World War II

I INTRODUCTION

World War II, global military conflict that, in terms of lives lost and material destruction, was the most devastating war in human history. It began in 1939 as a European conflict between Germany and an Anglo-French coalition but eventually widened to include most of the nations of the world. It ended in 1945, leaving a new world order dominated by the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

More than any previous war, World War II involved the commitment of nations' entire human and economic resources, the blurring of the distinction between combatant and noncombatant, and the expansion of the battlefield to include all of the enemy's territory. The most important determinants of its outcome were industrial capacity and personnel. In the last stages of the war, two radically new weapons were introduced: the long-range rocket and the atomic bomb. In the main, however, the war was fought with the same or improved weapons of the types used in World War I (1914-1918). The greatest advances were in aircraft and tanks.

I THE WORLD AFTER WORLD WAR I

I

Three major powers had been dissatisfied with the outcome of World War I. Germany, the principal defeated nation, bitterly resented the territorial losses and reparations payments imposed on it by the Treaty of Versailles. Italy, one of the victors, found its territorial gains far from enough either to offset the cost of the war or to satisfy its ambitions. Japan, also a victor, was unhappy about its failure to gain control of China.

A Causes of the War

France, the United Kingdom, and the United States had attained their wartime objectives. They had reduced Germany to a military cipher and had reorganized Europe and the world as they saw fit. The French and the British frequently disagreed on policy in the postwar period, however, and were unsure of their ability to defend the peace settlement. The United States, disillusioned by the Europeans' failure to repay their war debts, retreated into isolationism.

A The Failure of Peace Efforts

1

During the 1920s, attempts were made to achieve a stable peace. The first was the establishment (1920) of the League of Nations as a forum in which nations could settle their disputes. The league's powers were limited to persuasion and various levels of moral and economic sanctions that the members were free to carry out as they saw fit. At the Washington Conference of 1921-22, the principal naval powers agreed to limit their navies according to a fixed ratio. The Locarno Conference (1925) produced a treaty guarantee of the German-French boundary and an arbitration agreement between Germany and Poland. In the Paris Peace Pact (1928), 63 countries, including all the great powers except the USSR, renounced war as an instrument of national policy and pledged to resolve all disputes among them "by pacific means." The signatories had agreed beforehand to exempt wars of "self-defense."

A The Rise of Fascism

2

One of the victors' stated aims in World War I had been "to make the world safe for democracy," and postwar Germany adopted a democratic constitution, as did most of the other states restored or created after the war. In the 1920s, however, the wave of the future appeared to be a form of nationalistic, militaristic totalitarianism known by its Italian name, fascism. It promised to minister to peoples' wants more effectively than democracy and presented itself as the one sure defense against communism. Benito Mussolini established the first Fascist dictatorship in Italy in 1922.

A Formation of the Axis Coalition

3

Adolf Hitler, the *Führer* (“leader”) of the German National Socialist (Nazi) Party, preached a racist brand of fascism. Hitler promised to overturn the Versailles Treaty and secure additional *Lebensraum* (“living space”) for the German people, who he contended deserved more as members of a superior race. In the early 1930s, the depression hit Germany. The moderate parties could not agree on what to do about it, and large numbers of voters turned to the Nazis and Communists. In 1933 Hitler became the German chancellor, and in a series of subsequent moves established himself as dictator.

Japan did not formally adopt fascism, but the armed forces' powerful position in the government enabled them to impose a similar type of totalitarianism. As dismantlers of the world status quo, the Japanese military were well ahead of Hitler. They used a minor clash with Chinese troops near Mukden in 1931 as a pretext for taking over all of Manchuria, where they proclaimed the puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932. In 1937-1938 they occupied the main Chinese ports.

Having denounced the disarmament clauses of the Versailles Treaty, created a new air force, and reintroduced conscription, Hitler tried out his new weapons on the side of right-wing military rebels in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The venture brought him into collaboration with Mussolini, who was also supporting the Spanish revolt after having seized (1935-1936) Ethiopia in a small war. Treaties between Germany, Italy, and Japan in the period from 1936 to 1940 brought into being the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis. The Axis thereafter became the collective term for those countries and their allies.

A German Aggression in Europe

4

Hitler launched his own expansionist drive with the annexation of Austria in March 1938. The way was clear: Mussolini supported him; and the British and French, overawed by German rearmament, accepted Hitler’s claim that the status of Austria was an internal German affair. The United States had severely impaired its ability to act against aggression by passing a neutrality law that prohibited material assistance to all parties in foreign conflicts.

In September 1938 Hitler threatened war to annex the western border area of Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland and its 3.5 million ethnic Germans. The British prime minister Neville Chamberlain initiated talks that culminated at the end of the month in the Munich Pact, by which the Czechs, on British and French urging, relinquished the Sudetenland in return for Hitler’s promise not to take any more Czech territory. Chamberlain believed he had achieved “peace for our time,” but the word Munich soon implied abject and futile appeasement.

Less than six months later, in March 1939, Hitler seized the remainder of Czechoslovakia. Alarmed by this new aggression and by Hitler’s threats against Poland, the British government pledged to aid that country if Germany threatened its independence. France already had a mutual defense treaty with Poland.

The turn away from appeasement brought the Soviet Union to the fore. Joseph Stalin, the Soviet dictator, had offered military help to Czechoslovakia during the 1938 crisis, but had been ignored by all the parties to the Munich Pact. Now that war threatened, he was courted by both sides, but Hitler made the more attractive offer. Allied with Britain and France, the Soviet Union might well have had to fight, but all Germany asked for was its neutrality. In Moscow, on the night of August 23, 1939, the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed. In the part published the next day, Germany and the Soviet Union agreed not to go to war against each other. A secret protocol gave Stalin a free hand in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, eastern Poland, and eastern Romania. *See also* German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact.

II MILITARY OPERATIONS

I

In the early morning hours of September 1, 1939, the German armies marched into Poland. On September 3 the British and French surprised Hitler by declaring war on Germany, but they had no plans for rendering active assistance to the Poles.

A The First Phase: Dominance of the Axis

Man for man, the German and Polish forces were an even match. Hitler committed about 1.5 million troops, and the Polish commander, Marshal Edward Smigły-Rydz, expected to muster 1.8 million. That was not the whole picture, however. The Germans had six panzer (armored) and four motorized divisions; the Poles had one armored and one motorized brigade and a few tank battalions. The Germans' 1600 aircraft were mostly of the latest types. Half of the Poles' 935 planes were obsolete.

A 1 The Blitzkrieg in Poland

Polish strategic doctrine called for a rigid defense of the whole frontier and anticipated several weeks of preliminary skirmishing. It was wrong on both counts. On the morning of September 1, waves of German bombers hit the railroads and hopelessly snarled the Polish mobilization. In four more days, two army groups—one on the north out of East Prussia, the other on the south out of Silesia—had broken through on relatively narrow fronts and were sending armored spearheads on fast drives toward Warsaw and Brest. This was blitzkrieg (lightning war): the use of armor, air power, and mobile infantry in a pincers movement to encircle the enemy.

Between September 8 and 10, the Germans closed in on Warsaw from the north and south, trapping the Polish forces west of the capital. On September 17, a second, deeper encirclement closed 160 km (100 mi) east, near Brest. On that day, too, the Soviet Red Army lunged across the border. By September 20, practically the whole country was in German or Soviet hands, and only isolated pockets continued to resist. The last to surrender was the fortress at Kock, on October 6.

A 2 The Phony War

A French and British offensive in the west might have enabled Poland to fight longer, but until enough British arrived, it would have had to be mounted mainly by the French; French strategy, however, was defensive, based on holding the heavily fortified Maginot line. The quick finish in Poland left both sides at loose ends. Dismayed, the British and French became preoccupied with schemes to stave off a bloody replay of World War I. Hitler made a halfhearted peace offer and at the same time ordered his generals to ready an attack on the Low Countries and France. The generals, who did not think they could do against France what they had done in Poland, asked for time and insisted they could only take Holland, Belgium, and the French channel coast. Except at sea, where German submarines operated against merchant shipping and the British navy imposed a blockade, so little was going on after the first week in October that the U.S. newspapers called it the Phony War.

A 3 The Soviet-Finnish War

On November 30, after two months of diplomatic wrangling, the Soviet Union invaded Finland (*see* Russo-Finnish War). Stalin was bent on having a blitzkrieg of his own, but his plan faltered. The Finns, under Marshal Carl G. Mannerheim, were expert at winter warfare. The Soviet troops, on the other hand, were often badly led, in part because political purges had claimed many of the Red Army's senior officers. Outnumbered by at least five to one, the Finns held their own and kept fighting into the new year.

The attack on Finland aroused world opinion against the Soviet Union and gave an opening to the British and French. They had long had their eyes on a mine at Kiruna in northern Sweden that was Germany's main source of iron ore. In summer the ore went through the Baltic Sea, in winter to the ice-free Norwegian port of Narvik and then through neutral Norwegian waters to Germany. The Narvik-Kiruna railroad also connected on the east with the Finnish railroads; consequently, an Anglo-French force ostensibly sent to help the Finns would automatically be in position to occupy Narvik and Kiruna. The problem was to get Norway and Sweden to cooperate, which both refused to do.

In Germany, the naval chief, Admiral Erich Raeder, urged Hitler to occupy Norway for the sake of its open-water ports on the Atlantic, but Hitler showed little interest until late January 1940, when the weather and the discovery of some invasion plans by Belgium forced him to delay the attack on the Low Countries and France indefinitely. The first studies he had made showed that Norway could best be taken by simultaneous landings at eight port cities from Narvik to Oslo. Because the troops would have to be transported on warships and because those would be easy prey for the British

navy, the operation would have to be executed while the nights were long. Denmark, which posed no military problems, could be usefully included because it had airfields close to Norway.

A 4 Denmark and Norway

Stalin, fearing outside intervention, ended his war on March 8 on terms that cost Finland territory but left it independent. The British and French then had to find another pretext for their projected action in Narvik and Kiruna; they decided to lay mines just outside the Narvik harbor. This they thought would provoke some kind of violent German reaction, which would let them spring to Norway's side—and into Narvik.

Hitler approved the incursions into Norway and Denmark on April 2, and the warships sailed on April 7. A British task force laid the mines the next morning and headed home, passing the German ships without seeing them and leaving them to make the landings unopposed on the morning of April 9. Denmark surrendered at once, and the landings succeeded everywhere but at Oslo. There a fort blocked the approach from the sea, and fog prevented an airborne landing. The Germans occupied Oslo by noon, but in the meantime, the Norwegian government, deciding to fight, had moved to Elverum.

Although the Norwegians, aided by 12,000 British and French, held out in the area between Oslo and Trondheim until May 3, the conclusion was never in doubt. Narvik was different. There 4,600 Germans faced 24,600 British, French, and Norwegians backed by the guns of the British navy. The Germans had an advantage in the ruggedness of the terrain and a greater one in their opponents' slow, methodical moves. Thus, they held Narvik until May 28. In the first week of June they were backed against the Swedish border and close to having to choose surrender or internment, but by then, military disasters in France were forcing the British and French to recall their troops from Narvik.

A 5 The Low Countries

By spring, Hitler had found a new and better way of handling the campaign against France and the Low Countries. The first plan had been to have the main force go through Belgium, as it had in World War I. General Erich von Manstein and some other advisers, however, had persuaded Hitler to shift the main force south to the area of Luxembourg and the Ardennes Forest. The Ardennes was hilly, wooded, and not the best country for tanks, but Manstein argued that the enemy would not expect a big attack there. The tanks could make a fast northwestward sweep from the Ardennes, behind the Belgians and British and part of the French. After reaching the coast and defeating the enemy in Belgium, they could make an about-face and strike to the southeast behind the French armies along the Maginot line.

When the attack began, on May 10, 1940, the two sides were approximately equal in numbers of troops and tanks; the Germans were superior in aircraft. The decisive advantage of the Germans, however, was that they knew exactly what they were going to do. Their opponents had to improvise, in part because the Belgians and Dutch tried to stay neutral to the last. The British and French, moreover, had failed to learn from the example of Poland, having attributed that country's defeat to its inherent weakness. Consequently, they were not prepared to deal with the German armor. Their tanks were scattered among the infantry; those of the Germans were drawn together in a panzer group, an armored army.

On May 10 German airborne troops landed inside Belgium and Holland to seize airfields and bridges and, most notably, the great Belgian fortress Eben-Emael. The Dutch army surrendered on May 14, several hours after bombers had destroyed the business section of Rotterdam. Also on May 14 the German main force, the panzer group in the lead, came out of the Ardennes to begin the drive to the sea behind the British and French armies supporting the Belgians.

A 6 The Defeat of France

On May 20 the panzer group took Abbeville at the mouth of the Somme River and began to push north along the coast; it covered 400 km (250 mi) in 11 days. By May 26, the British and French were pushed into a narrow beachhead around Dunkerque. The Belgian king, Leopold III, surrendered his army the next day. Destroyers and smaller craft of all kinds rescued 338,226 men from Dunkerque in a heroic sealift that probably would not have succeeded if the German

commander, General Gerd von Rundstedt, had not stopped the tanks to save them for the next phase.

On June 5 the Germans launched a new assault against France. Italy declared war on France and Britain on June 10. The Maginot line, which only extended to the Belgian border, was intact, but the French commander, General Maxime Weygand, had nothing with which to screen it or Paris on the north and west. On June 17, Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain, a World War I hero who had become premier the day before, asked for an armistice. The armistice was signed on June 25 on terms that gave Germany control of northern France and the Atlantic coast. Pétain then set up a capital at Vichy in the unoccupied southeast.

A 7 The Battle of Britain

In the summer of 1940, Hitler dominated Europe from the North Cape to the Pyrenees. His one remaining active enemy—Britain, under a new prime minister, Winston Churchill—vowed to continue fighting. Whether it could was questionable. The British army had left most of its weapons on the beaches at Dunkerque. Stalin was in no mood to challenge Hitler. The United States, shocked by the fall of France, began the first peacetime conscription in its history and greatly increased its military budget, but public opinion, although sympathetic to Britain, was against getting into the war.

The Germans hoped to subdue the British by starving them out. In June 1940 they undertook the Battle of the Atlantic, using submarine warfare to cut the British overseas lifelines. The Germans now had submarine bases in Norway and France. At the outset the Germans had only 28 submarines, but more were being built—enough to keep Britain in danger until the spring of 1943 and to carry on the battle for months thereafter.

Invasion was the expeditious way to finish off Britain, but that meant crossing the English Channel; Hitler would not risk it unless the Britain’s Royal Air Force could be neutralized first. As a result, the Battle of Britain was fought in the air, not on the beaches. In August 1940 the Germans launched daylight raids against ports and airfields and in September against inland cities. The objective was to draw out the British fighters and destroy them. The Germans failed to reckon with a new device, radar, which greatly increased the British fighters’ effectiveness. Because their own losses were too high, the Germans had to switch to night bombing at the end of September. Between then and May 1941 they made 71 major raids on London and 56 on other cities, but the damage they wrought was too indiscriminate to be militarily decisive. On September 17, 1940, Hitler postponed the invasion indefinitely, thereby conceding defeat in the Battle of Britain.

A 8 The Balkans and North Africa (1940-1941)

In fact, Hitler had told his generals in late July 1940 that the next attack would be on the USSR. There, he said, Germany would get its “living space” and defeat Britain as well. He claimed the British were only being kept in the war by the hope of a falling-out between Germany and the USSR. When the Soviets had been defeated and British positions in India and the Middle East were threatened, he believed that Britain would make peace. Hitler wanted to start in the fall of 1940, but his advisers persuaded him to avoid the risks of a winter campaign in the Soviet Union and wait until the spring.

Meanwhile, Germany’s ally, Mussolini, had staged an unsuccessful attack (September 1940) on British-occupied Egypt from the Italian colony of Libya and an equally abortive invasion (October 1940) of Greece. In response to the latter move, the British occupied airfields on Crete (Kríti) and in Greece. Hitler did not want British planes within striking distance of his one major oil source, the Ploieşti fields in Romania, and in November he began to prepare an operation against Greece.

Early in 1941 British forces pushed the Italians back into Libya, and in February Hitler sent General Erwin Rommel with a two-division tank corps, the Afrika Korps, to help his allies. *See also* North African Campaign.

Because he would need to cross their territory to get at Greece (and the Soviet Union), Hitler brought Romania and Hungary into the Axis alliance in November 1940; Bulgaria joined in March 1941. When Yugoslavia refused to follow suit, Hitler ordered an invasion of that country.

A 8a Yugoslavia

The operations against Greece and Yugoslavia began on April 6, 1941. The Germans' primary difficulty with the attack on Yugoslavia was in pulling together an army of nine divisions from Germany and France in less than ten days. They had to limit themselves for several days to air raids and border skirmishing. On April 10 they opened drives on Belgrade from the northwest, north, and southeast. The city fell on April 13, and the Yugoslav army surrendered the next day. Yugoslavia, however, was easier to take than it would be to hold. Guerrillas—Četniks under Draža Mihajlović and partisans under Josip Broz Tito—fought throughout the war.

A Greece

8b

The Greek army of 430,000, unlike the Yugoslav, was fully mobilized, and to some extent battle tested, but national pride compelled it to try to defend the Metaxas line northeast of Salonika. By one short thrust to Salonika, the Germans forced the surrender on April 9 of the line and about half of the Greek army. After the Greek First Army, pulling out of Albania, was trapped at the Metsóvon Pass and surrendered on April 22, the British force of some 62,000 troops retreated southward. Thereafter, fast German drives—to the Isthmus of Corinth by April 27 and through the Pelopónnisos by April 30—forced the British into an evacuation that cost them 12,000 men. An airborne assault on May 20-27 also brought Crete into German hands.

Meanwhile, Rommel had launched a successful counteroffensive against the British in Libya, expelling them from the country (except for an isolated garrison at Tobruk) by April 1941.

B The Second Phase: Expansion of the War

In the year after the fall of France, the war moved toward a new stage—world war. While conducting subsidiary campaigns in the Balkans, in North Africa, and in the air against Britain, Hitler deployed his main forces to the east and brought the countries of southeastern Europe (as well as Finland) into a partnership against the USSR.

B U.S. Aid to Britain

1

The United States abandoned strict neutrality in the European war and approached a confrontation with Japan in Asia and the Pacific Ocean. U.S. and British conferences, begun in January 1941, determined a basic strategy for the event of a U.S. entry into the war, namely, that both would center their effort on Germany, leaving Japan, if need be, to be dealt with later.

In March 1941 the U.S. Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act and appropriated an initial $7 billion to lend or lease weapons and other aid to any countries the president might designate. By this means the United States hoped to ensure victory over the Axis without involving its own troops. By late summer of 1941, however, the United States was in a state of undeclared war with Germany. In July, U.S. Marines were stationed in Iceland, which had been occupied by the British in May 1940, and thereafter the U.S. Navy took over the task of escorting convoys in the waters west of Iceland. In September President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized ships on convoy duty to attack Axis war vessels.

B Friction Between the U.S. and Japan

2

Meanwhile, American relations with Japan continued to deteriorate. In September 1940 Japan coerced Vichy France into giving up northern Indochina. The United States retaliated by prohibiting the exportation of steel, scrap iron, and aviation gasoline to Japan. In April 1941, the Japanese signed a neutrality treaty with the USSR as insurance against an attack from that direction if they were to come into conflict with Britain or the United States while taking a bigger bite out of Southeast Asia. When Germany invaded the USSR in June, Japanese leaders considered breaking the treaty and joining in from the east, but, making one of the most fateful decisions of the war, they chose instead to intensify their push to the southeast. On July 23 Japan occupied southern Indochina. Two days later, the United States, Britain, and the Netherlands froze Japanese assets. The effect was to prevent Japan from purchasing oil, which would, in time, cripple its army and make its navy and air force completely useless.

B The German Invasion of the USSR

3

The war’s most massive encounter, dubbed Operation Barbarossa, began on the morning of June 22, 1941, when slightly more than 3 million German troops invaded the USSR. Although German preparations had been visible for months and had been talked about openly among the diplomats in Moscow, the Soviet forces were taken by surprise. Stalin, his confidence in the country’s military capability shaken by the Finnish war, had refused to allow any counteractivity for fear of provoking the Germans. Moreover, the Soviet military leadership had concluded that blitzkrieg, as it had been practiced in Poland and France, would not be possible on the scale of a Soviet-German war; both sides would therefore confine themselves for the first several weeks at least to sparring along the frontier.

The Soviet army had 2.9 million troops on the western border and outnumbered the Germans by two to one in tanks and by two or three to one in aircraft. Many of its tanks and aircraft were older types, but some of the tanks, particularly the later famous T-34s, were far superior to any the Germans had. Large numbers of the aircraft were destroyed on the ground in the first day, however, and their tanks, like those of the French, were scattered among the infantry, where they could not be effective against the German panzer groups. The infantry was first ordered to counterattack, which was impossible, and then forbidden to retreat, which ensured their wholesale destruction or capture.

B Initial German Successes

3a

For the invasion, the Germans had set up three army groups, designated as North, Center, and South, and aimed toward Leningrad, Moscow, and Kyiv. Hitler and his generals had agreed that their main strategic problem was to lock the Soviet army in battle and defeat it before it could escape into the depths of the country. They disagreed on how that could best be accomplished. Most of the generals believed that the Soviet regime would sacrifice everything to defend Moscow, the capital, the hub of the road and railroad networks, and the country’s main industrial center. To Hitler, the land and resources of the Ukraine and the oil of the Caucasus were more important, and he wanted to seize Leningrad as well. The result had been a compromise—the three thrusts, with the one by Army Group Center toward Moscow the strongest—that temporarily satisfied Hitler as well as the generals. War games had indicated a victory in about ten weeks, which was significant because the Russian summer, the ideal time for fighting in the USSR, was short, and the Balkans operations had caused a 3-week delay at the outset.

Ten weeks seemed ample time. Churchill offered the USSR an alliance, and Roosevelt promised lend-lease aid, but after the first few days, their staffs believed everything would be over in a month or so. By the end of the first week in July, Army Group Center had taken 290,000 prisoners in encirclements at Białystok and Minsk. On August 5, having crossed the Dnieper River, the last natural barrier west of Moscow, the army group wiped out a pocket near Smolensk and counted another 300,000 prisoners. On reaching Smolensk, it had covered more than two-thirds of the distance to Moscow.

B Hitler’s Change of Plan

3b

The Russians were doing exactly what the German generals had wanted, sacrificing enormous numbers of troops and weapons to defend Moscow. Hitler, however, was not satisfied, and over the generals’ protests, he ordered Army Group Center to divert the bulk of its armor to the north and south to help the other two army groups, thereby stopping the advance toward Moscow. On September 8 Army Group North cut Leningrad’s land connections and, together with the Finnish army on the north, brought the city under siege. On September 16 Army Group South closed a gigantic encirclement east of Kyiv that brought in 665,000 prisoners. Hitler then decided to resume the advance toward Moscow and ordered the armor be returned to Army Group Center. *See also* Leningrad, Siege of.

B The Attempt to Take Moscow

3c

After a standstill of six weeks, Army Group Center resumed action on October 2. Within two weeks, it completed three large encirclements and took 663,000 prisoners. Then the fall rains set in,

turning the unpaved Russian roads to mud and stopping the advance for the better part of a month.

In mid-November, the weather turned cold and the ground froze. Hitler and the commander of Army Group Center, Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, faced the choice of having the armies dig in where they were or sending them ahead, possibly to be overtaken by the winter. Wanting to finish the 1941 campaign with some sort of a victory at Moscow, they chose to move ahead.

In the second half of November Bock aimed two armored spearheads at Moscow. Just after the turn of the month, one of those, bearing in on the city from the northwest, was less than 32 km (less than 20 mi) away. The other, coming from the south, had about 65 km (about 40 mi) still to go. The panzer divisions had often covered such distances in less than a day, but the temperature was falling, snow was drifting on the roads, and neither the men nor the machines were outfitted for extreme cold. On December 5 the generals commanding the spearhead armies reported that they were stopped: The tanks and trucks were freezing up, and the troops were losing their will to fight.

B Soviet Counteroffensive

3d

Stalin, who had stayed in Moscow, and his commander at the front, General Georgy Zhukov, had held back their reserves. Many of them were recent recruits, but some were hardened veterans from Siberia. All were dressed for winter. On December 6 they counterattacked, and within a few days, the German spearheads were rolling back and abandoning large numbers of vehicles and weapons, rendered useless by the cold.

On Stalin’s orders, the Moscow counterattack was quickly converted into a counteroffensive on the entire front. The Germans had not built any defense lines to the rear and could not dig in because the ground was frozen hard as concrete. Some of the generals recommended retreating to Poland, but on December 18 Hitler ordered the troops to stand fast wherever they were. Thereafter, the Russians chopped great chunks out of the German front, but enough of it survived the winter to maintain the siege of Leningrad, continue the threat to Moscow, and keep the western Ukraine in German hands. *See also* Battle of Moscow.

B The Beginning of the War in the Pacific

4

The seeming imminence of a Soviet defeat in the summer and fall of 1941 had created dilemmas for Japan and the United States. The Japanese thought they then had the best opportunity to seize the petroleum and other resources of Southeast Asia and the adjacent islands; on the other hand, they knew they could not win the war with the United States that would probably ensue. The U.S. government wanted to stop Japanese expansion but doubted whether the American people would be willing to go to war to do so. Moreover, the United States did not want to get embroiled in a war with Japan while it faced the ghastly possibility of being alone in the world with a triumphant Germany. After the oil embargo, the Japanese, also under the pressure of time, resolved to move in Southeast Asia and the nearby islands. *See also* War in the Pacific.

B Pearl Harbor

4a

Until December 1941 the Japanese leadership pursued two courses: They tried to get the oil embargo lifted on terms that would still let them take the territory they wanted, and they prepared for war. The United States demanded that Japan withdraw from China and Indochina, but would very likely have settled for a token withdrawal and a promise not to take more territory. After he became Japan’s premier in mid-October, General Tōjō Hideki set November 29 as the last day on which Japan would accept a settlement without war. Tōjō’s deadline, which was kept secret, meant that war was practically certain.

The Japanese army and navy had, in fact, devised a war plan in which they had great confidence. They proposed to make fast sweeps into Burma, Malaya, the East Indies, and the Philippines and, at the same time, set up a defensive perimeter in the central and southwest Pacific. They expected the United States to declare war but not to be willing to fight long or hard enough to win. Their greatest concern was the U.S. Pacific Fleet, based at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. If it reacted quickly, it could scramble their very tight timetable. As insurance, the Japanese navy undertook to cripple the Pacific Fleet by a surprise air attack.

A few minutes before 8 AM on Sunday, December 7, 1941, Japanese carrier-based airplanes struck Pearl Harbor. In a raid lasting less than two hours, they sank or seriously damaged eight battleships and 13 other naval vessels. The U.S. authorities had broken the Japanese diplomatic code and knew an attack was imminent. A warning had been sent from Washington, but, owing to delays in transmission, it arrived after the raid had begun. In one stroke, the Japanese navy scored a brilliant success—and assured the Axis defeat in World War II. The Japanese attack brought the United States into the war on December 8—and brought it in determined to fight to the finish. Germany and Italy declared war on the United States on December 11.

B Japanese Conquests in Asia and the Pacific

4b

In the vast area of land and ocean they had marked for conquest, the Japanese seemed to be everywhere at once. Before the end of December, they took British Hong Kong and the Gilbert Islands (now Kiribati) and Guam and Wake Island (U.S. possessions), and they had invaded British Burma, Malaya, Borneo, and the American-held Philippines. British Singapore, long regarded as one of the world's strongest fortresses, fell to them in February 1942, and in March they occupied the Netherlands East Indies and landed on New Guinea. The American and Philippine forces surrendered at Bataan on April 9, and resistance in the Philippines ended with the surrender of Corregidor on May 6.

According to the Japanese plan, it would be time for them to take a defensive stance when they had captured northern New Guinea (an Australian possession), the Bismarck Archipelago, the Gilberts, and Wake Island, which they did by mid-March. But they had done so well that they decided to expand their defensive perimeter north into the Aleutian Islands, east to Midway Island, and south through the Solomon Islands and southern New Guinea. Their first move was by sea, to take Port Moresby on the southeastern tip of New Guinea. The Americans, using their ability to read the Japanese code, had a naval task force on the scene. In the ensuing Battle of the Coral Sea (May 7-8), fought entirely by aircraft carriers, the Japanese were forced to abandon their designs on Port Moresby.

B The Battle of Midway

4c

A powerful Japanese force, nine battleships and four carriers under Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, the commander in chief of the navy, steamed toward Midway in the first week of June. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, who had taken command of the Pacific Fleet after Pearl Harbor, could only muster three carriers and seven heavy cruisers, but he was reading the Japanese radio messages. Yamamoto, the architect of the Pearl Harbor raid, had planned another surprise. This time, however, it was he who was surprised. Off Midway, on the morning of June 4, U.S. dive-bombers destroyed three of the Japanese carriers in one 5-minute strike. The fourth went down later in the day, after its planes had battered the U.S. carrier *Yorktown,* which sank two days later. *See* Midway, Battle of.

Yamamoto ordered a general retreat on June 5. On June 6-7 a secondary Japanese force took Kiska and Attu in the Aleutians, but those were no recompense for the defeat at Midway, from which the Japanese navy would never recover. Their battleships were intact, but the Coral Sea and Midway had shown carriers to be the true capital ships of the war, and four of those were gone.

C The Third Phase: Turn of the Tide

In late December 1941 Roosevelt and Churchill and their chief advisers met in Washington. They reaffirmed the strategy of defeating Germany first, and because it appeared that the British would have all they could do fighting in Europe, the war against Japan became almost solely a U.S. responsibility. They also created the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS), a top-level British-American military committee seated in Washington, to develop and execute a common strategy. On January 1, 1942, the United States, the United Kingdom, the USSR, and 23 other countries signed the Declaration by United Nations in which they pledged not to make a separate peace. The United Nations became the official name for the anti-Axis coalition, but the term used more often was the Allies, taken over from World War I.

C Development of Allied Strategy

1

As a practical matter, the United States could not take much action in Europe in early 1942. It had no troops there, and it was in the midst of building forces and converting industry at home. In North Africa, the British appeared to be more than holding their own. They had relieved Tobruk on December 10, 1941, and taken Banghāzī in Libya two weeks later. Rommel counterattacked in late January 1942 and drove them back 300 km (185 mi) to al-Gazala and Bir Hacheim, but there, well forward of Tobruk and the Egyptian border, a lull set in.

C 1a Europe

The big question in the war was whether the USSR could survive a second German summer offensive, and the Russians were urging the United States and Britain to relieve the pressure on them by starting an offensive in the west. General George C. Marshall, the U.S. Army chief of staff, believed the best way to help the Russians and bring an early end to the war was to stage a buildup in England and attack across the English Channel into northwestern Europe. He wanted to act in the spring of 1943, or even in 1942 if the USSR appeared about to collapse. The British did not want involvement elsewhere until North Africa was settled and did not believe a force strong enough for a cross-channel attack could be assembled in England by 1943. Rommel settled the issue. In June he captured Tobruk and drove 380 km (235 mi) into Egypt, to Al ‘Alamayn (El ‘Alamein). After that, the Americans agreed to shelve the cross-channel attack and ready the troops en route to England for an invasion of French North Africa.

C 1b The Pacific

Meanwhile, despite the Germany-first strategy, the Americans were moving toward an active pursuit of the war against Japan. The U.S. Navy saw the Pacific as an arena in which it could perform more effectively than in the Atlantic or the Mediterranean. General Douglas MacArthur, who had commanded in the Philippines and been evacuated to Australia by submarine before the surrender, was the country’s best-known military figure and as such too valuable to be left with an inconsequential mission. The Battle of Midway had stopped the Japanese in the central Pacific, but they continued to advance in the southwest Pacific along the Solomons chain and overland on New Guinea. On July 2, 1942, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) directed the naval and ground forces in the south and southwest Pacific to halt the Japanese, drive them out of the Solomons and northeastern New Guinea, and eliminate the great base the Japanese had established at Rabaul, on New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago (now in Papua New Guinea).

C 2 The Russian Front: Summer 1942

In the most immediately critical area of the war, the USSR, the initiative had passed to the Germans again by summer 1942. The Soviet successes in the winter had been followed by disasters in the spring. Setbacks south of Leningrad, near Kharkiv, and in Crimea had cost well more than a half-million men in prisoners alone. The Germans had not sustained such massive losses, but the fighting had been expensive for them too, especially since the Soviets had three times the human resources at their disposal. Moreover, Hitler's overconfidence had led him into a colossal error. He had been so sure of victory in 1941 that he had stopped most kinds of weapons and ammunition production for the army and shifted the industries to work for the air force and navy, with which he proposed to finish off the British. He had resumed production for the army in January 1942, but the flow would not reach the front until late summer. Soviet weapons output, on the other hand, after having dropped low in November and December 1941, had increased steadily since the turn of the year, and the Soviet industrial base also was larger than the German.

Looking ahead to the summer, Hitler knew he could not again mount an all-out, three-pronged offensive. Some of the generals talked about waiting a year until the army could be rebuilt, but Hitler was determined to have the victory in 1942. He had sufficient troops and weapons to bring the southern flank of the eastern front nearly to full strength, and he believed he could compel the Soviet command to sacrifice its main forces trying to defend the coal mines of the Donets Basin and the oil fields of the Caucasus.

C 2a The German Drive Toward the Caucasus

The offensive began east of Kharkiv on June 28, and in less than four weeks the armies had taken the Donets Basin and advanced east to the Don River. The distances covered were spectacular, but the numbers of enemy killed or captured were relatively small. Stalin and his generals had made the luckiest mistake of the war. Believing the Germans were going to aim a second, more powerful, attack on Moscow, they had held their reserves back and allowed the armies in the south to retreat.

Hitler, emboldened by the ease and speed of the advance, altered his plan in the last week of July. He had originally proposed to drive due east to Stalingrad, seize a firm hold on the Volga River there, and only then send a force south into the Caucasus. On July 23 he ordered two armies to continue the advance toward Stalingrad and two to strike south across the lower Don and take the oil fields at Maikop, Groznyy, and Baku.

The Russians appeared to be heading toward disaster, as the German thrust into the Caucasus covered 300 km (185 mi) to Maikop by August 9. Hitler's strategy, however, presented a problem: Two forces moving away from each other could not be sustained equally over the badly damaged railroads of the occupied territory. In the second half of August, he diverted more supplies to the attack toward Stalingrad, and the march into the Caucasus slowed. Nevertheless, success seemed to be in sight when the Sixth Army and Fourth Panzer Army (formerly group) closed near the Stalingrad suburbs on September 3.

C 2b The Russian Stand at Stalingrad

The USSR reached its low point in the war at the end of July 1942. The retreat was almost out of hand, and the Germans were getting into position to strike north along the Volga behind Moscow as well as into the Caucasus. On July 28 Stalin issued his most famous order of the war, "Not a step back!" While threatening Draconian punishments for slackers and defeatists, he relegated communism to the background and called on the troops to fight a "patriotic" war for Russia. Like Hitler, he had thus far conducted the war as he saw fit. In late August he called on his two best military professionals, Zhukov, who had organized the Moscow counteroffensive in December 1941, and the army chief of the General Staff, General Aleksandr M. Vasilyevsky, to deal with the situation at Stalingrad. They proposed to wear the enemy down by locking its troops in a bloody fight for the city while they assembled the means for a counterattack. *See also* Stalingrad, Battle of.

C 3 Guadalcanal

The Axis was riding a high tide in midsummer 1942. Stalingrad and the Caucasus oil were seemingly within Hitler's grasp, and Rommel was within striking distance of the Suez Canal. The Japanese had occupied Guadalcanal at the southern end of the Solomons chain and were marching on Port Moresby. Within the next six months, however, the Axis had been stopped and turned back in the Soviet Union, North Africa, and the southwest Pacific.

U.S. Marines landed on Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942. Against a small Japanese garrison, the landing was easy. Afterward nothing was easy. The Japanese responded swiftly and violently by sea and by air. The outcome hinged on the Japanese navy's ability to bring in reinforcements, which was substantial, and the U.S. Navy's ability to keep the marines supplied, which was at times in some doubt. While the marines battled a determined foe in a debilitating tropical climate, between August 24 and November 30 the navy fought six major engagements in the waters surrounding the island. The losses in ships and aircraft were heavy on both sides, but the Japanese were more seriously hurt because they could not afford to accept a war of attrition with the Americans. Their warships did not come out again after the end of November, and the Americans declared the island secure on February 9, 1943.

C 4 The Anglo-American Offensive in North Africa

The turnabout in North Africa began on August 31, 1942, when Rommel attacked through the southern flank of the British line west of Al 'Alamayn, was stopped at the 'Alam al Ḥalfā' Ridge, and was thrown back by September 7. The newly appointed British commander, General Bernard Law Montgomery, hit the north flank on October 23 with a methodically prepared offensive and, by November 5, forced Rommel into a retreat. American and British Troops fighting together under

General Dwight D. Eisenhower began landing in Morocco and Algeria on November 8, the Americans at Casablanca and Oran, the British at Algiers. *See also* North African Campaign.

The Germans sent reinforcements into Tunis and occupied all of France. They managed to get the Fifth Panzer Army under General Jürgen von Arnim on the scene in time to stop Eisenhower in western Tunisia by mid-December. Rommel went into the Mareth Line in southeastern Tunisia in early February 1943 and launched an attack against the Americans on February 14 that drove them back 80 km (50 mi) and out of the vital Kasserine Pass. It was his last success and one he could not exploit. Hitler recalled him in March, as the Americans and British closed in from the west and south. After being cut off from their bases at Bizerte and Tunis and driven back into pockets on the Cape Bon Peninsula, 275,000 Germans and Italians surrendered by May 13.

C 5 The Soviet Victory at Stalingrad

On the eastern front the Germans' advances to Stalingrad and into the Caucasus had added about 1,100 km (about 680 mi) to their line. No German troops were available to hold that extra distance, so Hitler had to use troops contributed by his allies. Consequently, while Sixth and Fourth Panzer armies were tied down at Stalingrad in September and October 1942, they were flanked on the left and right by Romanian armies. An Italian and a Hungarian army were deployed farther upstream on the Don River. Trial maneuvers had exposed serious weaknesses in some of the Axis's armies.

On the morning of November 19, in snow and fog, Soviet armored spearheads hit the Romanians west and south of Stalingrad. Their points met three days later at Kalach on the Don River, encircling the Sixth Army, about half of the Fourth Panzer Army, and a number of Romanian units. Hitler ordered the Sixth Army commander, General Friedrich Paulus, to hold the pocket, promised him air supply, and sent Manstein, by then a field marshal, to organize a relief. The airlift failed to provide the 300 tons of supplies that Paulus needed each day, and Manstein's relief operation was halted 55 km (34 mi) short of the pocket in late December. The Sixth Army was doomed if it did not attempt a breakout, which Hitler refused to permit.

The Russians pushed in on the pocket from three sides in January 1943, and Paulus surrendered on January 31. The battle cost Germany about 200,000 troops. In the aftermath of Stalingrad, in part owing to the collapse of the Italian and Hungarian armies, the Germans were forced to retreat from the Caucasus and back approximately to the line from which they had started the 1942 summer offensive. *See also* Battle of Stalingrad.

C 6 The Casablanca Conference

From January 14 to 24, 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill and their staffs met in Casablanca to lay out a strategy for the period after the North African campaign. The American military chiefs wanted to proceed to the direct, cross-channel assault on Germany. The British, eloquently spoken for by Churchill, argued the advantages of gathering in the "great prizes" to be had in the Mediterranean, in Sicily and Italy for a start. Roosevelt supported the British, and the American military succeeded only (several months later) in getting an agreement that no more troops would be put into the Mediterranean area than were already there, all others being assembled in England for a cross-channel attack in 1944. Roosevelt gave his military another shock when he announced that nothing short of unconditional surrender would be accepted from any of the Axis powers. The policy was meant to reassure the Russians, who would have to wait at least another year for a full-fledged second front, but was likely also to stiffen Axis resistance.

C 7 Air Raids on Germany

As a prelude to the postponed cross-channel attack, the British and Americans decided at Casablanca to open a strategic air (bombing) offensive against Germany. In this instance they agreed on timing but not on method. The British, as a result of discouraging experience with daylight bombing early in the war, had built their heavy bombers, the Lancasters and Halifaxes, for night bombing, which meant area bombing. The Americans believed their B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberators were armed and armored heavily enough and were fitted with sufficiently accurate bombsights to fly by daylight and strike pinpoint targets. The difference was resolved by letting each nation conduct its own offensive in its own way and calling the result round-the-clock bombing. The British method was exemplified by four firebomb raids on Hamburg in late July 1943, in which much of the city was burned out and 50,000 people died. American losses of planes and

crews increased sharply as the bombers penetrated deeper into Germany. After early October 1943, when strikes at ball-bearing plants in Schweinfurt incurred nearly 25 percent losses, the daylight offensive had to be curtailed until long-range fighters became available.

C 8 The Battle of Kursk

Before the winter fighting on the eastern front ended in March 1943, Hitler knew he could not manage another summer offensive, and he talked about setting up an east wall comparable to the fortified Atlantic wall he was building along the western European coast. The long winter's retreat, however, had shortened the front enough to give him a surplus of almost two armies. It also left a large westward bulge in the front around the city of Kursk. To Hitler, the opportunity for one more grand encirclement was too good to let pass.

After waiting three months for more new tanks to come off the assembly lines, Hitler opened the battle at Kursk on July 5 with attacks north and south across the open eastern end of the bulge. Zhukov and Vasilyevsky had also had their eyes on Kursk, and they had heavily reinforced the front around it. In the war's greatest tank battle, the Russians fought the Germans nearly to a standstill by July 12. Hitler then called off the operation because the Americans and British had landed on Sicily, and he needed to transfer divisions to Italy. With that, the strategic initiative in the east passed to the Soviet forces permanently.

C 9 The Invasion of Italy

Three American, one Canadian, and three British divisions landed on Sicily on July 10. They pushed across the island from beachheads on the south coast in five weeks, against four Italian and two German divisions, and overcame the last Axis resistance on August 17. In the meantime, Mussolini had been stripped of power on July 25, and the Italian government had entered into negotiations that resulted in an armistice signed in secret on September 3 and made public on September 8.

On September 3 elements of Montgomery's British Eighth Army crossed the Strait of Messina from Sicily to the toe of the Italian boot. The U.S. Fifth Army, under General Mark W. Clark, staged a landing near Salerno on September 9; and by October 12, the British and Americans had a fairly solid line across the peninsula from the Volturno River, north of Naples, to Termoli on the Adriatic coast. The Italian surrender brought little military benefit to the Allies, and by the end of the year, the Germans stopped them on the Gustav line about 100 km (about 60 mi) south of Rome. A landing at Anzio on January 22, 1944, failed to shake the Gustav line, which was solidly anchored on the Liri River and Monte Cassino.

C 10 Allied Strategy Against Japan

Strategy in the war with Japan evolved by stages during 1943. In the first, the goal was to secure bases on the coast of China (from which Japan could be bombed and later invaded) by British and Chinese drives through Burma and eastern China and by American thrusts through the islands of the central and southwestern Pacific to Taiwan and China. By midyear, it was apparent that neither the British nor the Chinese drive was likely to materialize. Thereafter, only the two American thrusts remained. Their objectives were still Formosa and the Chinese coast.

C 11 U.S. Advances in the Pacific

In the Pacific, U.S. troops retook Attu, in the Aleutians, in a hard-fought, 3-week battle beginning on May 23. (The Japanese evacuated Kiska before Americans and Canadians landed there in August.) The main action was in the southwest Pacific. There U.S. and New Zealand troops, under Admiral William Halsey, advanced through the Solomons, taking New Georgia in August and a large beachhead on Bougainville in November. Australians and Americans under MacArthur drove the Japanese back along the East Coast of New Guinea and took Lae and Salamaua in September. MacArthur's and Halsey's mission, as set by the JCS in 1942, had been to take Rabaul, but they discovered in the Solomons that having command of the air and sea around them was enough to neutralize the Japanese Island garrisons and render them useless. Landings on Cape Gloucester, New Britain, in December, in the Admiralty Islands in February 1944, and At Emirau Island in March

1944 effectively sealed off Rabaul. Its 100,000-man garrison could not thereafter be either adequately supplied or evacuated.

The central Pacific thrust was slower in getting started. The southwest Pacific islands were relatively close together; airfields on one could furnish support for the move to the next; and the Japanese navy was wary of risking its ships within range of land-based aircraft. In the central Pacific, however, the islands were scattered over vast stretches of ocean, and powerful naval forces were needed to support the landings, particularly aircraft carriers, which were not available in sufficient numbers until late 1943.

The first central Pacific landings were in the Gilbert Islands, at Makin and Tarawa in November 1943. Betio Island in the Tarawa Atoll, 117.8 hectares (291 acres) of coral sand and concrete and coconut log bunkers, cost the 2nd Marine Division 3000 casualties in three days. More intensive preliminary bombardments and larger numbers of amphibian tractors capable of crossing the surrounding reefs made the taking of Kwajalein and Enewetak in the Marshall Islands in February 1944 somewhat less expensive.

D The Fourth Phase: Allied Victory

After the Battle of Kursk, the last lingering doubt about the Soviet forces was whether they could conduct a successful summer offensive. It was dispelled in the first week of August 1943, when slashing attacks hit the German line north and west of Kharkiv. On August 12 Hitler ordered work started on an east wall to be built along the Narva River and Lakes Pskov and Peipus, behind Army Group North, and the Desna and Dnieper rivers, behind Army Groups Center and South. In the second half of the month, the Soviet offensive expanded south along the Donets River and north into the Army Group Center sector.

On September 15 Hitler permitted Army Group South to retreat to the Dnieper River; otherwise it was likely to be destroyed. He also ordered everything in the area east of the Dnieper that could be of any use to the enemy to be hauled away, burned, or blown up. This scorched-earth policy, as it was called, could only be partially carried out before the army group crossed the river at the end of the month. Henceforth, that policy would be applied in all territory surrendered to the Russians.

Behind the river, the German troops found no trace of an east wall, and they had to contend from the first with five Soviet bridgeheads. The high west bank of the river was the best defensive line left in the Soviet Union, and the Soviet armies, under Zhukov and Vasilyevsky, fought furiously to prevent the Germans from gaining a foothold there. They expanded the bridgeheads, isolated a German army in Crimea in October, took Kyiv on November 6, and stayed on the offensive into the winter with hardly a pause.

D The Tehrān Conference

1

At the end of November, Roosevelt and Churchill journeyed to Tehrān for their first meeting with Stalin. The president and the prime minister had already approved, under the code name Overlord, a plan for a cross-channel attack. Roosevelt wholeheartedly favored executing Overlord as early in 1944 as the weather permitted. At Tehrān, Churchill argued for giving priority to Italy and possible new offensives in the Balkans or southern France, but he was outvoted by Roosevelt and Stalin. Overlord was set for May 1944. After the meeting, the CCS recalled Eisenhower from the Mediterranean and gave him command of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), which was to organize and carry out Overlord.

The Tehrān conference marked the high point of the East-West wartime alliance. Stalin came to the meeting as a victorious war leader; large quantities of U.S. lend-lease aid were flowing into the Soviet Union through Murmansk and the Persian Gulf; and the decision on Overlord satisfied the long-standing Soviet demand for a second front. At the same time, strains were developing as the Soviet armies approached the borders of the smaller eastern European states. In May 1943 the Germans had produced evidence linking the USSR to the deaths of some 11,000 Polish officers found buried in mass graves in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk. Stalin had severed relations with the Polish exile government in London, and he insisted at Tehrān, as he had before, that the postwar Soviet-Polish boundary would have to be the one established after the Polish defeat in 1939. He also reacted with barely concealed hostility to Churchill’s proposal of a British-American thrust into the Balkans.

D German Preparations for Overlord

2

Hitler expected an invasion of northwestern Europe in the spring of 1944, and he welcomed it as a chance to win the war. If he could throw the Americans and British off the beaches, he reasoned, they would not soon try again. He could then throw all of his forces, nearly half of which were in the west, against the USSR. In November 1943 he told the commanders on the eastern front that they would get no more reinforcements until after the invasion had been defeated.

In January 1944 a Soviet offensive raised the siege of Leningrad and drove Army Group North back to the Narva River-Lake Peipus line. There the Germans found a tenuous refuge in the one segment of the east wall that had been to some extent fortified. On the south flank, successive offensives, the last in March and April, pushed the Germans in the broad stretch between the Poles’ye Marshes (Pripet Marshes) and the Black Sea off of all but a few shreds of Soviet territory. The greater part of 150,000 Germans and Romanians in Crimea died or passed into Soviet captivity in May after a belated sealift failed to get them out of Sevastopol'. On the other hand, enough tanks and weapons had been turned out to equip new divisions for the west and replace some of those lost in the east; the air force had 40 percent more planes than at the same time a year earlier; and synthetic oil production reached its wartime peak in April 1944.

D 3 The Normandy Invasion

On June 6, 1944, D-Day, the day of invasion for Overlord, the U.S. First Army, under General Omar N. Bradley, and the British Second Army, under General Miles C. Dempsey, established beachheads in Normandy (Normandie), on the French channel coast. The German resistance was strong, and the footholds for Allied armies were not nearly as good as they had expected. Nevertheless, the powerful counterattack with which Hitler had proposed to throw the Allies off the beaches did not materialize, neither on D-Day nor later.

Enormous Allied air superiority over northern France made it difficult for Rommel, who was in command on the scene, to move his limited reserves. Moreover, Hitler became convinced that the Normandy landings were a feint and the main assault would come north of the Seine River. Consequently, he refused to release the divisions he had there and insisted on drawing in reinforcements from more distant areas. By the end of June, Eisenhower had 850,000 men and 150,000 vehicles ashore in Normandy.

D 4 The Soviet Reconquest of Belorussia

The German eastern front was quiet during the first three weeks of June 1944. Hitler fully expected a Soviet summer offensive, which he and his military advisers believed would come on the south flank. Since Stalingrad the Soviets had concentrated their main effort there, and the Germans thought Stalin would be eager to push into the Balkans, the historic object of Russian ambition. Although Army Group Center was holding Belorussia—the only large piece of Soviet territory still in German hands—and although signs of a Soviet buildup against the army group multiplied in June, they did not believe it was in real danger.

On June 22-23, four Soviet army groups, two controlled by Zhukov and two by Vasilyevsky, hit Army Group Center. Outnumbered by about ten to one at the points of attack, and under orders from Hitler not to retreat, the army group began to disintegrate almost at once. By July 3, when Soviet spearheads coming from the northeast and southeast met at Minsk, the Belorussian capital, Army Group Center had lost two-thirds of its divisions. By the third week of the month, Zhukov's and Vasilyevsky's fronts had advanced about 300 km (about 200 mi). The Soviet command celebrated on July 17 with a day-long march by 57,000 German prisoners, including 19 generals, through the streets of Moscow.

D 5 The Plot Against Hitler

A group of German officers and civilians concluded in July that getting rid of Hitler offered the last remaining chance to end the war before it swept onto German soil from two directions. On July 20 they tried to kill him by placing a bomb in his headquarters in East Prussia. The bomb exploded, wounding a number of officers—several fatally—but inflicting only minor injuries on Hitler. Afterward, the Gestapo hunted down everyone suspected of complicity in the plot. One of the suspects was Rommel, who committed suicide. Hitler emerged from the assassination attempt more secure in his power than ever before.

D 6 The Liberation of France

As of July 24 the Americans and British were still confined in the Normandy beachhead, which they had expanded somewhat to take in Saint-Lô and Caen. Bradley began the breakout the next day with an attack south from Saint-Lô. Thereafter, the front expanded rapidly, and Eisenhower regrouped his forces. Montgomery took over the British Second Army and the Canadian First Army. Bradley assumed command of a newly activated Twelfth Army Group consisting of U.S. First and Third armies under General Courtney H. Hodges and General George S. Patton.

After the Americans had turned east from Avranches in the first week of August, a pocket developed around the German Fifth Panzer and Seventh armies west of Falaise. The Germans held out until August 20 but then retreated across the Seine. On August 25 the Americans, in conjunction with General Charles de Gaulle's Free French and Resistance forces, liberated Paris.

Meanwhile, on August 15, American and French forces had landed on the southern coast of France east of Marseille and were pushing north along the valley of the Rhône River. They made contact with Bradley's forces near Dijon in the second week of September.

D 7 Pause in the Western Offensive

Bradley and Montgomery sent their army groups north and east across the Seine on August 25, the British going along the coast toward Belgium, the Americans toward the Franco-German border. Montgomery's troops seized Antwerp on September 3, and the first American patrols crossed the German border on September 11. But the pursuit was ending. The German armies shattered in the breakout were being rebuilt, and Hitler sent as commander Field Marshal Walter Model, who had earned a reputation as the so-called lion of the defense on the eastern front. Montgomery had reached formidable water barriers—the Meuse and lower Rhine rivers—and the Americans were coming up against the west wall, which had been built in the 1930s as the German counterpart to the Maginot line. Although most of its big guns had been removed, the west wall's concrete bunkers and antitank barriers would make it tough to crack.

The Allies' most serious problem was that they had outrun their supplies. Gasoline and ammunition in particular were scarce and were being brought from French ports on the channel coast over as much as 800 km (500 mi) of war-damaged roads and railroads. Until the port of Antwerp could be cleared and put into operation, major advances like those in August and early September were out of the question.

D 8 The Warsaw Uprising

The Soviet offensive had spread to the flanks of Army Group Center in July. On July 29 a spearhead reached the Baltic coast near Rīga and severed Army Group North's land contact with the German main front. Powerful thrusts past Army Group Center's south flank reached the line of the Wisła (Vistula) River upstream from Warsaw by the end of the month. In Warsaw on July 31 the Polish underground Home Army commanded by General Tadeusz Komorowski (known as General Bor) staged an uprising. The insurgents, who were loyal to the anti-Communist exile government in London, disrupted the Germans for several days. The Soviet forces held fast on the east side of the Wisła, however, and Stalin refused to let U.S. planes use Soviet airfields for making supply flights for the insurgents. He did, finally, allow one flight by 110 B-17s, which was made on September 18. By then it was too late; the Germans had the upper hand; and Komorowski surrendered on October 2. Stalin insisted that his forces could not have crossed into Warsaw because they were too weak, which was probably not true. On the other hand, the line of the Wisła was as far as the Soviet armies could go on a broad front without pausing to replenish their supplies.

D 9 The Defeat of Germany's Allies in the East

While the Soviet Union was letting the Warsaw uprising run its tragic course, it was gathering in a plentiful harvest of successes elsewhere. An offensive between the Carpathian Mountains and the Black Sea, opened on August 20, resulted in Romania's asking for an armistice three days later. Bulgaria, which had never declared war on the Soviet Union, surrendered on September 9, Finland

on September 19. Soviet troops took Belgrade on October 20 and installed a Communist government under Tito in Yugoslavia. In Hungary, the Russians were at the gates of Budapest by late November.

D 10 Allied Advances in Italy

The Italian campaign passed into the shadow of Overlord in the summer of 1944. Clark's Fifth Army, comprising French and Poles as well as Americans, took Monte Cassino on May 18. A breakout from the Anzio beachhead five days later forced the Germans to abandon the whole Gustav line, and the Fifth Army entered Rome, an open city since June 4. The advance went well for some distance north of Rome, but it was bound to lose momentum because U.S. and French divisions would soon be withdrawn for the invasion of southern France. After taking Ancona on the east and Florence on the west coast in the second week of August, the Allies were at the German Gothic line. An offensive late in the month demolished the Gothic line but failed in three months to carry through to the Po River valley and was stopped for the winter in the mountains.

D 11 The Battle of the Philippine Sea

Operations against Japan in the Pacific picked up speed in 1944. In the spring, the JCS projected advances by MacArthur through northwestern New Guinea and into the Philippines and by Nimitz across the central Pacific to the Marianas and Caroline Islands. The Japanese, on their part, were getting ready for a decisive naval battle east of the Philippines.

After making leaps along the New Guinea coast to Aitape, Hollandia, and Wakde Island in April and May, MacArthur's troops landed on Biak Island on May 27. Airfields on Biak would enable U.S. planes to harass the Japanese fleet in the Philippines. A striking force built around the world's two largest battleships, *Yamato* and *Musashi,* was steaming toward Biak on June 13 when the U.S. Navy began bombing and shelling Saipan in the Marianas. The Japanese ships were then ordered to turn north and join the First Mobile Fleet of Admiral Ozawa Jisaburo, which was heading out of the Philippines toward the Marianas.

On June 19 and 20, Ozawa met U.S. Task Force 58, under Admiral Marc A. Mitscher, in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. The outcome was decided in the air and under the sea. Ozawa had five heavy and four light carriers; Mitscher had nine heavy and six light carriers. On the first day, in what was called the Marianas Turkey Shoot, U.S. fighters downed 219 of 326 Japanese planes sent against them. While the air battle was going on, U.S. submarines sank Ozawa's two largest carriers, one of them his flagship; and on the second day, dive-bombers sank a third big carrier. After that, Ozawa steered north toward Okinawa with just 35 planes left. It was the end for Japanese carrier aviation. Mitscher lost 26 planes, and 3 of his ships suffered minor damage.

D 12 Strategic Shift in the Pacific

U.S. forces landed on Saipan on June 15. The Americans had possession of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam by August 10, giving them the key to a strategy for ending the war. The islands could accommodate bases for the new American long-range bombers, the B-29 Superfortresses, which could reach Tokyo and the other main Japanese cities at least as well from the islands as they would have been able to from bases in China. Moreover, U.S. naval superiority in the Pacific was rapidly becoming sufficient to sustain an invasion of Japan itself across the open ocean. That invasion, however, would have to wait for the defeat of Germany and the subsequent release of ground troops from Europe for use in the Pacific. The regular bombing of Japan began in November 1944.

Although the shift in strategy raised some doubts about the need for the operations in the Carolines and Philippines, they went ahead as planned, with landings in the western Carolines at Peleliu (September 15), Ulithi (September 23), and Ngulu (October 16) and in the central Philippines on Leyte (October 20). The invasion of the Philippines brought the Japanese navy out in force for the last time in the war. In the 3-day Battle for Leyte Gulf (October 23-25), the outcome of which was at times more in doubt than the final result would seem to indicate, the Japanese lost 26 ships, including the giant battleship *Musashi,* and the Americans lost 7 ships.

D The Air War in Europe

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The main action against Germany during the fall of 1944 was in the air. Escorted by long-range fighters, particularly P-51 Mustangs, U.S. bombers hit industrial targets by day, while the German cities crumbled under British bombing by night. Hitler had responded by bombarding England, beginning in June, with V-1 flying bombs and in September with V-2 rockets; but the best launching sites, those in northwestern France and in Belgium, were lost in October. The effects of the Allied strategic bombing were less clear-cut than had been expected. The bombing did not destroy civilian morale, and German fighter plane and armored vehicle production reached their wartime peaks in the second half of 1944. On the other hand, iron and steel output dropped by half between September and December, and continued bombing of the synthetic oil plants, coupled with loss of the Ploieşti oil fields in Romania, severely limited the fuel that would be available for the tanks and planes coming off the assembly lines.

The shortening of the fronts on the east and the west and the late year lull in the ground fighting gave Hitler one more chance to create a reserve of about 25 divisions. He resolved to use them offensively against the British and Americans by cutting across Belgium to Antwerp in an action similar to the sweep through the Ardennes that had brought the British and French to disaster at Dunkerque in May 1940.

D The Battle of the Bulge

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The German Ardennes offensive, soon to be known to the Allies as the Battle of the Bulge (*see* Bulge, Battle of the), began on December 16. The Americans were taken completely by surprise. They put up a strong resistance, however, and were able to hold the critical road centers of Saint-Vith and Bastogne. The German effort was doomed after December 23, when good flying weather allowed the overwhelming Allied air superiority to make itself felt. Nevertheless, it was not until the end of January that the last of the 80-km (50-mi) deep “bulge” in the Allied lines was eliminated. The Allied advance into Germany was not resumed until February.

D The Yalta Conference

15

By then the Soviet armies were on the Odra (Oder) River, 60 km (35 mi) east of Berlin. They had smashed the German line on the Wisła River and reached the Baltic coast east of Danzig (Gdańsk) in January 1945 and had a tight hold on the Odra by February 3. Stalin would meet Roosevelt and Churchill at Yalta (*see* Yalta Conference) in Crimea (February 4-11) with all of Poland in his pocket and with Berlin and, for all anybody then knew, most of Germany as well within his grasp. At Yalta, Stalin agreed to enter the war against Japan within three months after the German surrender in return for territorial concessions in the Far East.

The Americans and British, as was their custom, disagreed on how to proceed against Germany. In a meeting at Malta shortly before the Yalta conference, Montgomery and the British members of the CCS argued for a fast single thrust by Montgomery's army group across the north German plain to Berlin. To sustain such a thrust, they wanted the bulk of Allied supplies to go to Montgomery, which meant the American armies would have to stay on the defensive. Eisenhower’s plan, which prevailed, was to give Montgomery first priority but also keep the American armies on the move.

D Crossing the Rhine

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The first stage for all of the Allied armies was to reach the Rhine River. To accomplish that, they had to break through the west wall in the south and cross the Ruhr (Dutch Roer) River on the north. The Germans had flooded the Ruhr Valley by opening dams. After waiting nearly two weeks for the water to subside, the U.S. Ninth and First armies crossed the Ruhr on February 23.

In early March, the armies closed up to the Rhine. The bridges were down everywhere—everywhere, that is, except at the small city of Remagen, where units of the U.S. First Army captured the Ludendorff railroad bridge on March 7. By March 24, when Montgomery sent elements of the British Second Army and the U.S. Ninth Army across the river, the U.S. First Army was occupying a sprawling bridgehead between Bonn and Koblenz. On March 22 the U.S. Third Army had seized a bridgehead south of Mainz. Thus, the whole barrier of the river was broken, and Eisenhower ordered the armies to strike east on a broad front.

D 17 Allied Objectives in Germany

Advancing at times over 80 km (over 50 mi) a day, the U.S. First and Ninth armies closed an encirclement around the industrial heart of Germany, the Ruhr, on April 1. They trapped 325,000 German troops in the pocket. The British Second Army crossed the Weser River, halfway between the Rhine and the Elbe rivers, on April 5. On April 11 the Ninth Army reached the Elbe near Magdeburg and the next day took a bridgehead on the east side, thereby putting itself within striking distance (120 km/75 mi) of Berlin.

The Ninth Army's arrival on the Elbe raised a question of a "race for Berlin." The British, especially Churchill and Montgomery, and some Americans contended that Berlin was the most important objective in Germany because the world, and the German people especially, would regard the forces that took Berlin as the real victors in the war. Eisenhower, supported by the JCS, insisted that, militarily, Berlin was not worth the possible cost of taking it, and a junction with the Russians could be made just as well farther south in the vicinity of Leipzig and Dresden. Moreover, he believed Nazi diehards were going to take refuge in a redoubt in the Bavarian mountains, and he wanted, therefore, to direct the main weight of his American forces into south Germany.

The Soviet front, meanwhile, had remained stationary on the Odra River since February, which raised another question. The postwar Soviet explanation was that their flanks on the north and south were threatened and had to be cleared. The sequence of events after February 1945 indicates that Stalin did not believe the British and Americans could cross Germany as fast as they did and, consequently, assumed he would have ample time to complete his conquest of eastern Europe before heading into central Germany. Although he told Eisenhower differently, he obviously did not regard Berlin as unimportant. In the first week of April, his armies went into a whirlwind redeployment for a Berlin offensive.

D 18 The Final Battles in Europe

Hitler's last, faint hope, strengthened briefly by Roosevelt's death on April 12, was for a falling out between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. The East-West alliance was, in fact, strained, but the break would not come in time to benefit Nazi Germany. On April 14 and 16 the U.S. Fifth and British Eighth armies launched attacks that brought them to the Po River in a week. The Soviet advance toward Berlin began on April 16. The U.S. Seventh Army captured Nürnberg, the site of Nazi Party rallies in the 1930s, on April 20. Four days later Soviet armies closed a ring around Berlin. The next day the Soviet Fifth Guards Army and the U.S. First Army made contact at Torgau on the Elbe River northeast of Leipzig, and Germany was split into two parts. In the last week of the month, organized resistance against the Americans and British practically ceased, but the German troops facing east battled desperately to avoid falling into Soviet captivity.

D 19 The German Surrender

Hitler decided to await the end in Berlin, where he could still manipulate what was left of the command apparatus. Most of his political and military associates chose to leave the capital for places in north and south Germany likely to be out of the Soviet reach. On the afternoon of April 30 Hitler committed suicide in his Berlin bunker. As his last significant official act, he named Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz to succeed him as chief of state.

Doenitz, who had been loyal to Hitler, had no course open to him other than surrender. His representative, General Alfred Jodl, signed an unconditional surrender of all German armed forces at Eisenhower's headquarters in Reims early on May 7. By then the German forces in Italy had already surrendered (on May 2), as had those in Holland, north Germany, and Denmark (May 4). The U.S. and British governments declared May 8 V-E (Victory in Europe) Day. The full unconditional surrender took effect at one minute past midnight after a second signing in Berlin with Soviet participation.

D 20 The Defeat of Japan

Although Japan's position was hopeless by early 1945, an early end to the war was not in sight. The Japanese navy would not be able to come out in force again, but the bulk of the army was intact and was deployed in the home islands and China. The Japanese gave a foretaste of what was yet in store by resorting to kamikaze (Japanese, “divine wind”) attacks, or suicide air attacks, during the fighting for Luzon in the Philippines. On January 4-13, 1945, quickly trained kamikaze pilots flying obsolete planes had sunk 17 U.S. ships and damaged 50.

D20a Iwo Jima and Okinawa

While the final assault on Japan awaited reinforcements from Europe, the island-hopping approach march continued, first, with a landing on Iwo Jima (now Iwo To) on February 19. That small, barren island cost the lives of about 6,800 U.S. personnel (including about 6,000 Marines) before it was secured on March 16. Situated almost halfway between the Marianas and Tokyo, the island played an important part in the air war. Its two airfields provided landing sites for damaged B-29s and enabled fighters to give the bombers cover during their raids on Japanese cities.

On April 1 the U.S. Tenth Army, composed of four army and four marine divisions under General Simon B. Buckner, Jr., landed on Okinawa, 500 km (310 mi) south of the southernmost Japanese island, Kyūshū. The Japanese did not defend the beaches. They proposed to make their stand on the southern tip of the island, across which they had constructed three strong lines. The northern three-fifths of the island were secured in less than two weeks, the third line in the south could not be breached until June 14, and the fighting continued to June 21.

D20b Hiroshima and Nagasaki

The next attack was scheduled for Kyūshū in November 1945. An easy success seemed unlikely. The Japanese had fought practically to the last man on Iwo Jima, and hundreds of soldiers and civilians had jumped off cliffs at the southern end of Okinawa rather than surrender. Kamikaze planes had sunk 15 naval vessels and damaged 200 off Okinawa.

The Kyūshū landing was never made. Throughout the war, the U.S. government and the British, believing Germany was doing the same, had maintained a massive scientific and industrial project to develop an atomic bomb. The chief ingredients, fissionable uranium and plutonium, had not been available in sufficient quantity before the war in Europe ended. The first bomb was exploded in a test at Alamogordo, New Mexico, on July 16, 1945. *See also* Manhattan Project.

Two more bombs had been built, and the possibility arose of using them to convince the Japanese to surrender. President Harry S. Truman decided to allow the bombs to be dropped. For maximum psychological impact, they were used in quick succession, one over Hiroshima on August 6, the other over Nagasaki on August 9. These cities had not previously been bombed, and thus the bombs’ damage could be accurately assessed. U.S. estimates put the number killed or missing as a result of the bomb in Hiroshima at 60,000 to 70,000 and in Nagasaki at 40,000. Japanese estimates gave a combined total of 240,000. The USSR declared war on Japan on August 8 and invaded Manchuria the next day.

D20c The Japanese Surrender

On August 14 Japan announced its surrender, which was not quite unconditional because the Allies had agreed to allow the country to keep its emperor. The formal signing took place on September 2 in Tokyo Bay aboard the battleship *Missouri.* The Allied delegation was headed by General MacArthur, who became the military governor of occupied Japan.

IV COST OF THE WAR

World War II's basic statistics qualify it as by far the most costly war in history in terms of human casualties and material resources expended. In all, 61 countries with 1.7 billion people, three-fourths of the world’s population, took part. A total of 110 million people were mobilized for military service, more than half of those by three countries: the USSR (22 million to 30 million), Germany (17 million), and the United States (16 million). For the major participants the largest numbers on duty at any one time were as follows: USSR (12,500,000); United States (12,245,000); Germany

(10,938,000); British Empire and Commonwealth (8,720,000); Japan (7,193,000); and China (5,000,000).

Most statistics on the war are only estimates. The war's vast and chaotic sweep made uniform record keeping impossible. Some governments lost control of the data, and some resorted to manipulating it for political reasons.

A rough consensus has been reached on the total cost of the war. The human cost is estimated at 55 million dead—25 million in the military and 30 million civilians. The amount of money spent has been estimated at more than $1 trillion, which makes World War II more expensive than all other wars combined.

A Economic Statistics

The United States spent the most money on the war, an estimated $341 billion, including $50 billion for lend-lease supplies, of which $31 billion went to Britain, $11 billion to the Soviet Union, $5 billion to China, and $3 billion to 35 other countries. Germany was next, with $272 billion; followed by the Soviet Union, $192 billion; and then Britain, $120 billion; Italy, $94 billion; and Japan, $56 billion. Except for the United States, however, and some of the less militarily active Allies, the money spent does not come close to being the war's true cost. The Soviet government has calculated that the USSR lost 30 percent of its national wealth, while Nazi exactions and looting were of incalculable amounts in the occupied countries. The full cost to Japan has been estimated at $562 billion. In Germany, bombing and shelling had produced 4 billion cu m (5 billion cu yd) of rubble.

B Human Losses

Although the human cost of the war was tremendous, casualty figures cannot always be obtained and often vary widely. Most experts estimate the military and civilian losses of Allied forces at 44 million and those of the Axis at 11 million. The total number of civilian losses includes the 5.6 million to 5.9 million Jews who were killed in the Holocaust. Of all the nations that participated in World War II, the human cost of the war fell heaviest on the USSR, for which the official total, military and civilian, is given as more than 20 million killed. The United States, which had no significant civilian losses, sustained more than 400,000 deaths.

Perhaps the most significant casualty over the long term was the world balance of power. Britain, France, Germany, and Japan ceased to be great powers in the traditional military sense, leaving only two, the United States and the Soviet Union.