February 15, 1942 Japan captures Singapore*

*March 9 Japan captures Java*

*April 9 Japan captures the Philippines*

*April 18 Doolittle Raid on Tokyo*

*May 4–8 Battle of the Coral Sea*

*June 3–6 Battle of Midway*

### ***Key People***

*James Doolittle - U.S. Army colonel who led daring air raid on Japanese mainland in April 1942*

*Yamomoto Isoroku - Japanese admiral who orchestrated attacks on both Pearl Harbor and Midway*

### ***The Japanese Onslaught***

*After its initial attacks on Pearl Harbor and Allied interests throughout the Pacific, the Japanese navy continued to expand its conquests over the coming months. On February 15, 1942, Japanese forces took Singapore, which was a very humiliating defeat for Britain. On March 9, after a series of extended sea battles, the Dutch colony of Java surrendered. On April 9, the U.S. territory of the Philippines also fell to Japan. Island colonies, territories, and nations in Southeast Asia continued to fall one after the other as Japanese forces exploded across the South China Sea and into the Bay of Bengal, threatening Burma and even India.*

### ***The Doolittle Raid***

*On April 18, 1942, U.S. forces launched a daring air raid to demonstrate that Japan itself was susceptible to Allied attack. Lieutenant Colonel James Doolittle led the ingenious campaign, which originated from the aircraft carrier USS Hornet. Although aircraft carriers were designed to launch fighters, not bombers, Doolittle specially prepared a squadron of sixteen B-25 bombers to fly from the Hornet. The bombers were stripped of all equipment and parts not absolutely necessary for the flight and loaded on board the Hornet with a minimum cargo of bombs.*

*The lightweight planes managed to take off from the Hornet and fly more than 800 miles to Japan, where they dropped bombs on oil reservoirs and naval facilities in Tokyo and several other cities. The planes then continued on to China to land. Low on fuel, all sixteen planes crash-landed, but two went astray into Japanese-held territory and another landed in Vladivostok, in the eastern USSR. Although the raid did minimal damage to Japan, it was a powerful psychological victory for the United States and demonstrated that the Japanese homeland was indeed vulnerable.*

### ***The Battle of the Coral Sea***

*By late spring 1942, Japan had captured most of Southeast Asia and turned its attention southward. In early May, Japanese invasion fleets were ordered to take over Tulagi in the Solomon Islands and Port Moresby on New Guinea—the location of a major Allied base and the last Allied outpost standing between the Japanese navy and Australia. U.S. forces in the area were alerted in advance because of intercepted Japanese radio transmissions. Two American aircraft carriers (the USS Lexington and USS Yorktown), along with several cruisers and destroyers, were dispatched to stop the attacks and protect Port Moresby. The Japanese landed at Tulagi on May 3, before American ships could arrive on the scene. The next day, planes from the Lexington attacked the Japanese forces on the ground at Tulagi and then turned south to join the Yorktown in defending Port Moresby.*

*The Americans and Japanese finally engaged each other on May 7 in the Battle of the Coral Sea. The entire battle was carried out by carrier-based aircraft, without any ships exchanging shots—*

*the first time in history that a naval battle was waged exclusively from the air. Both sides suffered heavy losses, and the Lexington was sunk. While material losses were comparable for each side, the Allied forces succeeded in their central goal of protecting Port Moresby.*

### ***Japan's New Plan***

*Following the humiliation of the Doolittle Raid and the failure to take Port Moresby during the Battle of the Coral Sea, Japanese strategists knew that something had to be done to eliminate the threat from U.S. aircraft carriers. Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, who had planned the Pearl Harbor attack, was again put in charge.*

*Yamamoto's plan involved a massive assault on the Pacific island of Midway and a second, smaller attack on the Aleutian Islands of Alaska with the intent of drawing part of the U.S. Navy away from Midway. The Japanese assembled a huge armada of more than 150 ships for the attack, including four aircraft carriers and seven battleships. As with the Battle of the Coral Sea, however, U.S. intelligence managed to decipher Japanese coded transmissions and determine where the actual attack would take place. The United States responded by sending its entire Pacific Fleet to Midway.*

### ***The Battle of Midway***

*After light U.S. bombing of the Japanese carriers on June 3, 1942, Japan initiated the attack early in the morning on June 4, bombing the U.S. base on Midway Island. American naval planes responded against the Japanese armada in a series of waves. Although the first American attacks were easily repulsed, a group of U.S. dive-bombers finally got through Japanese defenses and near three Japanese aircraft carriers, whose decks were loaded with freshly fueled aircraft preparing for takeoff. The American bombers managed to hit the planes on all three carriers' decks, setting off a chain of explosions that engulfed the ships in flames and set off ammunition stores in the lower decks of the giant ships. All three carriers were put out of commission and were eventually scuttled by the Japanese themselves. That afternoon, a fourth Japanese carrier was damaged beyond repair.*

*The Battle of Midway was over by the end of the day. In all, the United States lost one aircraft carrier, one destroyer, nearly 150 airplanes, and just over 300 men. The Japanese toll was far worse: four aircraft carriers, along with more than 230 airplanes and more than 2,000 men.*

### ***Japan on the Defensive***

*The nature of the war in the Pacific changed dramatically during the first half of 1942. Japan had begun with a strong offensive but quickly overextended itself by conquering most of Southeast Asia. Furthermore, Japan underestimated the U.S. Navy and took a risky gamble in its attack on Midway. Japan's losses at Coral Sea and Midway forced it to shift into a defensive mode. Never again would Australia or the U.S. mainland face a serious danger from Japanese attack. Although the war in the Pacific was far from over, for the rest of the World War II, Japan's struggle would remain a fight to maintain the territory it had already conquered, rather*

*than an aggressive campaign for further expansion. Eventually, Japan would gradually lose all of these earlier gains.*

## **THE STRENGTHENING ALLIANCE**

### **Events**

*January 12, 1943 Roosevelt and Churchill begin meeting at Casablanca  
November 28 Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin begin meeting at Tehran*

### **Key People**

*Winston Churchill - British prime minister; insisted on unconditional surrender for Germany and delayed invasion of western Europe*

*Franklin D. Roosevelt - 32nd U.S. president; agreed to continued commitment of United States to defeat Germany in Europe*

*Joseph Stalin - Soviet premier; met with Churchill and Roosevelt at Tehran; pushed for early invasion of western Europe to take German pressure off the USSR*

### **The Casablanca Conference**

*On January 12–23, 1943, U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill met at Casablanca in French North Africa (present-day Morocco) and decided that they would accept nothing but an unconditional surrender from Germany in order to end the war. They also made a number of important strategic decisions. They discussed troop distribution in the Pacific, outlined major lines of attack in the far east, and agreed upon the invasion of Sicily. Moreover, they decided to delay plans for an Allied invasion of Europe via the English Channel until the summer of 1944, due to ongoing difficulties with the preparations. Finally, in order to reduce pressure on the Soviet Union, they agreed to intensify bombing operations against Germany. Following the conference, the two leaders sent a telegram to Soviet premier Joseph Stalin, informing him of their decisions and reaffirming their commitment to work together with the USSR in defeating Germany.*

### **The Tehran Conference**

*From November 28 to December 1, 1943, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin all met together for the first time, at a conference in Tehran, Iran. The three leaders discussed detailed plans for the Allied invasion of Europe, which Churchill and Roosevelt had decided to postpone at the Casablanca Conference earlier that year. The invasion would be code-named Operation Overlord. Stalin was frustrated by the delay, but Churchill and Roosevelt insisted that the extra time was needed to sufficiently degrade Germany's military strength. At the end of the meeting, Stalin committed the USSR to enter the war against Japan once Germany was defeated.*

## SOUTH EAST ASIA

### *Events*

*March 8, 1942 Japan takes Rangoon, Burma*  
*July Japan occupies Guadalcanal*  
*August 7 Allies launch offensive on Guadalcanal*  
*November Allies launch offensive in New Guinea*  
*February 9, 1943 Battle of Guadalcanal ends*  
*August 4, 1944 Allied forces take Myitkyina, Burma*  
*October 20 Battle of Leyte begins*  
*December 31 Battle of Leyte ends*  
*February 19, 1945 Battle of Iwo Jima begins*  
*February 23 U.S. Marines reach Mt. Suribachi*  
*March 26 Iwo Jima declared secure*  
*April 1 Battle of Okinawa begins*  
*May 3 Allies liberate Rangoon*  
*June 21 Battle of Okinawa ends*

### ***Guadalcanal***

*After the Japanese defeat at Midway in June 1942, the war in the Pacific shifted south, as the Japanese focused on winning complete control of the Solomon Islands. They already had a strong foothold at the north end of the island chain, but occupying the central island, Guadalcanal, was crucial. When the Japanese took Guadalcanal in July 1942, the move threatened Allied shipping throughout the region, and Allied leaders were determined to respond. On August 7, the Allies launched an offensive on Guadalcanal via an amphibious landing of more than 16,000 U.S. Marines onto the island. The landing went relatively smoothly, although the Japanese naval forces sank eight Allied cruisers, two heavy carriers, and fourteen destroyers, killing more than 1,000 men.*

*Once on the island, the Marines found little resistance at first, since the only Japanese present were construction workers building military facilities. The Americans soon captured an airfield, which they quickly made operational, and all was quiet except for a series of Japanese air raids, which were fought off with the help of U.S. naval air support. By mid-October, however, Japan began streaming troops onto the opposite end of the island, sending wave after wave of soldiers despite terrible losses to American gunfire. The Japanese fought to the last man in virtually every engagement, regardless of the odds, which was shocking and intimidating to the U.S. troops. Attrition and limited supplies eventually resulted in unsustainable losses for the*

*Japanese, but it was a slow process: the Battle of Guadalcanal continued until February 1943, when Japan was forced to abandon the island.*

### ***New Guinea***

*While the Allied campaign in Guadalcanal was going on, the United States and Australia launched a joint offensive on November 16, 1942, into New Guinea, the control of which the Japanese and Allied forces had both been struggling over for many months. As at Guadalcanal, the Japanese displayed a tenacious will to fight for every inch of territory, regardless of the cost in human lives. Although the majority of Japanese forces were driven off the island by January 1943, the Allies were unable to remove them fully, and fighting in New Guinea continued well into 1944.*

### ***Burma***

*Japan's conquests in Southeast Asia during the first half of 1942 extended as far west as Burma. Britain, along with its colonial armies in India, took responsibility for containing this portion of the conflict. The British campaign did not go well, however, and on March 8, 1942, the Burmese port of Rangoon fell to Japan. This setback was a particularly bitter loss for the Allies, as it had been a primary supply point and the site of a crucial base for the British Royal Air Force. By May, the Japanese had driven the Allies back across the Indian border. During the rest of 1942, British-Indian forces launched minor offensives into Burma, but with little success.*

*It was only in mid-1943, when the Allies organized a new command structure in the region—the Southeast Asia Command—that they made any substantial progress in driving the Japanese back. Under this new command, the British cooperated with the Chinese to advance on the Burmese border, while U.S. and British special operations forces went behind enemy lines to cut communications and create chaos in general. A major focus of the campaign was to capture the town of Myitkyina, which was a principal Japanese communications post. There was a prolonged struggle for the Myitkyina, which finally fell on August 4, 1944. Another goal was to secure the so-called Burma Road, which linked Burma and China but was blocked by Japanese forces. The Burma Road was reopened in January, 1945. Finally, the Allies recaptured Rangoon on May 3, 1945.*

### ***The Island Campaigns***

*Following their success in the Solomon Islands, the Allies fought fiercely throughout 1944 and 1945 to free the many other South Pacific island groups that Japan had seized earlier in the war. Many of these islands had formerly been territories of the United States, Britain, or other Allied countries. The largest of the island groups included the Marshall Islands, the Marianas, the Philippines, and the Ryukyu Islands. The battles took place on land, on the sea, and in the air.*

*For Japan, it was a nearly continuous series of losses, beginning with the Battle of the Philippine Sea near the Mariana Islands on June 19–20, 1944. In this huge sea battle, Japan lost most of its naval air power. Three Japanese aircraft carriers were sunk and more than 300 airplanes destroyed. The ground battles in these campaigns were similar in character to those on*

*Guadalcanal and New Guinea: the fighting involved guerilla-style warfare with very high casualty counts, especially for the Japanese. For example, in the Battle of Leyte, which took place in the Philippines between October 20 and December 31, 1944, the Japanese lost 49,000 soldiers out of a total of 55,000 involved in the conflict. In the same conflict, the United States lost only 3,500 troops.*

*One by one, the Allies liberated Japanese-controlled islands until the last obstacle between Allied forces and the Japanese mainland were the Ryukyu Islands, which included Okinawa. However, each battle was more intense and more costly than the previous one, which led military commanders to begin rethinking their strategy.*

### ***Iwo Jima***

*A small island off the Japanese coast, Iwo Jima served as an early warning station against Allied bombers en route to attack Japan. As the Allies closed in on Japan, Iwo Jima became an obvious target. Following a heavy bombardment of the island by aircraft and battleships, U.S. Marines began an amphibious assault on February 19, 1945. Over 20,000 Japanese troops were garrisoned on Iwo Jima, and the entire island was honeycombed with underground tunnels and bunkers, especially Mt. Suribachi, which overlooked the southern end of the island.*

*After U.S. forces came ashore, they surrounded the base of Mt. Suribachi within a single day. Ascending the mountain was another matter entirely, as the Japanese fought from their hidden tunnels and small bunkers on the steep, ash-covered slopes. After a brutal, four-day struggle, U.S. forces reached the peak of Mt. Suribachi on February 23, where an Associated Press photographer took a now world-famous photograph of a group of Marines raising the American flag. Although taking the mountain was a victory in itself, it would be more than a month before U.S. forces secured the entire island. Approximately 20,000 Japanese soldiers—nearly all the forces on the island—were killed. The American death toll was 7,000.*

### ***Okinawa***

*The Battle of Okinawa was the last large-scale battle in the Pacific and the most intense of the island invasions. Unlike Iwo Jima, Okinawa had a large civilian population, which became one of the great tragedies of the battle.*

*U.S. forces began amphibious landings on April 1, 1945. Japan had more than 100,000 soldiers lying in wait in a series of fortified defensive lines. The Japanese believed that the Allied weakness would be its large fleet of naval vessels anchored offshore. As a result, they planned a massive series of kamikaze attacks on these ships—suicide missions in which Japanese pilots crashed their fuel- and bomb-laden planes into targets—with the goal of destroying the ships or forcing them to abandon their troops on land. However, these kamikaze attacks did not do nearly as much damage as the Japanese had anticipated, and the U.S. fleet was able to remain in place and continue to offer air support to the troops on the ground.*

*The battle lasted for two and a half months, until June 21, and cost nearly 19,000 American lives. The Japanese losses were even more sobering: more than 100,000 Japanese soldiers were killed, while the civilian death toll was estimated to be 80,000 to 100,000.*

### ***Mounting Casualties***

*As Allied forces retook one by one the territories that Japan had captured earlier in the war, they became alarmed by Japan's increasingly extreme tactics. At Guadalcanal in August 1942 and in nearly every battle afterward, Japanese forces simply refused to surrender, even when they were clearly losing. This tactic resulted in huge death tolls for the Japanese forces, as well as increased Allied casualties. Each battle became progressively worse in this respect, and by the battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa in 1945, the Japanese were fighting to nearly the last man. In Okinawa, even many Japanese civilians committed suicide when it became clear that the island was falling to the Americans.*

*These developments made Allied commanders worry about what it would take to win the war. Although the Allies had a plan in the works to land U.S. ground troops on the Japanese home islands, if the Japanese population chose to fight to the death, as many were speculating, the cost in American lives would be overwhelming. As Allied forces closed in on Japan proper, however, the U.S. Air Force was able to stage extensive bombing raids over Japanese cities, including Tokyo, which gradually began to demonstrate a viable alternative to a ground invasion*

## **NORTH AFRICA AND THE INVASION OF ITALY**

### ***Events***

*January 12, 1941 Britain captures Tobruk, Libya*

*June 21, 1942 Germans retake Tobruk*

*October 23 Battle of El-Alamein begins*

*November 8 Operation Torch; joint U.S.-British landing in French North Africa*

*November 11 Britain retakes Tobruk*

*November 25 Allies begin offensive into Tunisia*

*March 7, 1943 Tunis falls to Allied forces*

*July 10 Allied invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky) begins*

*July 22 Palermo falls to Allies*

*July 24 Mussolini is overthrown in a peaceful coup*

*September 2 Allied invasion of Italy begins*

*September 8 Italy surrenders to Allies*

*October 1 Allies capture Naples*

*May 18, 1944 Monte Cassino falls to Allies*

*June 5 Rome falls to Allies*

### ***Key People***

*Erwin Rommel - German tank commander whose strategic skill and surprise attacks earned him the nickname "Desert Fox"*

*Benito Mussolini - Italian dictator whose ill-advised military offensives embroiled Italian and German forces in North Africa; was deposed by coup in July 1943*

### **Tobruk**

*At the same time that war was going on in the European and Pacific theaters, conflict also escalated in North Africa, primarily as a result of Italy's aggression in the region in 1940 and 1941. One of the primary flash points in North Africa was the key port of Tobruk, Libya, which changed hands between the Germans and the British several times and was the site of several major battles.*

*Originally in Italy's sphere of influence, Tobruk fell to the British on January 12, 1941, building upon the initiative they had seized after Italy's defeat in Egypt the previous year. More than a year later, in June 1942, Tobruk fell to the Germans after a long and intensive siege by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's tank forces. Then, in November 1942, Tobruk fell once more to the British and remained under their control for the rest of the war.*

### **El-Alamein**

*Perhaps the most decisive battle in North Africa was the Battle of El-Alamein, from October 23 to November 3, 1942, in which a powerful British offensive defeated German forces overwhelmingly. The British outnumbered the Germans two to one, and Rommel, who had by this time earned the nickname "Desert Fox" for his brilliant surprise attacks, was away on sick leave when the battle began. As the battle started, Rommel's substitute died of a heart attack, and by the time Rommel arrived, the situation was hopeless.*

### **Operation Torch**

*Within days of the British victory at El-Alamein, the Allies launched Operation Torch, the code name for their invasion of North Africa. On November 8, 1942, British and American forces carried out an amphibious landing on the coast of French North Africa (present-day Morocco). The invasion involved more than 100,000 men and over 600 ships, placing it among the largest such invasions in history. Operation Torch was highly successful and enabled the Allies to take more than 1,000 miles of North African coastline.*

### **Tunisia**

*With Operation Torch completed and many Allied troops on the ground in Africa, the Allies energetically pursued the Axis forces that had begun retreating into Tunisia. The desert terrain in Tunisia was ideal for a defending force, and it was here that Rommel planned to make a stand against the Allies. The Allies did not begin their offensive into Tunisia until November 25, 1942, however, and the delay of several weeks gave Germany and Italy time to airlift more troops and equipment to the region. Thus, by the time U.S. and British forces began their attacks, the Axis forces substantially outnumbered them.*

*The Allies faced a difficult challenge in Tunisia, and their progress was very slow. Rommel's forces fought with tenacity in one battle after another as the fighting continued well into the spring of 1943. Nonetheless, the Allies did consistently gain ground on the Axis forces. On May 7, the Allies took Tunis and soon took the remaining Axis forces in Africa—more than 200,000 in all—prisoner. With that, the war in North Africa was over.*

### **Results of the North African Campaign**

*The war in North Africa was essentially an adventure initiated by Italy in an attempt to seize former colonial territories of Britain and France. As it became apparent that the Italian military had taken on more than it could handle, Germany was forced to come to Italy's defense. In that respect, the campaign in North Africa was very much like the failed Italian campaign in Greece in November 1940. Unlike Greece, however, North Africa was a large-scale conflict and forced Hitler to divert considerable resources, severely weakening German efforts elsewhere. Ultimately, the North Africa campaign was a serious defeat for the Axis powers. It also marked the first major involvement in the European theater by U.S. forces.*

### **Operation Husky**

*Following the Axis defeat in North Africa, the Allies pursued them to the island of Sicily. On July 10, 1943, U.S. and British forces began Operation Husky, an invasion of the island using troops deployed by gliders, parachutes, and boats. Many of these landings were disrupted by high winds, making it difficult for Allied troops to regroup once on the ground. During the first few days, the invaders encountered significant resistance around Sicily's main airfield, but it was quickly overcome. On July 22, the Sicilian capital of Palermo fell to the Allies, and Sicily was secured.*

### **The Invasion of the Italian Mainland**

*The day after the fall of Sicily, Italy's Fascist ruler, Benito Mussolini, was overthrown by a peaceful coup, and Italian officials promptly began approaching the Allies about an armistice. Prior to Mussolini's ouster, U.S. and British forces had planned an invasion of the Italian mainland, and the sudden turn of events took the Allied leaders by surprise. Although Italy officially surrendered to the Allies on September 8, 1943, the Allied invasion of Italy proceeded as planned, as there were still a large number of German forces stationed in the country.*

*Following the success in North Africa, British forces landed at Taranto, on the southeastern tip of Italy, on September 2. However, the main invasion did not begin until September 9, the day after Italy's surrender. The two forces planned to fight their way across the country to meet in the middle. German resistance proved very heavy, however, and the U.S. forces in particular suffered great casualties. After slow and treacherous fighting, the Allies finally captured the port of Naples on October 1, putting all of southern Italy under Allied control.*

## ***Monte Cassino and Rome***

*Even though the Italian government had surrendered, the Germans were determined not to allow Rome to fall to the Allies. As the Allies secured their position in southern Italy, German forces formed a defensive line across the width of Italy, just south of Rome. This barrier was called the Winter Line and stretched from one coast of Italy to the other, crossing the center of the country at the fortified monastery of Monte Cassino.*

*The heavily defended Winter Line presented a very formidable obstacle to the Allied forces, who assaulted the entrenched Germans over and over again and each time were pushed back. The stalemate persisted for more than six months until Monte Cassino finally fell on May 18, 1944. Rome was liberated shortly thereafter, on June 5. The Germans retreated a short distance and formed a new defensive line in northern Italy, the Gothic Line, which would hold until the spring of 1945.*

## ***Italy's Role in the War***

*In sum, Italy's participation in World War II provided little strategic benefit for Germany; in fact, it actually hindered the German war effort by diverting German forces from more important tasks. All of Italy's actions were undertaken at the whim of its dictator, Mussolini, whose decisions became so erratic and potentially costly that his own underlings eventually decided to overthrow him. Indeed, the battles that resulted from Italy's initially frivolous and aimless campaigns became increasingly devastating. The campaign in North Africa ballooned into a huge endeavor that cost tens of thousands of lives, and the battles on the Italian mainland between Allied and German forces proved even more devastating.*

# **THE GERMAN RETREAT FROM RUSSIA**

## ***Events***

*July 5, 1943 Battle of Kursk begins*

*July 12 Germany retreats from Kursk*

*September 25 Soviet forces liberate Smolensk*

*November 6 Soviet forces liberate Kiev*

*January 27, 1944 Siege of Leningrad is broken*

*June 22 Russian offensive through Belorussia (Operation Bagration) begins*

*July 3 Soviet forces liberate Minsk*

*July 24 Soviet forces capture Majdanek extermination camp in Poland*

## ***The Germans Post-Stalingrad***

*After the devastation of the Battle of Stalingrad, which ended in February 1943, the Soviets and Germans took more than four months to regroup. Though forced to abandon the Caucasus region, the Germans continued to hold the Ukraine, with their forces concentrated to the west of the city of Kursk in western Russia. Hitler, determined to avenge his humiliating defeat at*

Stalingrad, formulated a plan known as Operation Citadel. Both the Germans and Soviets built up heavy armor, artillery, and air forces prior to the attack. The Soviets also created an incredible line of trenches, mines, and anti-tank barriers to slow the Germans.

### ***The Battle of Kursk***

The clash between German and Soviet forces began on the night of July 4, 1943, on a 200-mile front with a total of roughly 5,000 tanks and 4,000 aircraft in place—one of the largest armored conflicts in history. The Germans proved surprisingly effective at removing and neutralizing the Soviet minefields. After several days of escalation, the central episode of the battle took place on July 12 at the village of Prokhorovka, where nearly 2,000 tanks clashed at once.

In sharp contrast to Stalingrad, the Battle of Kursk was over in only a few weeks. By July 14, Germany was in retreat, with the Soviets pursuing them close behind. On August 5, the Soviets liberated the city of Orel, which lay to the north of Kursk, closing another major gap in the front. From this point forward, the USSR had the initiative and commenced a long offensive push that would slowly drive the Germans back to the west.

### ***Soviet Victories in the Ukraine***

During the late summer and autumn of 1943, the Soviets advanced steadily, achieving a series of victories as they pushed the Germans westward across the Ukraine. The first major victory came on August 22, when the Red Army retook the city of Kharkov. Meanwhile, the Germans were planning the construction of a massive defensive wall all the way from the Gulf of Finland in the north to the Sea of Azov in the south. To be called the Panther Line, it was meant to be analogous to the Atlantic Wall that the Germans were building near Normandy, France (see *The Allied Invasion of France*, p. 59 ). The wall was never built, however, for the Soviets advanced too quickly for the construction site to be held.

On September 25, Stalin's forces retook the city of Smolensk, which was a keystone in Germany's defense effort. Dnepropetrovsk fell on October 25, followed by the Ukrainian capital of Kiev on November 6. Germany's southern army group was now in full-scale retreat and would be expelled from Soviet territory early in 1944.

### ***The End of the Siege of Leningrad***

The city of Leningrad, meanwhile, was still starving under the crippling German siege that had begun all the way back in September 1941 (see *Kiev and Leningrad*, p. 30 ). The city was completely encircled by German troops, aside from a sliver of land that allowed access to nearby Lake Ladoga. Although the situation for those trapped in the city was grim, Russians were able to get some food and medical supplies into the city via trucks driving across the frozen lake. The task was dangerous, as many trucks fell victim to German shelling or broke through the ice and sank, but the supplies helped Leningrad's population endure the Germans' brutally long siege.

On January 27, 1944, the siege of Leningrad was finally broken, roughly 900 days after it had begun. The combined forces of the Red Army pushing in from the outside and Soviet troops and

*resistance fighters pushing out from the inside broke the German siege line. Within days, the German forces surrounding the city were forced out of the Leningrad region entirely.*

*The liberation of Leningrad was a tremendous victory for the Soviets, both literally and symbolically. More than 600,000 Russians died from starvation, exposure, or disease during the siege, and the rest were kept alive only barely by the supplies delivered across Lake Ladoga. Throughout the siege, Soviet forces trapped within the city had stood firm and prevented German forces from ever entering.*

### ***German Atrocities***

*With the Leningrad siege broken, all German forces on Soviet territory, except for the Crimea, were in active retreat during early 1944. With each passing month, more and more Soviet cities and towns were liberated, and the Germans lost more and more of the ground they had seized in 1941 and 1942. The retreat was nonetheless brutal as the Germans stepped up their murder campaigns to a frenzy. As the Nazi forces abandoned their positions, they executed any remaining Jewish slave laborers and Soviet prisoners, along with anyone even remotely suspected of partisan involvement. In Belorussia, entire towns were burned to the ground together with their residents.*

### ***Operation Bagration***

*Although the Red Army kept pushing, it was not until the summer of 1944 that a major Soviet offensive took place. Operation Bagration began three years to the day after Germany's initial invasion of Russia, on June 22, 1944. The objective was to drive out completely the German forces centered in Belorussia and central Russia. The Soviets advanced with nearly 2 million troops and thousands of tanks and within days had broken the German front line in two. On July 3, Soviet forces took the Belorussian capital of Minsk, and less than two weeks later, the Red Army reached the Polish border.*

### ***The Discovery of Concentration Camps***

*As the Red Army advanced west into Europe via Poland, Slovakia, and Romania, they uncovered a growing body of evidence concerning German atrocities. On July 24, 1944, Soviet soldiers moving through Lublin, Poland, captured the Majdanek extermination camp before its German operators could destroy the evidence of what had taken place there. Upon arrival, they found hundreds of dead bodies, along with gas chambers, crematoria, and thousands of living prisoners in varying states of starvation. Although the West had received reports of such atrocities for some time, this Soviet discovery was the first absolute proof.*

### ***The Polish Insurgency***

*At the same time, an active Polish insurgency continued to fight against the Germans in Warsaw and throughout western Poland. The Allies had limited success in their efforts to airdrop supplies and other means of support to these insurgents. The Soviet government refused to assist in these airdrops and even actively discouraged them, claiming that they would have negligible*

*effect on the war and were a waste of time. However, as the Red Army made its way deeper into Poland, Stalin's intentions became clearer, as reports surfaced in the West that Soviets "liberating" Polish territory were actually arresting members of the Polish insurgency in large numbers.*

### ***Germany on the Defensive***

*Germany's defeat at Kursk in July 1943 was almost simultaneous with the Allied invasion of Sicily, and Hitler was forced to withdraw some generals and forces to fight the new threat in Italy. This multi-front war began to take a serious toll on Germany's capability to control the territory it had seized over the previous four years. As Soviet forces advanced farther west during early 1944, the German military leadership also had to prepare for the expected British and American invasion of France. Consequently, Germany withdrew still more forces from the collapsing eastern front. Although Hitler was still far from giving up, his conquests were clearly in decline and his war machine gradually collapsing.*

## **THE ALLIED INVASION OF FRANCE**

### ***Events***

*June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion begins*

*July 20 Attempt on Hitler's life nearly succeeds*

*Late July Allied forces make first significant inland progress*

*August 15 Allied forces land on Mediterranean coast of France*

*Mid-August Hitler orders evacuation of southern France Soviet forces enter Germany from the east*

*August 30 Soviet forces capture Ploesti, Romania*

*September 10 First Allied troops enter Germany from west*

*October 18 Hitler authorizes conscription of all healthy men aged 16–60*

### ***Key People***

*Dwight D. Eisenhower - U.S. general and supreme commander of Allied forces in western Europe; planned Normandy invasion*

### ***Operation Overlord***

*By early 1944, the Allies, under the leadership of U.S. general Dwight D. Eisenhower, had been planning an invasion of France for more than a year. The Germans, anticipating such an invasion since 1942, had begun building the Atlantic Wall, a series of heavily armed fortifications all along the French coast. As the Allied invasion plan became more specific, it was dubbed Operation Overlord, and preparations and training for the mission began in earnest.*

*As part of the invasion plan, the Allies instigated a mass disinformation campaign in hopes of directing German forces away from the actual landing point. As part of this effort, the Allies*

*made use of German spies in Britain who had been turned and were serving as double agents. These double agents helped convince the German leadership that the invasion would take place near Calais, the point where the English Channel was narrowest, when in fact the invasion was targeted farther south, in Normandy.*

### ***D-Day***

*The invasion was launched early in the morning of June 6, 1944—the famous D-Day—barely a day after U.S. troops had liberated the Italian capital of Rome. Overnight, roughly 20,000 British and American airborne troops had been dropped by parachute and glider a short distance inland of the Normandy coast, ordered to do as much damage as possible to the German fortified coastal defenses. Meanwhile, over 6,000 ships were making their way across the English Channel to deliver a huge expeditionary force onto five separate beaches between Cherbourg and Caen. The first wave alone brought 150,000 Allied soldiers to the French shore, and over the coming weeks, more than 2 million more would enter France via the Normandy beaches—to this day the largest seaborne invasion in history. Opposing the invaders were thousands of German troops manning the fortifications above the beaches.*

*The first day of the invasion was costly for the Allies in terms of casualties—especially at one landing point, Omaha Beach—but the Germans were vastly outnumbered and rapidly overwhelmed by the incoming forces. The German high command still believed that a larger invasion was imminent at Calais or elsewhere, so they withheld reserve forces in the area from moving against the Normandy invaders. The Allies therefore accomplished nearly all of their set objectives for the first day, which included fully securing the landing areas.*

### ***The Battle of Normandy***

*Breaking out of the Normandy coast and into inland France proved more difficult, in part because of stubbornly defended German defense posts at Cherbourg and Caen, which framed the area. The Allies were unable to advance inland in significant numbers until July 28, 1944, by which time the two German forts had been defeated. During August, the Allied forces that continued to land in Normandy were able to move rapidly into the heart of France.*

### ***Operation Dragoon***

*On August 15, a second Allied assault was made into France, this time along the Mediterranean coast in the south. This campaign, called Operation Dragoon, involved nearly 100,000 troops, who rapidly spread out northward into France. With this southern operation a success, Allied forces were able to approach the French capital from two directions.*

### ***Paris***

*By mid-August 1944, most of northwestern France was under Allied control, and from there, the Allied advance moved rapidly. Hitler ordered the evacuation of southern France, and German troops also began the process of evacuating Paris itself. At almost the same time, Soviet troops invading from the other front first crossed Germany's eastern border.*

*Even as it became inevitable that France would fall to the Allies, however, the Nazi war machine continued deporting French Jews to Auschwitz and other extermination camps without letup. A few days later, on August 25, Allied forces entered Paris, by which point all remaining German troops had either evacuated or been taken prisoner.*

### ***The Approach to Germany***

*Even though the war in Europe would continue for another seven months, September 1944 brought Germany perilously close to defeat. During that month, Allied troops overran most of France, pushed deep into Belgium, and were on the verge of entering the Netherlands. The first Allied soldier crossed into Germany on September 10; although this mission was only a brief excursion, Allied ground missions into Germany would become increasingly frequent.*

*After the success of Operation Overlord, the Allies had the ability to launch bomber raids from France, Italy, and Britain, which vastly expanded the range and duration of aerial attacks inside Germany. Simultaneously, the Soviets were closing in from the east: although Warsaw was still under German control, the Red Army had taken much of eastern Poland. The Soviets also had advanced into Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia—the latter two of which even signed formal agreements of cooperation with the USSR.*

### ***Germany Surrounded***

*By the autumn of 1944, Germany was surrounded on all sides. Allied air strikes on German industrial facilities, particularly oil reserves, prevented the Luftwaffe from posing the serious threat that it once had. This gap in Germany's defense left the country very vulnerable to attack. Moreover, the fuel situation in Germany was becoming truly desperate, especially after the city of Ploiesti, Romania, fell to the Red Army on August 30. Ploiesti had been the last oil source available to Germany, as it was now cut off from the Black Sea.*

*Few in the German high command could have failed to recognize that they were in serious trouble, even if they could not admit it publicly. A resistance movement against Hitler grew among the German officer corps, and several attempts were made on Hitler's life throughout the summer, including a bombing on July 20 that nearly succeeded. After the failed attempt, Hitler cracked down mercilessly on known opponents, executing more than 4,000 of them.*

*On October 18, Hitler ordered the conscription of all healthy German men aged sixteen to sixty in order to defend the country from an obviously imminent invasion. Hitler intended for the country to fight to the last man and planned to employ a scorched-earth policy similar to the strategy the Soviets had used against Hitler's own forces in the USSR in 1941.*

## **THE FALL OF GERMANY**

## **Events**

*November 20, 1944 Hitler abandons Rastenburg headquarters*  
*December 16 Battle of the Bulge; Germans begin counteroffensive in Ardennes*  
*December 24 Germans surround Americans at Bastogne*  
*January 16, 1945 U.S. forces freed from Bastogne*  
*February 4 Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin meet at Yalta Conference*  
*April 12 Roosevelt dies; Truman becomes U.S. president*  
*April 16 Soviets begin offensive on Berlin*  
*April 25 U.S. and Soviet advances meet for first time*  
*April 28 Partisans execute Mussolini*  
*April 30 Hitler commits suicide*  
*May 7 Germany signs formal surrender*  
*May 8 Western Allies declare V-E Day*  
*May 9 USSR declares Victory Day*

## **Key People**

*Adolf Hitler - German chancellor; committed suicide on April 30, 1945, with fall of Berlin imminent*  
*Franklin D. Roosevelt - 32nd U.S. president; met with Churchill and Stalin at Yalta Conference but died in April 1945*  
*Harry S Truman - 33rd U.S. president; took office upon Roosevelt's death*  
*Winston Churchill - British prime minister; met with Roosevelt and Stalin at February 1945 Yalta Conference*  
*Joseph Stalin - Soviet premier; began to assert USSR's dominance over Eastern Europe in final days of the war, which led to Cold War tensions*

## **German Desperation**

*During the second half of 1944, the Nazi empire gradually imploded as its enemies invaded from east, west, and south. Supplies and manufacturing dwindled on a daily basis. The once-mighty Luftwaffe had some of the best military aircraft in the world but lacked fuel to fly them and parts to maintain them. Evidence suggests that Chancellor Adolf Hitler himself became addicted to a variety of drugs and that he may also have suffered from syphilis, Parkinson's disease, or both.*

*Far separated from reality, Hitler placed his last hope of winning the war on the latest developments of German technology. These developments were both impressive and real but were too late and too poorly executed to change the outcome of the war or even delay it by much. Among Germany's most fearsome new weapons were two missiles, the V1 and the V2. The V1 was the world's first cruise missile, the V2 the world's first weaponized ballistic missile. Other German innovations included both jet- and rocket-propelled aircraft. However, nearly all of these innovations were still experimental in nature and not truly ready for effective use in combat. German scientists were also busily working on the development of an atomic bomb, but the war ended before they could succeed.*

## **The Battle of the Bulge**

*On December 16, 1944, the Germans began their last major counteroffensive of the war, as three German armies surged into the Ardennes Forest, dividing the Allied front with the ultimate goal of retaking the Belgian city of Antwerp. This time, Allied intelligence failed to intercept the German plans, and the action was a complete surprise.*

*The Germans launched the attack during a heavy snowstorm that grounded all aircraft, making it difficult for the Allies to evaluate the extent of the attack. Furthermore, the Germans deployed a group of about thirty English-speaking soldiers behind Allied lines, dressed in American uniforms and driving captured American vehicles. These special troops succeeded in creating chaos among the Allied troops by reversing road signs, cutting communications wires, and inciting a panic among Allied troops once they realized that they had been infiltrated.*

*By December 24, the Germans had penetrated deep into French territory, making a distinct bulge in the front line that lent the Battle of the Bulge its name. German forces surrounded a large contingent of U.S forces in the town of Bastogne and attempted to intimidate them with an invitation of surrender. The offer was refused.*

*As the weather cleared and Allied aircraft could fly again, the Germans were pushed back, and supplies were airdropped to the trapped American troops. In the meantime, other Allied armies were diverted from other areas of France to help. By early January 1945, the Germans were once again in retreat, and on January 16, the soldiers trapped at Bastogne were free, and the “bulge” was no more.*

### ***The German Retreat from the East***

*Throughout the fall and winter of 1944, Soviet forces slowly but steadily made their way toward Germany through eastern Europe. The brunt of the assault was concentrated on Poland, where most of the Nazis’ concentration camps were located. By early November 1944, the German S.S. was trying frantically to dismantle these camps and hide evidence of the atrocities that had taken place. The Nazis forced those prisoners who were still living to march on foot westward to Germany. On November 20, Hitler himself retreated, abandoning his staff headquarters at Rastenburg along the Polish-German border and relocating to Berlin.*

### ***The Yalta Conference***

*On February 4, 1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin came together for a now-famous meeting at Yalta, a resort on the Crimean Peninsula in the USSR. During the meeting, the “Big Three,” as they came to be called, discussed their strategy for the last stages of the war. They agreed that Britain and the United States would provide bomber support for Soviet troops fighting along the eastern front.*

*The three leaders also spoke about the issue of how Europe would be divided after the war, with particular concern regarding the situation in Poland, which was by this point controlled entirely by the Soviet Union. With considerable difficulty, Roosevelt and Churchill managed to pressure Stalin into holding democratic elections in Poland. However, these turned out to be heavily rigged in favor of a pro-Soviet Communist government.*

### ***The Soviet Advance***

*Meanwhile, the Red Army had moved deep into Hungary and, by early December, had taken most of the country except for the area immediately around Budapest. U.S. and British aircraft provided support as the Soviets advanced into German territory, making devastating bombing attacks on the cities of Leipzig, Dresden, and Berlin. Dresden, in particular, was almost completely destroyed.*

*By late March 1945, the Red Army had secured all of eastern Europe. It continued its advance into Austria, capturing the capital of Vienna on April 13. By this time, the Allied forces coming from France had crossed the Rhine River and were moving swiftly toward Berlin from the west. The Allies decided to let Soviet forces enter Berlin first, while British and U.S. forces concentrated on other areas to the north and south.*

### ***Roosevelt's Death***

*On April 12, 1945, U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose health had been failing for some time, died of a cerebral hemorrhage at his vacation home in Georgia. The United States saw an outpouring of grief, as Roosevelt had been president an unprecedented twelve years and, in addition to being an effective commander in chief and diplomatic leader, had almost single-handedly rallied the American people through the hardships of the war. Vice President Harry S Truman succeeded Roosevelt as president.*

### ***The End of Nazi Germany***

*Just days after Roosevelt's death, on April 16, 1945, the Soviets began their final offensive against the Third Reich. Over the coming days, more than 3,000 tanks crossed the Neisse River, assaulting Berlin's outer defenses while Allied aircraft bombed the city from above. On April 20, Hitler spent his birthday in an underground bunker and soon resigned to kill himself when the city fell. Although imminent defeat was obvious, Hitler not only refused to allow his troops to surrender but also insisted that the conscripted civilian army was to defend Berlin to the last man.*

*On April 25, the Allied armies advancing from east and west met for the first time, when a small group of American and Soviet soldiers met at the German village of Stehla. The hugely symbolic meeting was marked by celebrations in both Moscow and New York. On April 28, the former dictator of Italy, Benito Mussolini, under arrest since his ouster nearly two years before, was executed by Italian partisans and hung upside down in the center of Milan. Two days later, on April 30, Adolf Hitler killed himself in the bunker in which he had been living since the beginning of the month. Later that evening, the Red Army hung a Soviet flag from the top of the Reichstag, the German parliament building in Berlin.*

*Over the following days, there was a great deal of confusion throughout Germany. Some German forces surrendered, while others continued to fight. Among the remaining leaders, some went into hiding or sought escape abroad. Others followed Hitler's example and committed suicide.*

### ***The Formal Surrender***

*Early on the morning of May 7, 1945, General Alfred Jodl signed the official surrender on behalf of all German forces, which went into effect the next day. Some sporadic fighting continued in the interim, particularly in Czechoslovakia. During the course of May 8, nearly all remaining German forces surrendered, and that night, additional members of the German high command signed a formal surrender. The Western Allies thus celebrated May 8, 1945, as V-E Day (Victory in Europe Day). Because some fighting between Soviet and German forces continued into the next day, May 9 became the official Victory Day in the USSR.*

### ***The Seeds of the Cold War***

*As it turned out, the dividing line between the Red Army's position and the Western Allied armies' position at the end of the war in Europe would solidify into roughly the same line as the Iron Curtain, the line dividing Western Europe from Eastern Europe in the Cold War. Berlin itself would remain divided into Soviet and Western zones—which became East and West Berlin, respectively—for decades*

## **THE FALL OF JAPAN**

### ***Events***

*March 1945 Allies begin mass bombing raids of Tokyo and other cities*

*July 16 United States successfully tests first atomic bomb*

*July 26 Potsdam Declaration signed*

*August 6 United States drops atomic bomb on Hiroshima*

*August 8 USSR enters war against Japan*

*August 9 United States drops atomic bomb on Nagasaki USSR invades Manchuria*

*August 15 Hirohito announces Japan's surrender*

*September 2 Japan signs formal surrender*

### ***Key People***

*Harry S Truman - 33rd U.S. president; after death of Roosevelt, made decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945*

*Curtis LeMay - U.S. general who orchestrated brutal incendiary bombing campaign against major Japanese cities in March 1945*

### ***The Tokyo Air Raids***

*During the same months that Allied forces in Europe were closing in on Germany, Allied forces in the Pacific were closing in on Japan. In March 1945, the U.S. Air Force began a series of heavy bombing campaigns against major Japanese cities. These attacks were the brainchild of General Curtis LeMay, who headed the 21st Bomber Command. The operations used America's new strategic bomber, the B-29, and directly targeted the Japanese civilian population in*

*addition to industrial and military targets. The strategy was simply to destroy the Japanese will to resist.*

*Many of these raids were conducted on the capital of Tokyo itself, though other cities such as Kobe were also hit. In the spring and summer of 1945, the severity of these air raids grew exponentially, some causing firestorms that produced death tolls in the hundreds of thousands. By late summer, little of Tokyo and the other targeted cities were left standing.*

### ***The Potsdam Declaration***

*Between July 17 and August 2, 1945, Harry S Truman of the United States, Winston Churchill of Britain (and later Clement Atlee, who replaced him as prime minister during the conference), and Joseph Stalin of the USSR met in Potsdam, Germany, with other Allied leaders to discuss the future administration of Germany. On July 26, the three also held a special meeting to settle on the terms of surrender for Japan in order to end the war. The agreement was set forth in a document known as the Potsdam Declaration. In short, it demanded an unconditional surrender that included the complete demilitarization of the country and the replacement of Japan's current leadership by a "peacefully inclined and responsible government."*

### ***The Manhattan Project***

*During the summer of 1945, American scientists succeeded in completing a working atomic bomb, which was tested a single time, on July 16, at a remote location in New Mexico. Scientists around the world had theorized about the concept of such a weapon for years, and active research on its development had been taking place not only in the United States but also in Nazi Germany, Japan, and the USSR. The American effort, which was conducted with substantial help from Canada and Britain, was code-named the Manhattan Project. Shortly after the July test, the Truman administration began seriously to consider using the bomb against Japan. Eventually, Truman made the difficult decision to do so, in spite of considerable resistance from U.S. military leaders. Despite the fact that the bomb would kill tens of thousands of innocents, Truman felt that it would ultimately save both U.S. military and Japanese civilian casualties that would inevitably result from a ground invasion of Japan.*

### ***Hiroshima and Nagasaki***

*The first atomic bomb was dropped from a B-29 called the Enola Gay on the morning of August 6, 1945, onto the city of Hiroshima. The blast obliterated most of the central city, killing 80,000 in a single moment. By the end of the year, 60,000 more victims would die from radiation poisoning, and thousands more would die in the years to come, from cancer and other long-term effects of the radiation. It is estimated that the total death toll from Hiroshima was well over 200,000.*

*The immediate reaction to the bomb in Japan was one of total incomprehension. All communications with Hiroshima were lost, and rumors quickly spread that the city had vanished in some kind of cataclysmic explosion. Yet Japanese military radar had indicated that only a few isolated planes had been in the area. The Japanese would learn the truth sixteen hours following*

*the explosion, when the U.S. government released a public statement explaining what had taken place. Three days later, on August 9, a second atomic bomb was dropped on the port city of Nagasaki with similarly devastating results.*

### ***Japan Surrenders***

*The day before the Nagasaki bombing, the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan and commenced an attack on the Chinese province of Manchuria, which was still held by the Japanese. The combination of the atomic bombings with the potential threat of a full-scale invasion of Japan by the USSR was enough to remove any hope that Japan may have held for continuing the war. On August 15, 1945, Emperor Hirohito announced Japan's capitulation in accordance with the Potsdam Declaration. A formal surrender was signed on September 2 aboard the battleship USS Missouri.*