

World at War and the Fires Between

War Again?



The Rhodes Colossus. © The Granger Collection / Universal Images Group / ImageQuest 2016

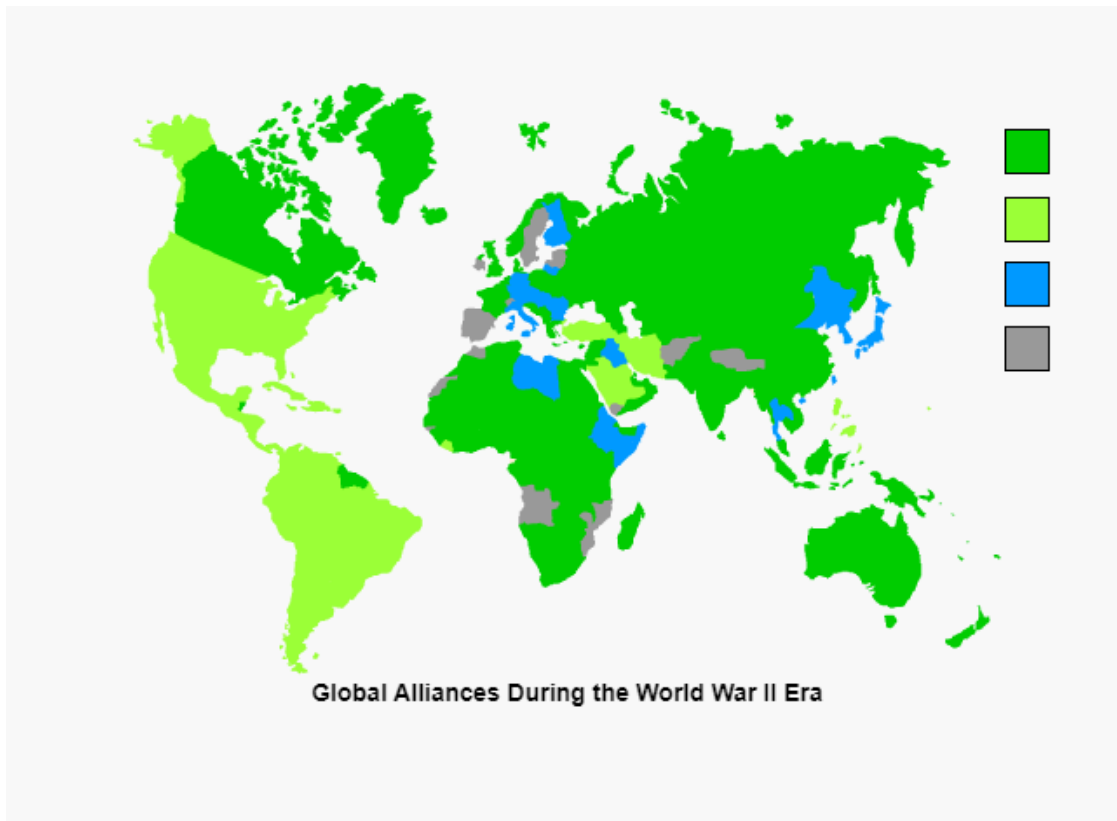
These days there are very few colonies in the traditional sense. But it wasn't that long ago that colonialism was very common around the world. How do you think your life would be different if this were still the case? If World War II hadn't occurred, this might be a reality.

As you've already learned, in the late 19th century, European nations competed with one another to grab the largest and richest regions of the globe to gain wealth and power.

The imperialists swept over Asia and Africa, with Italy and France taking control of large parts of North Africa. Imperialism pitted European countries against each other as potential competitors or threats.

Germany was a late participant in the imperial game, so it pursued colonies with a single-minded intensity. To further its imperial goals, Germany also began to build up its military in order to defend its colonies and itself against other European nations.

German militarization alarmed other European nations, which then began to build up their militaries, too. Defensive alliances among nations were forged. These complex interdependencies were one factor that led to World War I.



What Led to WWII?—Text Version

Review the map description and the descriptions of the makeup of the world at the start of World War II (WWII).

Map Description: There is a map of the world. There are a number of countries shaded four different colors: dark green, light green, blue, and gray. Dark green represents Allies before the attack on Pearl Harbor, including colonies and occupied countries. Light green represents Allied countries that entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Blue represents Axis Powers and their colonies. Gray represents neutral countries during WWII.

Allies before the attack on Pearl Harbor:

Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Allies consisted of Canada, Australia, Russia, China, France, Norway, Poland, Greece, Yugoslavia, India, and most of the continent of Africa. Not all of these countries were sovereign; however, a number of them were colonies.

Allied countries that entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor:

After Pearl Harbor, a number of other countries entered the war on the side of the Allies. These countries included the United States, most of South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. The countries of Turkey, Persia, and Saudi Arabia also joined.

Axis Powers and their colonies:

The Axis Powers and their colonies included Germany, Austria, Italy, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Albania, Libya, Manchuria, Japan, part of Indo-China, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Eritrea.

Neutral countries:

During WWII, there were a number of neutral countries, as well. These countries included Spain, Portugal, the Western Sahara, Angola, Afghanistan, Tibet, Sweden, and Mozambique.

How Did World War I Contribute to the Start of the Next War?

The Treaty of Versailles set out the conditions of German surrender after World War I. The treaty sought to punish the Germans for the war. The harshest punishment was the requirement that Germany pay other European nations reparations to cover their monetary losses in fighting the war. As you have learned, Germany was as bankrupt (from war spending) as every other European country. Its attempts to meet its reparations payments left Germany with devastating **hyperinflation**. Prices of basic goods rose a billion percent or more. With the German economy in a tailspin, and skyrocketing unemployment, the German people became desperate.

Their defeat in World War I was a deep humiliation for Germans. Some German people nurtured their sense of nationalism to bolster their pride. In some, this sense of fierce nationalism became so distorted that it led them to support the nationalist Nazi Party. The Nazi government, the **Third Reich**, whose capital was Berlin, promised to elevate the German ideal through conquest and rule of most, if not all, of the world. Nazi leaders spoke of a global "Thousand-Year Reich" that would reclaim German pride and impose a glorious German culture throughout the world.

Nazi pursuit of these grand goals would lead to the outbreak of World War II. Japanese imperialism, with its dreams of controlling large parts of Asia, particularly **Manchuria**, would sustain the war in Asia and the Pacific. Imperialism also contributed to the **North African campaign**, which was an important theater during the Second World War.

Problems in Europe	Munich Conference	The First Meeting	Second Meeting	Third Meeting	The Result
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Problems in Europe

Have you ever been bullied or cyber bullied? How did you deal with it? Did you confront the bully? Did you try to avoid the bully? Or did you just give in? Most young people face these problems at some point. How they deal with these situations has a lot to do with how they have dealt with confrontation in the past.

Europe in the 1930s was faced with a similar problem.

- In 1937, Germany formed an alliance with Italy (the **Axis Powers** also included Japan) and supported Italy's imperial adventure in Ethiopia.
- The Nazis then took control of the **Rhineland**. In the **Anschluss** of 1938, they **annexed** Austria for Germany.
- That same year, the Nazi government declared its intention to take over **Sudetenland**, regions of Czechoslovakia that had a large population of ethnic Germans.

But Europe had just escaped from a devastating war on the continent. Many believed that that war could have been avoided if people had just tried to work out their differences peaceably. The British Prime Minister, **Neville Chamberlain**, was working under this assumption and believed that Hitler could be reasoned with. Chamberlain was prepared to engage in a policy of **appeasement** in order to secure peace with Germany.

This policy was implemented during three meetings between Chamberlain and Hitler at the **Munich Conference**.



Piles of German Rentenmarks pile up worthlessly as a result of hyperinflation.

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Problems
in Europe

Munich
Conference

The First
Meeting

Second
Meeting

Third
Meeting

The
Result

Munich Conference

- September of 1938
- British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain is warned that Germany is arming in preparation for invading Czechoslovakia
- Chamberlain decides to set up a series of meetings with Adolf Hitler to negotiate a deal that would keep Europe out of another war



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Problems
in Europe

Munich
Conference

The First
Meeting

Second
Meeting

Third
Meeting

The
Result

The First Meeting

- September 15, 1938
- Hitler shows his willingness to go to war over the annexation of Sudetenland
- Chamberlain manages to persuade Hitler to give some vague assurances that Germany will not invade Czechoslovakia
- Chamberlain returns to Britain feeling positive about this outcome
- Chamberlain meets with French representatives, and they urge the Czech government to agree to German demands
- Czechs will consider this, as long as they are assured protection from invasion by Britain and France



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Problems in Europe	Munich Conference	The First Meeting	Second Meeting	Third Meeting	The Result
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Second Meeting

- September 22 and 23, 1938
- Chamberlain seeks assurance of non-aggression from Hitler
- Meeting does not go well
- Hitler is unwilling to make any concessions on Czechoslovakia
- Hitler keeps Chamberlain waiting for five hours on the second day, then he sends a memo outlining German demands for control of Sudetenland
- Chamberlain still feels optimistic that an agreement can be reached



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Problems in Europe	Munich Conference	The First Meeting	Second Meeting	Third Meeting	The Result
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Third Meeting

- September 29, 1938
- Chamberlain meets with Hitler, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, French officials, and others (no Czech representatives are present)
- Chamberlain hands Hitler a memo essentially giving him everything that he wants
- Agreement is finalized and approved by all those present
- Nazis take over German-speaking regions within Czechoslovakia
- Czechs are not guaranteed security and are told they must accept the dismemberment of their nation
- Prior to leaving the conference, Chamberlain and Hitler sign a declaration of Anglo-German friendship
- Chamberlain hails the agreement as having achieved "peace in our time"



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Problems in Europe	Munich Conference	The First Meeting	Second Meeting	Third Meeting	The Result
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The Result

We now know that Hitler was not trying to avoid war as many assumed. Rather, the historical record indicates that he was seeking to start a war. He actually wanted the conference to fail so that he could claim that war was his only option.

Chamberlain's negotiations, therefore, only delayed the inevitable. By year's end, Germany controlled Sudetenland. When a crisis erupted over the long-running dispute over the port of Danzig (German name), or Gdansk (Polish name), the Germans decided to use that event to start the war they wanted.

The Nazis invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun.

Chamberlain's appeasement policy before World War II is now considered a diplomatic failure. This example illustrates a serious problem for students of history trying to apply lessons from the past to current events: when facing the threat of war, should you make certain you do not rush to war OR confront a determined enemy before it is too late?

How Did the United States Emerge From Its Isolationism?

The United States had also learned the right lesson from World War I: "Never rush into a fight!" But as was the case in Europe, this lesson did not apply to the specific circumstances of the second great war in Europe.

President Franklin Roosevelt and other leaders, however, recognized the threat Germany presented. And when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Roosevelt called a special session of Congress to revise the U.S. Neutrality Act of 1935. The revised act permitted the United States to sell weapons and other war materials to its Allies in Europe that were fighting Nazi aggression.



United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the declaration of war against the Japanese in the wake of the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941. Public Domain

Though U.S. contributions of **armaments** helped, they did little to turn the tide against the Nazis. When France fell to the Nazis in June 1940, Roosevelt greatly increased munitions and other weapons supplies to Britain. Slowly, Congress and the U.S. public were beginning to consider if the U.S. should take a greater role in the conflict in Europe. Though it was a struggle, in March 1941, Roosevelt got Congress to pass the **Lend-Lease Act**, which committed the United States to supply arms and other necessary equipment to the European Allied Powers (Britain, France, the Soviet Union, China, and later the United States).

Then, on December 7, 1941, Japanese bombers attacked the U.S. naval base at **Pearl Harbor** in Hawaii. About 2,500 Americans were killed. This direct attack against U.S. soil and U.S. citizens **galvanized** the public, which now demanded U.S. entry into the war to defeat the aggressors. The U.S. military would engage the Axis Powers in Europe and the Japanese in the Pacific.

In August 1941, the United States and Great Britain had crafted and signed the **Atlantic Charter**, a document that defined the goals of Allied nations for, during, and after the war. The highlights were that:

- territorial adjustments would be made taking into consideration the people that it affected.
- the U.S. and Great Britain did not seek territorial gains as a result of the war's outcome.
- nations would have free access to raw materials.
- self-determination was a right of all people.
- an effort would be made to lower trade barriers.
- social welfare and global economic cooperation were recognized as being important.
- nations would work together to prevent fear.
- freedom of the seas was stated as being of importance.
- nations would work cooperatively towards disarmament.

The signing of the Atlantic Charter was a primary reason that Germany declared war on the United States in December 1941, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

The U.S. Involvement in WWII—Text Version

Read the following image descriptions and text to learn about how the U.S. became involved in WWII.

Battle of Britain

Image Description: This is a black-and-white photo of five firefighters at the scene of a building destroyed by a fire. They are all holding a large hose and spraying water on a building out of the picture. Behind them are a number of hollowed-out buildings.

London being bombed during the Battle of Britain in 1940. Between August and October 1940, the Nazi **Luftwaffe** (**Luftwaffe:** (German) the Nazi air force) was almost nightly bombing British cities, with many reduced to rubble. Many Britons lost their lives during the **Battle of Britain** (**Battle of Britain:** the Nazi bombing attacks on Great Britain between August – October 1940). While using his **oratorical** (**oratorical:** of or related to the art of public speaking) gifts to inspire and steel the British spirit to resist the Nazi onslaught, Churchill (now prime minister) was also pleading with Washington to come to Britain's aid. Churchill was dismayed at the U.S. refusal of sending bombers or troops to fight alongside the Allies. He simply could not fathom the deep-seated isolationist mindset of the American people.

Lend Lease

Image Description: This is a black-and-white photo of wooden crates being moved onto a boat by a large crane.

The Lend-Lease program allowed the United States to maintain its ostensible neutrality, yet provide much needed support to England. Before this, the United States had operated a strict cash-and-carry policy. This meant that Britain could not purchase anything on credit or on the condition that they win the war. With passage of the Lend-Lease Act, the United States' neutrality was now mostly a fiction.

Bombing of Pearl Harbor

Image Description: This is a black-and-white photo of the USS *Arizona* burning and sinking after being bombed during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

On December 7, 1941, the Empire of Japan launched an attack on the U.S. Pacific fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor. All eight U.S. battleships there were damaged, and four were sunk. The provocation ensured that the United States would enter the war.

Roosevelt Declares War

Image Description: This is a black and white photo of President Roosevelt signing a declaration of war. He is seated, and there are men standing behind him watching.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the U.S. declaration of war against Japan on December 8, 1941. He signed a declaration of war against Germany three days later on December 11.

Audio Transcript: Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, members of the Senate and the House of Representatives:

Yesterday, December 7th, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

The United States was at peace with that nation, and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its Emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific.

Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in the American island of Oahu, the Japanese Ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to our Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. And, while this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or of armed attack.

It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time, the Japanese Government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian Islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. In addition, American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday, the Japanese Government also launched an attack against Malaya.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked Guam.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands.

Last night, the Japanese attacked Wake Island.

And this morning, the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday and today speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation.

As Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense, that always will our whole nation remember the character of the onslaught against us.

No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people, in their righteous might, will win through to absolute victory.

I believe that I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost, but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us.

Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger.

With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph. So help us God.

I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7th, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.

How Did War in Europe Proceed?

The Nazi **blitzkrieg** had quickly conquered, subdued, and occupied the Low Countries. France, who had anticipated the assault since the 1920s, had been constructing an elaborate set of underground bunkers, defenses, and machine gun turrets for years called the **Maginot Line**. Unfortunately for the French, the Nazi march through Belgium merely sidestepped these defenses, thus making them useless. The French military was quickly defeated and France fell to Nazi occupation in a matter of weeks.

Thus the German army had done what it had set out to do in 1914, namely, shut down the Western Front quickly. But this success would prove to be Hitler's weakness. For rather than honor the **German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact** (1939) and maintain control of nearly all of Western Europe, Hitler decided to break the agreement and invade Russia. Hitler had his eye on Soviet resources for years, and at his insistence, Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, the code name for the invasion and hoped-for occupation of the Soviet Union.

At first, during the balmy days of summer, the Germans had enough provisions with them. However, they had planned on plundering provisions as the months wore on. The Russians left them nothing. Some German military leaders suggested a temporary withdrawal. Hitler adamantly refused. Most German soldiers died of starvation or hunger either in the USSR or attempting to make their way home from it. As the ragged, starving German soldiers struggled to get out of Russia and head home, the Soviet army attacked them and decimated the remaining forces. At least 20 million lives were lost in the fighting on the Eastern Front.

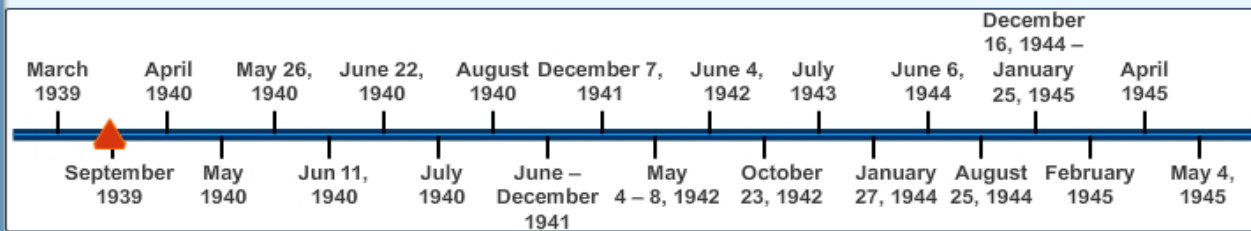
After driving the Nazi army out of Russia, the Soviet forces swarmed into eastern Europe, liberating Nazi-held regions as they went. The Soviet army was the first Allied force to enter Berlin in 1945 and crush the Third Reich. The Soviet army played a vital role in the defeat of the Nazis, but they and Soviet citizens paid a huge price. More than 20 million Soviet citizens died during World War II.

September 1939 - Nazis Invade Poland



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On September 1, Hitler invades Poland. Due to their agreements to defend Poland, on September 3, Britain and France declare war on Germany. World War II officially begins.

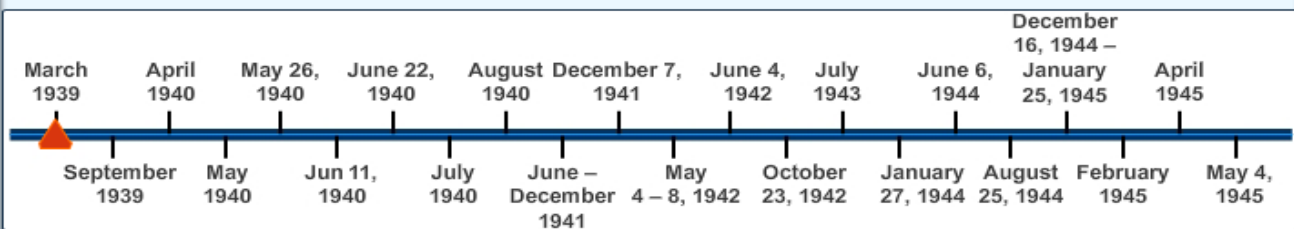


March 1939 - Invasion of Czechoslovakia



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Hitler invades Czechoslovakia. His intention is to take control of parts of Sudetenland. This is the region of Czechoslovakia with a large ethnic German population.

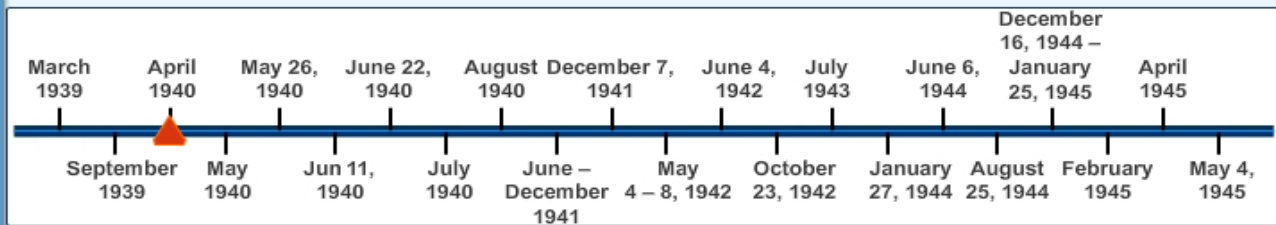


April 1940 - Nazis Occupy Denmark and Norway



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Nazi forces invade Denmark and Norway. Hitler occupies these nations in order to ensure a safe supply route for Swedish ore to Germany. The Germans also establish a military base in Norway from which they try to break the British naval blockade on Germany.

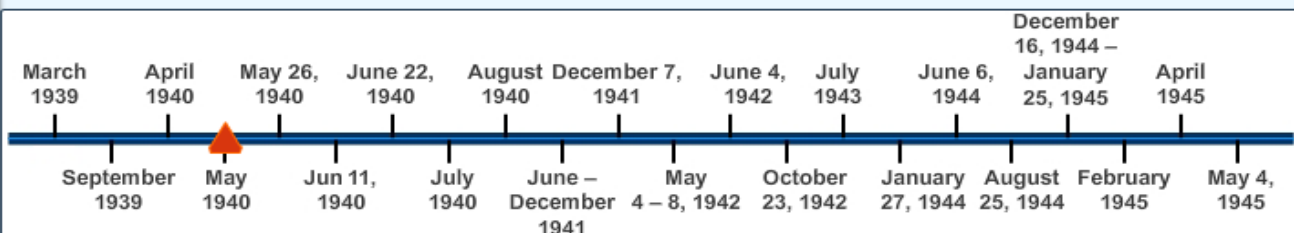


May 1940 - Destruction of Rotterdam



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Hitler orders a blitzkrieg against Holland and Belgium, pounding them with bombs, tanks, and armed forces. Rotterdam is nearly totally destroyed by the bombing. The Nazis quickly occupy these countries.

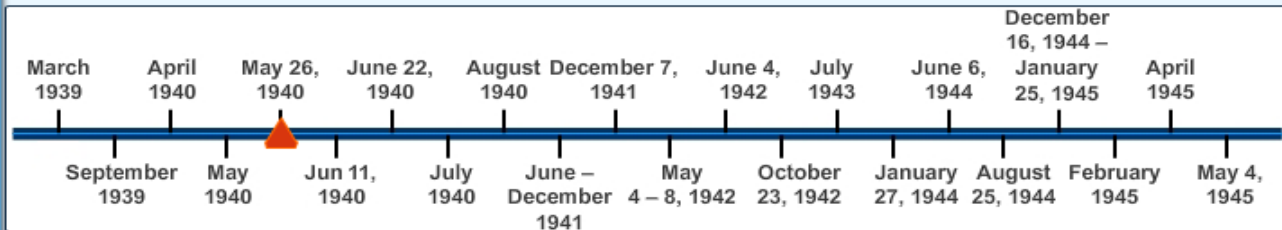


May 26, 1940 - Dunkirk Rescue



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British soldiers are trapped in France on the beach at Dunkirk by surrounding Nazi forces, who fire on them ceaselessly. The British call for vessels to cross the English Channel to rescue them. All available ships and boats, including British fishing boats, immediately set out from the southern coast of Britain to save the Allied soldiers. All told, more than 300,000 Allied soldiers are rescued and return to Britain. Among them are about 130,000 French soldiers who form the Free French Army under the leadership of General De Gaulle. Although the rescue lifted British morale, it left the French alone and vulnerable to the German army.

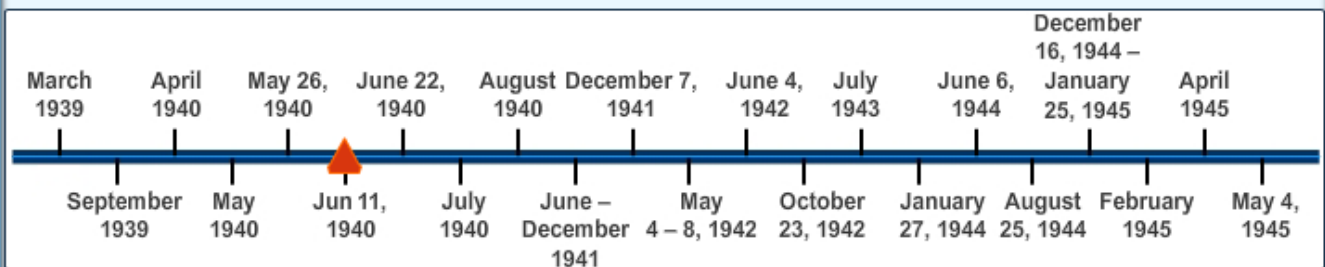


June 11, 1940 - Italy Enters the War



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Benito Mussolini, the fascist dictator of Italy, officially entered into an alliance known as the Pact of Steel with Germany on May 22, 1939. However, Italy was not prepared for war when Germany invaded Poland in 1939 and doesn't enter the war until the summer of 1940.

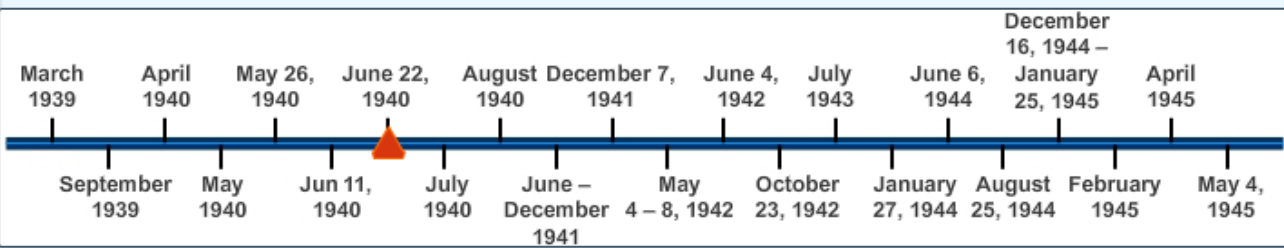


June 22, 1940 - Nazis Occupy Paris



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France is overrun by the Nazis. On this date, the French sign an armistice with the Germans. Marshall Petain signs the agreement. He becomes head of the **Vichy** government that collaborates with the Nazi occupiers.

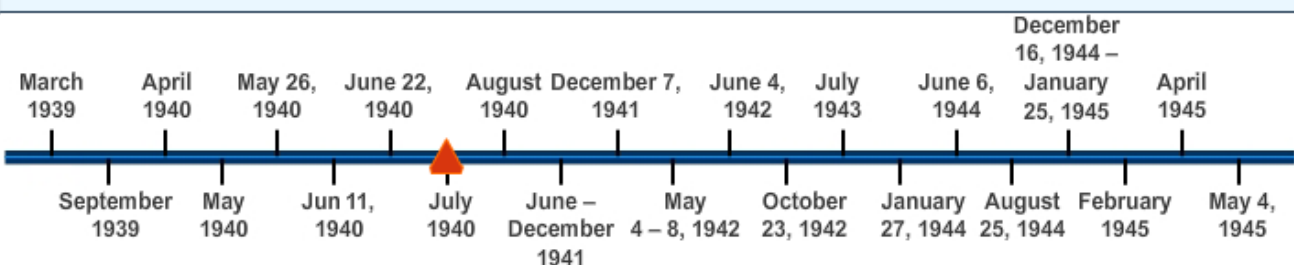


July 1940 - Division of France



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To administer the occupation of France, the German military divided the country into two areas. The zone in the north was occupied France. It was administered directly by the German military. In the south, Germany created the Vichy government. This was a puppet regime led by the French Marshall Pétain.

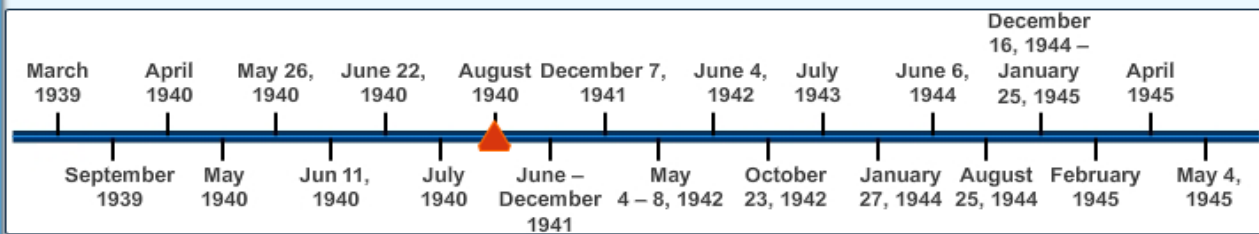


August 1940 - Battle of Britain



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Great Britain sustains months of nearly nightly bombing by the German Luftwaffe. Britain's air force defends the nation by engaging in "dog fights" with the attacking German bombers. Many bombers are lost on each side, but Britain holds out against the Nazis, who eventually give up. Hitler is particularly angry, as he wanted to destroy Britain more than any other European nation.

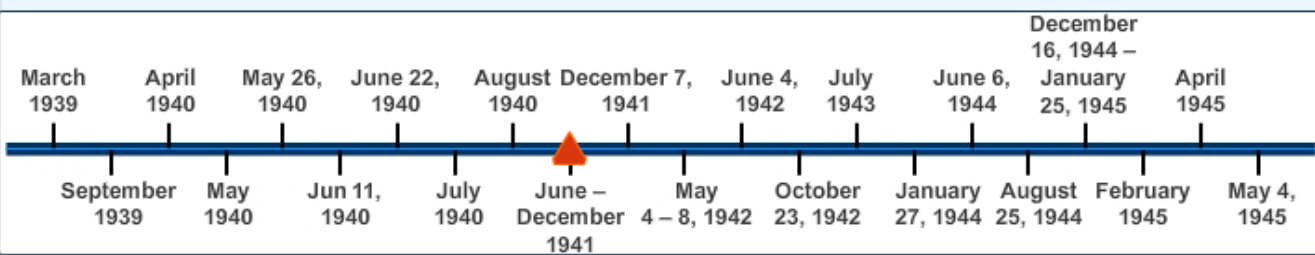


June - December 1941 - Operation Barbarossa



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More than three million Nazi forces and 3,000 tanks invade the Soviet Union, in violation of the Nonaggression Pact the two nations had signed. Stalin calls for Allied assistance, but it is largely the Soviet army that fights the advancing German forces. The German army headed deep into Soviet territory, which proved to be a mistake when winter arrived. The weather made it difficult for soldier reinforcements and supplies to be replenished. Many German soldiers starved or froze to death. The Soviet forces took advantage of the conditions and were able to consolidate their power to surround the German army in the Battle of **Stalingrad**. The Soviets were victorious on February 2, 1943.

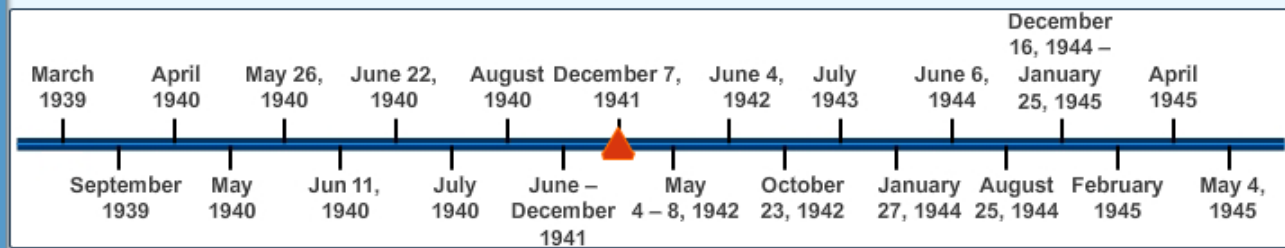


December 7, 1941 - Pearl Harbor Attack



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Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor. After the Japanese execute a surprise bombing attack on the naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, about 2,500 U.S. citizens are killed. The next day, President Roosevelt signs a declaration of war against the Japanese. Then Hitler declares war on the United States in support of Japan. The United States enters World War II on the side of the Allies with a "Europe first strategy." The threat to the Allies from Germany was greater than the threat posed by Japan. The United States focused their efforts to defeat the Nazis on the European front before turning their attention on Japan in what became known as the Pacific theater.

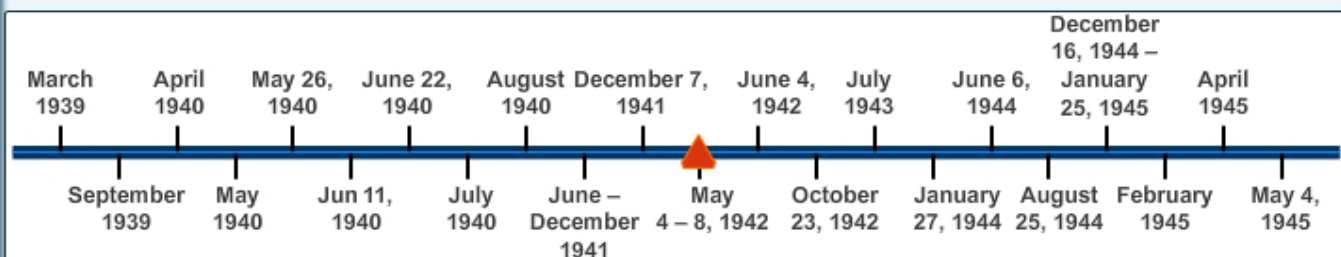


May 4 - 8, 1942



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Battle of Coral Sea: A fierce battle between bombers and battleships, as Japan and forces from the United States and Australia engage. Losses of both life and material are heavy on both sides. The battle, however, is indecisive. Both sides claim victory.

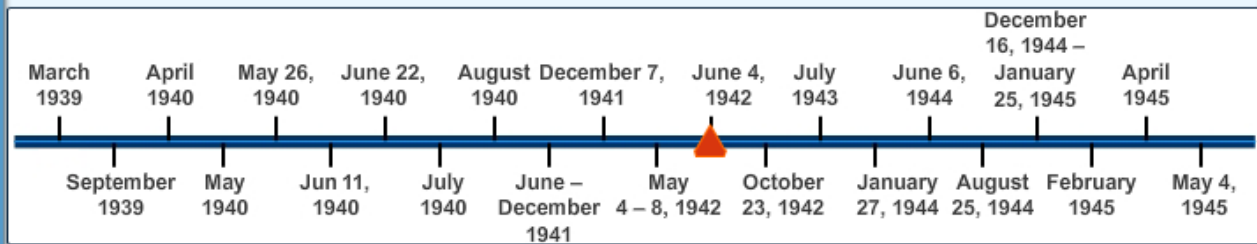


June 4, 1942 - Battle of Midway



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Battle of Midway: The Japanese wanted to control Midway, which is just 1,000 miles from Hawaii. In this battle, U.S. forces defeat the Japanese. This decisive battle gives the United States the impetus and ability to begin to push the Japanese out of the Pacific.

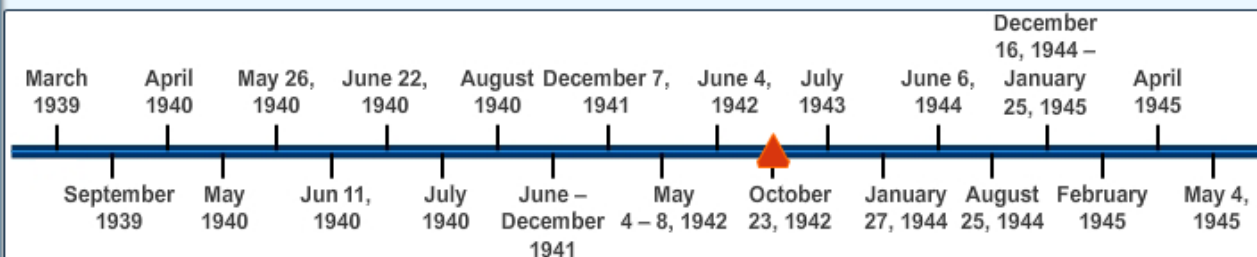


October 23, 1942 - Battle of El Alamein



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Before WWII, the Allied and Axis powers had interests in Africa, where they established many colonies. North African territories were considered to be strategic locations for trade and resources in the Mediterranean region. The turning point of the war in North Africa was the Second Battle of El Alamein. Under British General Montgomery, Allied forces in North Africa (mainly Libya and Egypt) attack the joint German-Italian army there. The Axis forces are under the skilled leadership of German Field-Marshal **Rommel**. During this battle, while Montgomery's forces fight a ground battle, Rommel's forces are pounded from the air by Allied bombers. The Axis army is on the run. Montgomery's forces chase the

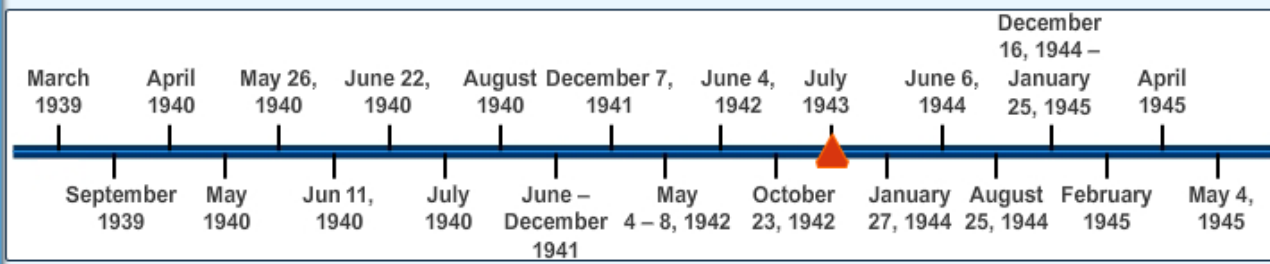


July 1943 - Italian Invasion



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British and U.S. forces invade Sicily in July and have taken it one month later. The Italian campaign moves into mainland Italy, where there is fierce fighting but ultimate victory. Italy surrenders to the Allies on September 3, 1943. Mussolini has already been thrown out of office, but the Germans protect him and take control of the Italian army, blocking further Allied advances through Italy. However, in June 1944, the Allies manage to capture and control Rome.

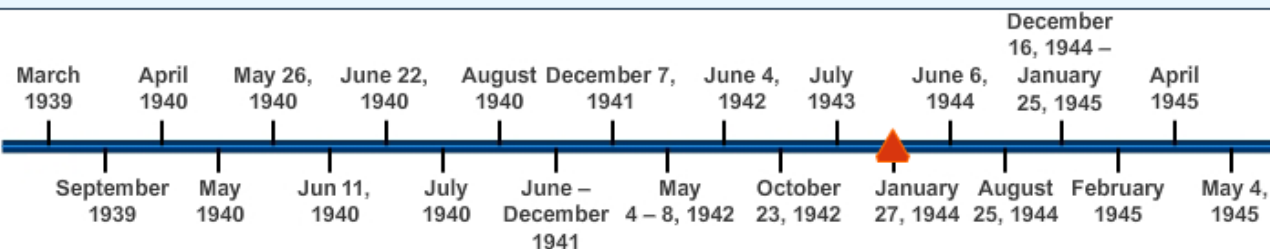


January 27, 1944 - The German Siege of Leningrad is Lifted



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The German army was unable to take the city of Leningrad (today's St. Petersburg) outright, so they surrounded the city. The Siege of **Leningrad** lasted 872 days, from September 8, 1941 to January 27, 1944. Although the Soviets managed to open a small land corridor out of the city, most city residents were cut off from the outside world for more than two years. In January 1944, the Soviet army finally defeated the German forces surrounding the city. The death toll from the siege was staggering. About 2.5 million Leningraders died of starvation or other effects of the siege. The Siege of Leningrad is one of the most deadly in world history.



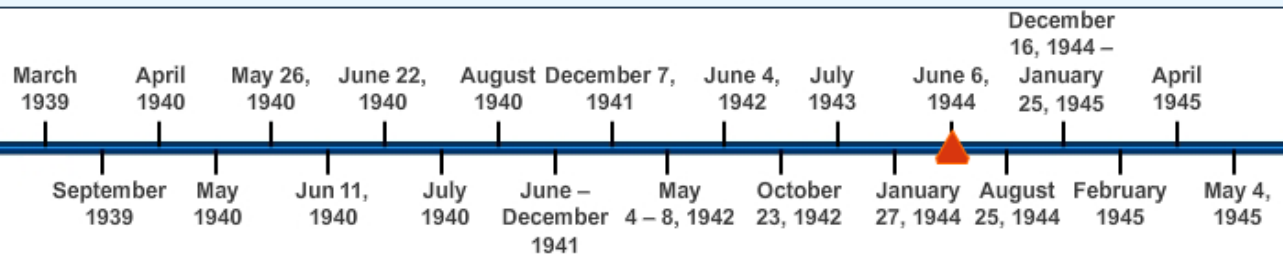
June 6, 1944 - D-Day



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Select *image* to enlarge.

The Allies launch their strategic attack against the Nazis. Thousands of transport boats carry U.S. and British forces across the English Channel. The forces, under the command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, land on the beaches of Normandy. The Germans had been fed false intelligence about a totally bogus invasion near Calais, so the Germans had moved most of their forces to that location. They were therefore unprepared for the Normandy invasion. The Normandy invasion began to turn the tide of the war. U.S. ground forces now fight with other Allied forces to push back the Nazis.

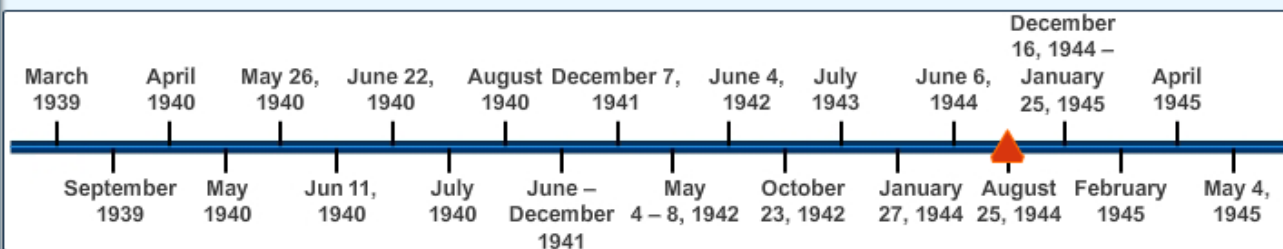


August 25, 1944 - Liberation of Paris



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Liberation of Paris: Allied forces have defeated and pushed back German forces occupying regions around Paris. On this date, the Allies liberate the French capital.



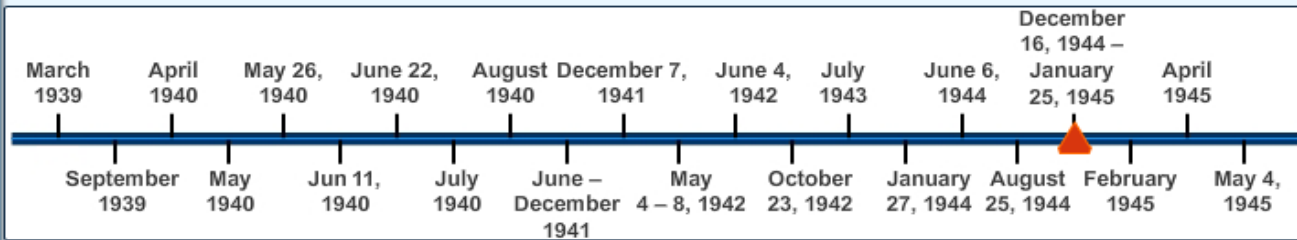
December 16, 1944 - January 25, 1945 - Battle of the Bulge and Other Major Battles on the Western Front



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Select *image to enlarge*.

The Battle of the Bulge was a German surprise offensive launched in the heavily wooded region of the Ardennes in Belgium. The Allies lose ground until reinforcements, in the form of General George S. Patton's Third Army, arrives and turns the tide of battle. After weeks of fighting, the Germans are defeated. It is the last Nazi offensive of World War II.

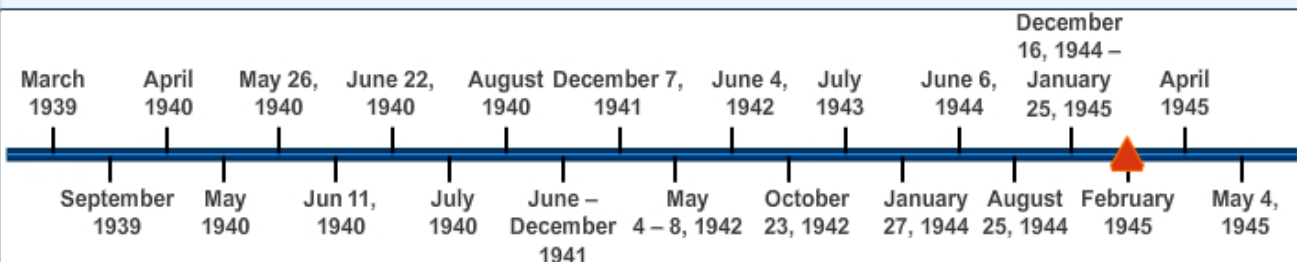


February 1945 - Yalta Conference



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When it became clear that the Allies were going to defeat Germany, Allied leaders met at Yalta in the Crimea to determine the shape and fate of postwar Europe. The **"Big Three"** conferees were British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin. Four major decisions came out of this meeting. First, different sectors of Germany would be occupied by the Big Three, plus France. Second, a United Nations conference on this matter would be held a year later. Third, the USSR would be granted control of lands in Asia as compensation for fighting against the Japanese in the Pacific Theater. Fourth, Poland would be guaranteed a

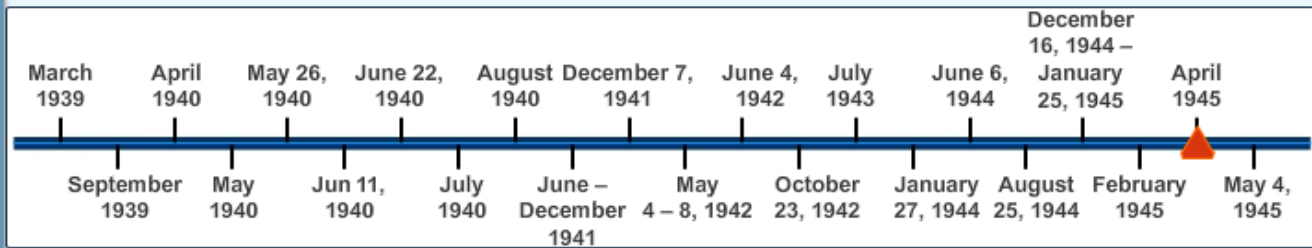


April 1945 - Russian invasion of Berlin

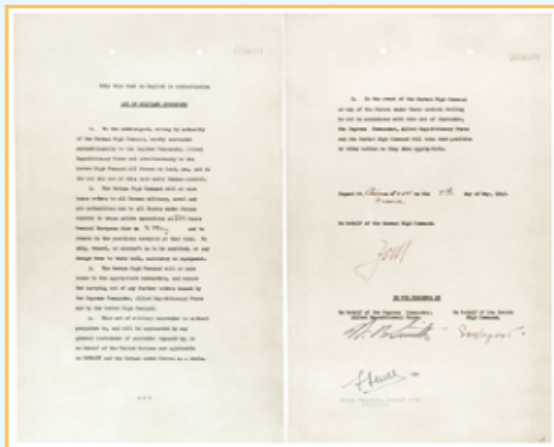


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The Soviet army enters Berlin, sealing the Nazi defeat. The U.S. army enters Berlin shortly thereafter.



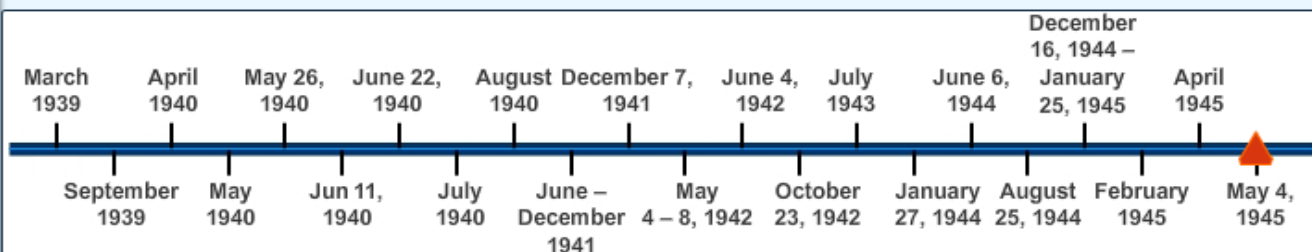
May 4, 1945 - Surrender



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Germany officially surrenders to the Allies.



How Did the War in the Pacific Unfold?

As Nazi victories piled up in Europe, Japan was seeking to widen its pursuit of territories via war. By the middle of 1941, Japanese officials were determined to press further into China and Indochina. Japan was a leading power in the Far East, and it was rich in its people and culture. Unfortunately, it suffered from a severe lack of natural resources, particularly oil. Conquest of resource-rich regions could ensure Japan a continuing supply of the vital resources it needed to prosper.

The initial Allied response to Japanese aggression took the form of sanctions. The United States and other Allied nations embargoed supplies of oil going to Japan. Other vital materials, such as ore, and military supplies were cut off as well. The desperate Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and began a war with the United States. What Japan had not counted on was the Netherlands and Britain joining the fight. Other Allied nations, such as Australia, Canada, and the Philippines, also joined the fight against Japan.

The Japanese military invaded China and pushed further toward the interior of that country. They took Hong Kong, Singapore, Burma, the Dutch East Indies, Borneo, Bali, Timor, and other nearby islands. They also dislodged the U.S. military in the Philippines.

The United States had agreed with its Allies on a "Europe first" military strategy. The Allies did fight some vital battles in the Pacific against the Japanese during 1942 (Battle of Coral Sea, Battle of Midway), but their main focus was defeating the Nazis and liberating Europe. Once that was accomplished, the Allies turned their full military might against the Japanese in the Pacific Theater.

After the death of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman became president. He vowed that nothing short of "unconditional surrender" of the Japanese would be acceptable. The United States and its Allies fought in the Pacific for three years until the pivotal battles of mid- to late-1945 turned the tide of the war. Naval Marshal General Isoroku Yamamoto was the commander-in-chief of Japanese naval forces. He was one of the primary proponents of the attack on Pearl Harbor. He also determined Japanese naval strategy in the Pacific Theater.

Island Hopping

Important battles were fought in the Coral Sea, on Midway **atoll**, Guadalcanal, Corregidor, and Iwo Jima, as well as on many other Pacific islands. The Battle of Coral Sea was indecisive, with both sides claiming victory. However, the Battle of Midway was a clear victory for the Allies, and it gave them the momentum to ultimately defeat the Japanese.

Many battles were fought between aircraft, including Japanese kamikaze fighters, and ships, with the planes trying to bomb the ships to destroy and sink them and the ships firing anti-aircraft guns at the planes to bring them down. Marine battles often involved ships' (or submarines') torpedoes launched to strike a fatal blow. Sometimes, Allies bombed Japanese military bases on strategic islands. These strikes would be followed by a land force invasion to take the island from the Japanese once and for all. The dropping of the atomic bomb would change the direction of the war once and for all.



[Show Text Version](#)

- 1: Battle of Midway
June 1942.
- 2: Guadalcanal Campaign
August 1942—February 1943.
- 3: Battle of Tarawa
November 1943.
- 4: Battle of Saipan
June—July 1944.
- 5: Battle of Guam (1944)
July—August 1944.
- 6: Battle of the Philippine Sea
September—October 1944.
- 7: Battle of Leyte Gulf
October 1944.
- 8: Battle of Leyte Gulf
January—August 1945.
- 9: Battle of Manila (1945)
February—March 1945.
- 10: Battle of Iwo Jima
February—March 1945.
- 11: Battle of Okinawa
April—June 1945.